Doctors of Presence:  
Tadashi Suzuki’s training method in  
Sydney Contemporary Performance

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Abstract

Starting from the mid 1980s, artists from what came to be known as contemporary performance in Sydney trained in Tadashi Suzuki’s method of actor training (SMAT). That their works did not resemble Suzuki’s own theatre provoked this research into the relationship between his training and their performance-making. This encouraged framing the research from a practitioner perspective.

I mobilise a synthesis of performance analysis, ethnography, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Casey and Leder and the sociological thinking of Bourdieu to analyse training, rehearsal, performance practices and histories of the artists in this study which I layout in Chapter One. This was developed to analyse an array of performances, documentations of training sessions and rehearsal processes, in-depth interviews with local artists, public talks, articles from magazines and academic literature that form the basis of this account.

In returning to examine the influences that shaped Tadashi Suzuki’s original design of his training kata, his robust collaborations with groups of actors stood out. In the politically charged climate of Japan’s little theatre movement in the 1960s and 1970s, these relations were essential to the development of the dramaturgy of his theatre works.

Parallel to this history, I map out a history of the performance field in Sydney in the decade prior to the take up of SMAT by local artists in Chapter Three. In this context, a first wave and, subsequently, a second wave of contemporary performance emerged from a range of precursor practices in physical theatre, performance art and community theatre. Amongst the influences working upon these non-mainstream performance genres was an influx of post-structural theory.

From this rich melange of influences, a distinctive set of performance strategies was evident, including widespread and diverse non-academy based training, amongst which Suzuki’s was prominent. Collaborative devising in ensembles of performer-makers foregrounded their corporeality and shaped their approach to the use of written texts in their performances. Training was intimately interwoven in their dramaturgy through their embodiment. However Sydney’s contemporary performers did not adopt SMAT slavishly. Rather, theirs was a reflexive adaptation of its potential, making it relevant to and engaging with their contemporaneous social context.

To develop my account of this interweaving from extended interviews with members of The Sydney Front, Sidetrack Performance Group and independent artists such as Deborah Leiser-Moore, Deborah Pollard and Katia Molino, I identified four key themes of SMAT practice in their reception. Chapter Five addresses relations with temporality, place and space. Through their confrontations with difficulty and concepts of the self in training in Chapter Six, I offer an account of how transformations in the dramaturgy of acting precipitated a dramaturgy of audiences. Local artists did not set out to replicate Suzuki’s dramaturgy, aesthetic or thematic concerns. SMAT did not ‘arrive’ into a vacuum. The nascent Sydney performance scene was already distinctive — well cultivated to develop aspects of what SMAT afforded in their critical appropriations, as these produced knowledge and questions about performance making and the social world.
Acknowledgements

No research and writing in this kind of project can be produced without the contributions of a range of artists, scholars and close associates. Firstly, those Sydney artists who practiced the Suzuki Method of Actor Training (and their artist-associates) who were willing to engage in dialogue with me and let me turn on a tape recorder: John Baylis, Tanya Gerstle, Clare Grant, Regina Heilmann, Nigel Kellaway, Deborah Leiser, Don Mamouney, Katia Molino, Deborah Pollard, Chris Ryan, Olivier Sidore and Mémé Thorne. For offering further information, documents, leads, contacts, interlocution and debate, I thank the artists - Sue Broadway, Virginia Baxter, Michael Cohen, Vince Crowley, Wadil Donah, Megan Elliot, Carlos Gomez, Keith Gallasch, Susan Kennedy, Lucia Mastroantone, Veronica Porcaro, Harley Stumm, Fiona Winning and Alicia Talbot.

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This study is dedicated to David Branson (1964-2001), Bruce Keller (1955-2003) and Ben Grieve (1965-2003) who performed and devised with an openness of spirit, restless enquiry and wicked senses of humour.
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INTRODUCTION

Tadashi Suzuki’s training resounds in the Sydney milieu

This thesis examines relations between training and the devising processes of practitioners who engaged in Tadashi Suzuki’s method of actor training (SMAT) in Sydney’s contemporary performance from the mid 1980s to late 90s. It looks at how concepts and approaches to their performances precipitated out of their experiences of SMAT.

The conditions in which Suzuki’s training was formed in Tokyo during the early 1970s resembled those that surrounded the evolution of Sydney’s contemporary performance. To paraphrase a well-known statement about history; people make art but not in circumstances of their own making. The structures of embodied performance practices, especially training regimes, incorporate the possibilities and imperatives in the “objective social conditions of their inculcation” (Johnson 1993, 5). Bourdieu describes the link between habitus, or sens pratique of agents, and the field in which they practice as one of complicity. The circumstances in which Suzuki with his ensemble of actors first designed and refined the training regime were decisive in how it was structured.

The cross-cultural transpositions of embodied practices are also temporally sensitive and bound in by the climates, macro and micro, of the contexts of their adoption and application. In the Sydney setting, without Suzuki’s supervisory agency, the practitioners’ pre-existing practices, discourses and goals familiarly carried in the embodiment of each individual and the state of the local field of artistic framed their initial reception of SMAT. This made the transposition into the local theatre making environment possible. After a phase of provocative induction, SMAT challenged the boundaries of individual and ensemble performance practices. Suzukian practice emphasises the presence of spectators. This amplified the resonances. Notions of resonance proved useful in thinking through these multi-factorial relations. While concepts such as ‘resonance’ may be thought weak in their discursive effects, a close look at the ways sound artists and musicians understand resonance is illuminating. Richard Vella, composer and professor of music, explains the dynamics of resonance in a series of examples that reveal its powers in action.
Resonance occurs when the frequency of vibration is the same as the natural frequency of an object. The result is an increase in amplitude (i.e. loudness). Imagine two children, one pushing the other on a swing. When the force of the child pushing coincides with the periodic cycle of the child on the swing, the amplitude of the swing increases ... Another example of resonance is the sympathetic vibration of a window as an aeroplane flies overhead. The vibration of the aeroplane activates the natural frequency of the window causing it to vibrate. Resonance can be very powerful and, if ignored, very destructive ... If a tuning fork is struck and held against a wooden box it causes another form of resonance. The regularly repeating vibrations of the tuning fork set the air inside into motion. The box becomes a resonator amplifying the sound (2000, 55). 

Training is customarily seen as a cause of phenomena in performance. Proceeding with the premise of causation offered few insights into the relationship between performance and training because it ignores a series of vital factors. Firstly, the power of the training histories or biographies of artists concerned is diminished or overlooked (both those from Japan and Sydney). Secondly, the influences of the intervening processes in stages of devising and rehearsal where performers’ capacities are put to work and are crucial in the outcomes. And finally, it ignores the multiple contemporaneous influences that surround performers – for example, seeing works by other artists of all kinds, responses to issues de jure and resource constraints. The first factor is of particular relevance to this study as, at the time of writing, younger artists in Sydney who have studied Suzuki’s method intensively are most likely to have done so at Anne Bogart’s SITI or with those who have visited SITI in the US. What SMAT can offer to performer makers is now tied up inextricably with their exposure to Anne Bogart’s Viewpoints approach to ensemble composition. Thus Viewpoints mediate the application and translation of SMAT. This was not the situation in Sydney contemporary performance field during the 1980s as neither Bogart, her company or the categories she codified in the improvisational exercises of Viewpoints had come to Australia. Her company has still not performed in Sydney at the time of writing. The trope of resonance offered a more efficacious model of thinking with which to map influences in analysing statements and allusions made by the theatre makers interviewed.

My stance on the works of those who have engaged in SMAT in Sydney has tested out and ultimately accords with Gilbert’s and Lo’s stance that these practitioners localised and ‘indigenised’ Suzukian training practices in the Australian context to create ... an original theatre form which extends boundaries between cultures. This kind of critical appropriation occurs mostly in avant-garde work and is characterised by genuine
efforts to deconstruct and transform the foreign style without denying its historicity (2001, 77).

Sydney scene artists in the nineties acknowledged that Suzuki’s efforts to systematise his regime were located in a modern and changing Japanese social world. They acknowledged, too that Australian – Japanese cultural relations carry inherent tensions. As one Sydney practitioner, Nigel Kellaway, prominent in this history put it:

There are a lot problems relating Suzuki’s work to an Australian context. I’ve read an awful lot over the last few years about Suzuki, about his work being ‘universal’. I have a large problem with that phallocentric and imperialist word, and the way it ‘demolishes’ cultural boundaries. Anyway, I think the term is simply not true of Suzuki’s work. I don’t think its sets out to do those things, and I don’t think it achieves them. I think that what is most valuable in Suzuki’s work is its particularly Japanese aesthetic and its Japanese socio-political stance (Kellaway in Carruthers 1996, 182).

They did not have an infantilising view of these practices as primitive pre-modern exotica. They respected his discoveries but not with a deifying reverence.

Walking through the Chapters
Chapter One offers a description of methods, locates myself within the field of study in a comprehensive hermeneutic declaration and fleshes out my evolving methodology and the theoretical synthesis that supported my analysis of artists’ practices. My perspective is informed by my own involvement on the margins of contemporary performance as a spectator, extensive lecturing in a tertiary acting degree and earlier freelance work as theatre-dance artist. Since 1999, I have devised contemporary performance works as dramaturg-performer with a shifting collection of artists in a group known as Version 1.0. This group has made performances from found public texts, various media and with artists of divergent generations, corporealities and perspectives. 2

Initial fieldwork for this research involved my training in Toga, observing others teaching and watching performances. I used a more semiotic mode of performance analysis of events at this point. A theoretical synthesis of the thinking of phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty, Casey and Leder and sociologist Bourdieu informed the further analysis of this fieldwork plus the analysis of more
performances, two rehearsal case studies, interviews with artists and an array of primary published articles from magazines and journals.

Devising a performer training system cannot be the sole intellectual achievement of a non-performing director. It occurs through the dialogue among performers and between performers and director... This does not undermine Suzuki's key role in the establishment of his methodology (selecting, clarifying and articulating) but also illustrates more collaborative influences through its development (Allain 1998, 66).

This extensive research on Sydney contemporary performance sent me back to the practical and aesthetic context in which Suzuki's desire to design a training methodology was forged as best I could without being a Japanese language speaker. Broadly the first half of the thesis offers a historical context for the analysis contained in the second half, in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter Two outlines the gestation, influences and evolutions of Suzuki's training method in the context of his theatre practice and working relations as part of the angura or underground theatres of Japan in the 1960s - 1970s. The chapter follows through with a brief account of his relations with the European and US avant-garde theatres – the period when Australian performing artists made contact with Suzuki and his training regime. While the exposition of this chapter and the following is more historical in tone, it is informed by the theoretical synthesis laid out in Chapter One. This account is not intended as a definitive account of Tadashi Suzuki's lifetime artistic development and mirrors the chronological scope of this study because of its emphasis on praxial relations with the Sydney scene up until the mid 1990's.

Chapter Three briefly surveys the state of the existing Sydney field with a particular focus on the praxial environment and genre in the decade just prior to the emergence of contemporary performance. Amongst these precursors were various physical theatres that became visible during the 1980s in Sydney and have fed into Australian physical theatre's current prominence. I have identified pertinent companies, local forces, field relations and practices that set up the ground for the emergence of the first wave of contemporary performance. In doing so, I seek to establish how one kind of performance practice informs or 'speaks' to other practices in an interpraxialogue rather than through a process of intertextuality alone. During this
first wave, practitioners were influenced by visual arts-based performance art. I appraise too the part played by the dissemination of post-structural theory amongst these overlapping artistic communities in their theatre making.

Chapter Four pays closer attention to the most prominent performance making practices pursued in the contemporary performance environment during the 1980s and 1990s. I identify, flesh out and draw together a constellation that distinguished the genre and field. These are in succession: how diverse trainings circulated within the communities of practice, a sample class to stitch the broad sweep back into the specificities of what was actually circulating as SMAT practice in Sydney, dramaturgical processes and the position of written texts in their live performances. I’ve drawn them together to give a context for the reception of SMAT in the local networks at the time. This was necessary also because no comprehensive history of contemporary performance in Sydney has been published and still needs to be done.

Chapters Five and Six attend to four prominent themes of performance praxis starting with artists’ reception of Suzukian training and follow these through their adaptations of these themes in devising and performing. Temporal, spatial and placial themes constitute the first pair and uses of the self, including their encounters with difficulty and pain, the second. Finally I draw these together in considering relations between spectators and performance works. The artists’ thoughts about and their application of what SMAT reveals how engagement with embodied performance practice has the potential to become a powerful means of enquiry in the process of making performance, generating knowledge about art making, human relations and the larger social world.

Practices are either humble and invisible or excessively valourised and promoted in the branding of the business end of teaching. Histories of practice often are written through the lens of theory and published discourse because texts exist, their traces can be cited, they are visible and discussions about them can be easily translated into print and language itself. “Suzuki’s titular control of training reflects partly his entrepreneurial spirit but also the fact that he alone has articulated its ethos in writing” (Allain 1998, 66). Practices by contrast can appear more inchoate, materially opaque, leave few citable-in-print traces and in being non-verbal not
discursively productive without intense academic rendering. One of the lodestones in
the practice of this research was to keep the thinking of the artists, especially those
moments of theoretical reflexivity through their own voices in dialogue alongside my
own. Retrospectively it strikes me I have ‘performed’ on these pages, echoing the
field’s most common practice, a kind of collaboration.

NOTE
Japanese names in this thesis follow the conventional English usage; given name
first, followed by surname. The spelling of Japanese names reflects how names are
most commonly spelt in the English language from which they are cited. Thus
macrons often over a long Japanese vowel in English are sometimes used, and on
occasions, instead an ‘h’ is used depending on how the person is most usually
identified in previous publications. Interpolations that I make within quotes are
surrounded by [ ] styled parentheses. All ( ) brackets enclosing words were used by
the original author or speaker. All ellipsis in citations are marked by … Any
paragraph spacing in a quote exists in the original.

1 Richard Vella was also a composer collaborator on a SYDNEY FRONT work referred to later in this
study.

2 These found texts have included but not exclusively transcriptions of the parliamentary enquiries and
public spokespeople for government agencies in matters concerning the implementation of
immigration policies effecting refugees and imbrication of media and politicians around Australia’s
motives for entering the Iraq War. For further information on VERSION 1.0 see
http://www.versiononpointzero.com

3 More detailed reconsiderations of the angura are now just appearing in English and articles on artists
of the second wave boom would extend this trajectory of study. See for example the electronic
journal, Performance Paradigm, Number 2 (March 2006) Japan After the 1960’s: The Ends of the
CHAPTER ONE
Locating myself in the field of study and methods

I was introduced to Tadashi Suzuki, when he visited Sydney in July 1990, by
Vincent Crowley and Susan Kennedy, my ex-students of the acting program from
the University of Western Sydney. Crowley and Kennedy had travelled to Toga and
trained with Suzuki earlier that year. In 1991, at Suzuki's suggestion, I went to Toga
to train in the Suzuki Method and attend the annual Toga festival primarily as part of
preparation for my own performance practice. The whole first cycle was used as an
audition and Suzuki invited me to stay for his teacher Masterclass course. The
invitation, however, came too late and I could not replace myself in my directing
commitments in Australia.

While I found it exciting, I did not understand the full resonance of my initial
experiences in Toga until later. I was struck by the rigorous demand-driven training,
by contrast to the more inductive pedagogic strategies other actor methods deployed
to gain their effects. The learning strategy felt a little like classical ballet and
corporeal mime, but the coordinative demand did not increase in complexity: the
repertoire of kata is limited and does not foreshadow an infinitude of variations,
unlike the syllabuses of many regimes. I trusted that, over time, my depth of
experience in embodied practices would allow for SMAT's meaningfulness to
'speak' to me.

Upon my return from Japan, the influence of Suzuki upon the performance work I
was seeing in Sydney struck me forcefully. Since 1986, I had attended (and continue
to attend), each year, between 60 and 100 live performances across a range of genres,
by both local and international artists in Adelaide and Sydney, including many by
artists in contemporary dance, physical theatre of a range of types and contemporary
performance. My experiences in Toga had sensitised me to traces of his method's
presence in those contemporary performance works. Though I had previously taken a
session with Nigel Kellaway and had trained with Mémé Thorne I had not been
aware how consistently THE SYDNEY FRONT had trained during their rehearsals. My
dance and mime background suggested to me how SMAT might 'speak to' these
embodied knowledges, for those who carried them, and prompt degrees of
reconsideration of how these deeply incorporated training backgrounds mediated their approach to performance.

Initiating myself in SMAT had been, effectively, my fifth entry into a performance discipline, surrendering my corporeality to ‘new’ vocal-corporeal structuration. This was something that I was to discover that I shared with most, if not all, practitioners who engaged with SMAT. My own trajectory through a range of disciplines and practices not only constitutes, to no small extent, the epistemological grounding of my analyses; it also maps a paradigmatic cultural history of dance and actor training in Australia.

1.1 My performance history
As a young person, I trained extensively as a dancer and actor, first in classical ballet like many Australian girls. Between the ages of four and twenty, I studied ballet, initially through the Royal Academy of Dance syllabus in Melbourne, then at the Canberra School of Ballet, before undertaking Vagonova in South Australia with Mme Zora Semberova. By the age of twenty, I had begun acting, as a teenager, with the Canberra Youth theatre under director Carol Woodrow. I studied and experimented with improvisational approaches to acting developed by Viola Spolin.
As a young adult I trained in gymnastics, Graham and Horton modern dance and tap. Tap, I performed regularly with a self-devising troupe in Adelaide. In the 1970s I majored in both theoretical and practical theatre and social philosophy at Flinders University. Under the leadership of Prof. Wal Cherry, Flinders University Drama was, at that time, a centre of specialist study in Brechtian history, theory and practice. John Willet, Brecht’s pre-eminent translator, came to the university for a semester-length residency during this period. Alongside studies of Brecht and Stanislavski, my undergraduate studies involved three years intensive corporeal mime with Mme Semberova, leading artist from the National Theatre of Prague. Semberova cited Decroux and Polish mime Tomasevski as sources. At the same time we studied via movement études, a movement analysis system designed by Czech, Kroschlova, evolved from the principles of Dalcroze and Laban.2

The professional fields of dance and theatre, during my undergraduate study in the seventies were very separate and distinct. The roles of dancers and actors on the one
hand, and choreographers, playwrights and directors on the other, were very
delineated. The titles ‘actor’ and ‘dancer’ both denoted a purely ‘interpretive’ role in
the formation of new works; actor and dancers were to realise the goals and
conceptions onstage of the ‘real’ and more fundamental artists: directors, writers and
choreographers. Indeed, artists in these roles were, in a number of Australia Council
funding categories from the 1970s to the late 1990s, designated “primary artists.”

Tensions between the fields of dance and theatre existed also around the role of
physical expression. Dance’s physical expression was often thought, by theatre
practitioners, as ‘external’ and therefore superficial, concerned with appearances, by
comparison to the more important ‘interiority’ of psychological motivation or the
‘deeper’ insights into human nature that acting and writing were presumed to access.
Dance, as a meta-genre, on this account, could not escape the boundaries of its
codified genres of technique. I recall, for example, ‘mainstage’ actor and Oscar
winner Geoffrey Rush deriding modern dance works at the Adelaide Festival as
aesthetic spectacle, so fixed in its formalist preoccupations that it did not offer a
model for an authentic Australian model for theatrical devising (the subject of his
critique was the work of Jiri Kylian’s NEDERLANDS Dans Theatre).3 Dancers’
bodies were understood as being marked for life by the demands of their techniques
to such a degree that they could not represent humans in ways with which spectators
could relate. In mainstream theatre, highly physicalised expression was mostly
quarantined in fight sequences, comedic dances, ‘other worldly’ sequences of
characters’ dreams, intoxications or ritual solemnity, or within commercial musicals
and in children’s theatre depicting animal characters or cartoons.

Equally, theatre was seen not to embrace the expressive clarity of form, intensity and
degree of abstraction that modernist dance expression could stage, or to offer
pleasures beyond barriers of language and world views that the culturally specific
representations of realist theatre styles relied upon to reach their audiences. What
interest the mainstream theatre world had in physical performance was limited to the
pedagogic role of developing fluency of expression, coordination, poise or support
for breath, voicing and the articulation of scripts. In my own studies, only in work on
mime, and in the thinking and documented works of Grotowski – I had visited
Sydney to see a performance of Apocalypsis Curn Figuris in Sydney in 1973 – did I
discern intimate fusions of the realist, psychologically representational concerns of ‘theatre proper’ and the embodied, expressive potential of movement-based performance. Nowhere in the field of practice, however, was such fusion being attempted.⁴ Indeed, throughout this time – from the mid 1970s to the early 1980s – a significant number of dancers and choreographers, including Ian Spink and Lloyd Newsome (Giannachi and Luckhurst 1999; Cave 2004), Cheryl Hazelwood, who studied butoh with Yoko Ashikawa’s Hakutobu, Force Majeure choreographer, Kate Champion, and Sue Broadway (Circus Oz) made independent careers in the UK. Hazelwood, Champion and Broadway returned to work in Australia in the late 1990s. The more substantial international profile of Australian physical theatre and visits to festivals by avant-garde companies over the last two decades has moderated this polarisation in attitudes. However, at the time, my personal capacities as a young skilled mover were often exoticised, making me useful in some genres, and an object of desire in others. I was stuck between and across fields: an uncomfortable place to be.

Outside the university, my theatre making was actively political, at times agit prop in style, informed by my study of Brecht and political philosophy responding to social changes and the climate of the times. With others I staged performances outside factory gates, courts, in shopping centres and on campus.⁵ Significantly, in the course of the research for this thesis, these experiences facilitated my identifications of what constituted the concerns for social and political relevance amongst the artists of the Sydney scene: for example, Don Mamouney’s deep commitment to Brechtian concerns at Sidetrack Performance Group. My interests and collaborations at this earlier time to an extent prefigured the kinds of address to power relations identified through the lens of Australian feminisms, gender and queer politics, indigenous politics and politics of cultural diversity, and the post-colonial critiques that were to become concerns that permeated 1980s and 1990s contemporary performance. Some commentators have noted that as such ideas took root in the 1980s they became increasingly played out in the deconstruction of conventional theatre and its internal relations (Guthrie 2000; Burvill 1994). It is remarkable that these dimensions of the purportedly ‘non-activist’ works of Sydney’s earlier contemporary performance scene were often not recognised as politically engaged.
None of this, however, satisfied my own need for a model of practice somehow synthesising the disparate fields of dance and theatre. After researching and implementing Australia’s first secondary dance curriculum, in residence at Port Adelaide in 1979-81, I worked as a freelance director, choreographer and performer, including residencies in juvenile detention and with populations of young people at risk of abuse in local youth theatre settings. Supported by a grant for the South Australian Department of the Arts, during 1986, I resumed postgraduate studies at London’s Laban Centre in contemporary dance, improvisation, choreography, movement analysis and community dance animateuring, being particularly influenced by the dance improvisation of Dana Reitz.

Since 1988, I have lectured in theatrical movement, directed and administered in what has been known as ‘Theatre Nepean’, the undergraduate acting program at the University of Western Sydney, a nationally recognised centre of tertiary actor education. Embedded within a larger contemporary art school, this experience offered a continuous perspective on the unfolding of postmodern theory in visual arts practice, theory and history within universities. Additionally, Theatre Nepean’s curriculum model allows for student participation in all aspects of production. This is in contrast with the structures in all other leading undergraduate acting programs in Australia, such as the National Institute for Dramatic Art (NIDA), where student artists are supported by a separate cohort of technical students. Instead, students acting in a project have had responsibility for all aspects of production, from marketing, stage management, to prop design fabrication, choreography, lighting and so on, with some guidance from specialist technical staff. While the leading decision makers have been professional artists, students constituted something like an internal company for public projects. When Deborah Leiser-Moore worked as a guest artist in this undergraduate program, she commented that the model was a pedagogic equivalent of the way Suzuki organised his company; I recognise threads of this similarity in the accounts by Leon Ingulsrud, long time company translator and member with Suzuki’s SCOT (Carruthers 1996, 230-31).

At UWS Nepean, I have worked with acting teachers of diverse backgrounds, aesthetic ideologies and nationalities; Brechtian, Grotowskian-informed, Stanislavskian, Meisnerian and Mametian; English, Polish and Australian
(respectively, Malcolm Keith, Bogdan Koca and Terence Crawford). In particular, the curriculum has been dominated by the transmission of actor methodologies that continue to dominate in the aesthetics of mainstream Australia theatre derived from Stanislavskianism.

In this context, I have had close dialogues with young actors in training and been struck by how people weigh up what matters and reframe techniques, consciously or not, adapting to desires and demands in rehearsal and performing. In particular, in these privileged long-term working relationships, I have been interested in the recurring practical necessities of how students related bodies, psyches, thought and language, imagining, breath, muscles, bones and their personal histories. In the context of the institutional foregrounding of Stanislavskianism, it has been apparent that students have not understood how their vocal and movement capacities are implicated in their work as actors: vocality or kinaesthesia is not seen as ‘acting’, but rather as ‘technical’ or external resources, and therefore not as valuable as, say, textual analysis, or work on character, construed as a psychological construct. This alerted me to how, in the transmission of practices, much depends on the agency of those involved.

**Training undergraduates and learning from them**

It was into this context that, in 1991, I briefly taught SMAT to undergraduate students. How particular students have negotiated SMAT in their own terms within their anticipated and actual institutional approaches to performing has been salutary. It has vividly highlighted how students conflate the cultural and pedagogic contexts with the coordinating practices and principles embedded within any training regime. The implicit working relations that coordinate training are equally appropriated and internalised by students as they learn.⁶

One student heatedly demanded I explain “What on earth Suzuki’s training had to do with acting?” Initially I was nonplussed as my own experience had been that this was self-evident. This student did not value, nor feel adept in, a corporeal approach to performing. For him, human movements were of themselves devoid of meaning, mechanical until vivified by a series of ideas and mental interpretations. SMAT did not offer him obvious ways to master the ‘proper’, legitimated practice of theatre he
had experienced: how to handle scripts, to portray characters, or to play someone else other than himself. Nor did Suzukian kata teach him manoeuvres that he could apply, like a tool kit, to psychological acting. My explanations did not satisfy him, and the extremity of physical demand of the training figures infuriated him.

Another student's reception has proved enduringly provocative in this research. A student who first encountered SMAT with me at UWS Nepean went on to undertake Honours at another university. In a section of her research paper, she summarised the difference between her learning at UWS Nepean, and her experiences as a freelance performer. She concluded that I had used SMAT's highly disciplinary structure as a surrogate to exercise my 'power' and discipline unruly 'student bodies'. I was initially confronted by this reduction. I had, I thought, enjoyed a good working relationship with this student. Further, I had a range of experiences with 'unruly' bodies in a range of social settings in community practice, and had developed a number of teacherly strategies without recourse to surrogacy or (implicitly), dictatorial high handedness. With a range of teaching strategies to choose from, I had sought to echo the teaching style used in Toga. I saw this offered opportunities for students to test themselves out that my more improvisational methodologies might not. She did not ascribe my style of teaching SMAT to a predilection of my personality, preferring to interpret her experience within a feminist analysis of power structures. These kinds of experiences caused me to reflect upon what I had learnt in Toga, and, upon the kinds of institutional sites in which such a practice might flourish.

When my informal reflections crystallized into a more formal research project, I withdrew myself from teaching SMAT at UWS Nepean. I found specialist guests to lead the training, so as to not confuse my roles as a teacher and a researcher, on the off-chance that my students thought they were my research subjects.

This thesis – the result of that research project – is, in a significant way, informed by this genealogically-styled personal history. I brought to this research a broad and diverse knowledge of performance, of human movement in theatrical settings developed through my own trainings, performing, creating performance and teaching roles. As a comprehensive hermeneutic declaration, this introduction makes explicit
knowledges that contributed to the formation of my own habitus, as a researcher related to those artists of whose works I made close study. This habitus makes possible the analysis and interpretations that I will offer throughout the second half of this thesis.

1.1 Understanding SMAT in practice: an evolving methodology.
In Chapters Two to Six, I lay out the respective histories of the development of SMAT, the emergence of the Sydney contemporary performance scene and present an analytical account of the practices precipitated out of the encounter of SMAT with the local scene. Before doing so, I will offer a brief account of the methodology and theoretical material with which I will develop that analysis.

When I first moved to Sydney my awareness of the nascent contemporary performance scene in Sydney, including its epicentre, the Performance Space in inner-city Redfern, was very limited. The University of Western Sydney was 70 kilometres away from inner city venues. I went ‘in’ to see theatre, to familiarise myself with what was going on beyond the university, both to contextualise the local circumstances for my students and myself. I was an audience member, unknown to many of the performers, and I sensed a ‘sea change’: something was definitely going on.

Preliminary stage – Interviews
After my study in Toga in 1991, I embarked upon bridging studies for a Masters degree at the Centre of Performance Studies (CPS) at the University of Sydney. As part of this work, in 1993, I started to interview performers who had trained in Toga about their interest in the Suzuki method. These were, predominantly, artists involved in the first wave of post-1986 companies. Each of these discussions lasted two to three hours. At that time, there was no published literature describing the scene that had flourished since the mid 1980s. Yet this scene was palpable: ‘a world’ that my informants assumed existed and of which they were a part. Before this thesis there was no comprehensive history documented.

In 1993, the CPS hosted a conference titled ‘Bleedlines: the limits of performance. Here, for the first time, I encountered debates about what was being identified as
"The Sydney style", as practitioners from the local field and academics delivered their presentations. Debates raged about the role of training in innovations of the 'new' field, confirming for me that a 'real' object of study existed beyond my observations.

Central to my studies at the CPS were the methodologies of performance analysis and documentation. Lowell Lewis lectured in the anthropology of performance where he introduced ethnographic modes of enquiry. His research on capoiera (Lewis 1992) and that of others, like Sally Ness, in their focus on movement disciplines, alerted me to the possibility of an analysis based upon extra-linguistic behaviour. Ness notes the inescapable translation artists and researchers perform when they engage with performance practices across cultural borders (1996: 245-287). The ethnographic orientation was relevant too, to thinking through Suzuki's engagement with traditional Japanese theatre practice, and I read, voraciously, the literature on noh and kabuki, as well as watching video documentation of performances in both traditions in order to frame my understanding of Suzuki's kata. Indonesianist, Tony Day, mapped out problems surrounding intercultural theatre and its research in the Asia-Pacific region helping me to reflect upon my experiences boarding with a village family while I trained, interacted with Suzuki, my teachers, and participated in the 1991 Toga festival. In particular I became aware of how my status as a guest, a gaijin and bearer of Anglo-Australian cultural values, led to misunderstandings and reinterpetations that framed my making sense of those experiences. (See Appendix O) This alerted me to the contrasting forces at work in the cultural and power relations of artists working, on one hand, in a small-scale non-institutional setting in Sydney and, on the other, in Suzuki's enterprise. The significance of the agency of artist interlocutors, in the formation of embodied knowledges, became and has remained important in my thinking.

At the same time, I revisited writings of key modernist practitioner directors engaged in training actors who had reflected on their own theatre making, alongside my study of Suzuki's literature; Stanislavski and his American legacy, Meyerhold, Brecht, Brook, Oida, Grotowski, Bogart and Barba. I returned to closer readings of Brecht and Meyerhold each of whom drew from Japanese theatricality to shape their concepts of theatre. Visiting Toga vividly highlighted how they, as spectators of
traditional Japanese and Chinese performance, transfigured what they saw inside their own projects in ways their sources would not have recognised. In the more recent work of Eugenio Barba, I saw an attempt to understand the interactions between training, devising and performance practice. The example of the conditions in which Odin Teatret was first established resembled those that surrounded Suzuki and the Sydney Scene practitioners. They, too, began without funding/patronage, relied on dedicated small ensembles that gained income through performing and individual employment, that subsidised the ventures and worked in small intimate spaces with insecure leases. Barba’s training approach was also decidedly eclectic in its thrust regardless of how this might be appraised.

A common dynamic emerged in the early interviews I conducted. In recounting their personal histories their previous, often multiple training and performance experiences prior to and in the current state of the field, mediated the artists’ entry into and response to SMAT. Their relation with their existing capacities engendered in training, rehearsals and performance, was changed but was never entirely superseded as the time and depth of experience in SMAT extended and their adaptations of it, in devising and performing circumstances, accumulated. Further, most – even those in ensembles doing daily training – had a less intense immersion in SMAT than a member of Suzuki’s company. In other words, these practitioners were not ‘converted’, holus bolus, to a new discipline. However, their encounter with SMAT without exception led to a significant reframing of these artists’ core principles. Their familiarity with earlier regimes, then, were important touchstones for making sense of their experiences through their induction into SMAT, even if they were only partially conscious of this at the time. Their existing competencies in a range of embodied disciplines effectively were their means of access to what would have otherwise been obscure or difficult experience.

I became increasingly aware of traces of SMAT’s disciplinary effects in Sydney performances. Sometimes the traces manifested explicitly in whole sections of a work; at other performances, the influence dispersed across an entire work, marked in details of expression. In this early research stage, I used performance analysis methods to map out these marks and traces to provide a basis for me to elucidate the relationship between training and performance. I undertook extensive video

Suzuki teacher, Deborah Leiser-Moore, and her students allowed me to document a sample class at UWS Nepean. Video documentation and transcription of teacher talk gave me another ‘object’ for performance analysis. I mapped out discourses about acting and audiences, and core strategies for staging learning in SMAT through repeated *bon mots*, instruction, feedback and criticism. Detailed attention to this sample session documentation, alongside transcripts of discussion with Leiser-Moore, pointed me towards particular inflections and emphases, in her reception of SMAT, melded in her teaching.

What I observed in these sessions could not be represented as a ‘pure’ or authentic SMAT training, unaltered in its transmission. The work was, unquestionably, Leiser-Moore’s intimate adaptation of Suzuki’s work. Far from constituting a dilution, or, worse, a debasement or ‘second hand’ transmission of the work, it is precisely in these interstices that the value of the work was transmitted. My interest turned more to the micro-adaptation of practice as a model of interculturalism in performance. Further, the more works I saw and the more articles about and interviews with Sydney artists I read the more I became aware that these artists were shaping the interpretation and adaptations of Suzuki’s work as a function of their own emerging positions in the nascent field.

**Extending the fieldwork – Undertaking case studies**

I widened the scope of my research to include documentation of rehearsal and devising practices within the field of what insiders, in the late 1980s, began to call ‘contemporary performance’. By this time, the first wave of SMAT-influenced companies were no longer producing performance work. *Sidetack*’s then ensemble formation had disbanded after seven years of work; *The Sydney Front* called it a day in 1993. Because of funding constraints, *Legs on the Wall* and *Entr’acte* no longer retained regular troupes; *Open City* established a national contemporary
performing arts magazine, RealTime, writing and reviewing live performance, and Stalker/Marrugeku worked outside Australia for most of the year. In their wake, a new generation – the second wave – was emerging.

The first rehearsed project I documented was Hungry, developed by Leiser-Moore with director Tanya Gerstle. As they developed material ‘on the floor’ in an early creative development, I took notes; when the project received Australia Council funding, I was invited to attend an intensive five-week rehearsal period in July 1996, held in Hut 3(a) of the Addison Rd complex in Marrickville. My documentation extended to the installation of the work at the Performance Space, and the first three performances. This intensive five weeks began with bits of Leiser-Moore’s writing, some agreed action ideas and an array of materials, including Tim Moore’s sculpture representing a giant torah, with scrolls made of cross sectioned corrugated iron water tanks, music segments composed by Elena Kats Chernin, and sections of Michael Stumm’s video pieces, to be projected onto white doors between the scrolls, but no structure for the whole work. Several months after this and prior to their season at the 1998 Adelaide Festival, I recorded discussions looking back over the piece’s development, and their working processes. This kind of practice, involving devising new work from an assemblage of resources, was a favoured mode of Suzuki-trained artists in the second wave of the Sydney scene pursued – a solo work made with a set of collaborators who constituted a transitory ensemble. Another example was Mémé Thorne’s work, Burying Mother, devised at the same as Hungry and performed in another venue, Downstairs Belvoir St, and involving Jai McHenry as director, Nigel Kellaway as design consultant, Victoria Spence as sound artist and Deborah Pollard as dramaturgical consultant – all with substantial SMAT experience. I conducted real-time notation and later an analysis of temporal structures. (See Taylor 1999)

In order to investigate this kind of process, in 1997, I drew together a group of five local artists as a focus group (discussed in Chapter 4) to talk about processes of collaborating away from the demands and goals of an actual project. The discussion provided insight into collective practice and confirmed the ubiquitous usage of particular terms amongst artists that were part of an emerging ‘language’ of practice to which I refer in Chapter Three.
Documenting rehearsals of Country Love

Early in 1997 I approached Don Mamouney at SIDETRACK. Mamouney was planning a collaborative devising project, Country Love, with a new ensemble and young Melbourne scriptwriter, Raimondo Cortese, and I was invited to observe the process. He planned to include daily training in a slightly extended rehearsal period. Mamouney sought, through audition, experienced performers with diverse backgrounds and skills, and assembled an eclectic cast and crew.

Working relations in rehearsals became strained and the atmosphere was tense. Neither the collaboration nor programmed rehearsal trainings unfolded as expected. Only limited sessions of SMAT were conducted, alongside yoga, ballroom dancing, singing and some aerial training. These generated, at best, an ephemeral, rather than an enduring sense of ensemble. Interestingly, because of these difficulties, participants spoke about what they valued and anticipated and experiences that these expectations were based upon. At the midpoint in rehearsals, the company polarised around the role of physical action, a schism that was exacerbated in struggles to clarify working procedures, and about the role of a pre-written script in creating a new work. One of the parties was poised to prosecute for a breach of contract around the ways writing was positioned and used in the project. SIDETRACK’s general manager declared my documentation was ‘owned’ by the company and could be drawn on as evidence in court akin to the use of police notebooks! This in itself signalled the power of crucial investments braided through performance praxis that mostly remain unspoken, unconsciously assumed, and thus often missed in advance planning. Even though a prior project briefing about the position of script writing had occurred, the implications of these plans were interpreted differently and did not fully predict, without prior practical experience what would be involved.

As a case study, Country Love emphatically revealed how deeply generative individual performance habitus is anticipated to be in rehearsals and the power of expectations about how these practical logics imply particular means for coordinating working relations in performance making. The assembled group had not worked together before, but Mamouney had clearly banked on their already engendered capacities for devising. The extent of the incompatibility of unspoken agendas entering into this project was such that compromise was neither fruitful nor
achievable in the ways discussed by my earlier focus group. That group perhaps, had been too willing to overstate the potential of certain kinds of practice to facilitate working creative relationships in their embrace of dissension and the synchrony of their own experiences of collaboration.

*Country Love* was emotionally taxing and traumatic for all concerned, including myself. It certainly succeeded in focussing participants' minds on what they valued, how they would negotiate their entry into future collaborative projects, and what they wished never to repeat. I will draw upon this fieldwork, as well as the material from the other rehearsal processes and the performance detailed above, in Chapters Five and Six, below.

**Drawing images from fieldwork: Marshalling metaphors and analytical discourse**

Through my fieldwork, spectatorship and analysis of performance works, I observed the dispersal of SMAT practices across rehearsals, devising and public performance. Initially to understand the tendency towards systematicity in its dispersal, I adapted a metaphor to articulate what I had witnessed from notions of bioaccumulation and biomagnification in environmental ecology (Gray 2002, 46-52). In the relatively bounded situations of rehearsals elements introduced through the embodiment of collaborators, frequently from other art forms, became salient and decisive at particular times. Analogous to the accumulation of nutrients around roots or stems or organs of animals, SMAT-engendered practices appeared to aggregate around, catalyse and amplify particular kinds of creative decision-making in these hybrid performance practices. The means by which SMAT became useful was then carried into future projects, as well as what artists had learnt about its limitations. SMAT, vectored through these bodies, changed and adapted to the constraints of new sets of collaborators. When working with others who had also trained in SMAT the resonance was greatest. These resonances were often elusive and were neither articulated, nor, sometimes, even recognised by the artists themselves.

It was all very well for me, for example, as a relatively outside observer to note what SMAT contributed to a particular process, but if my artist informants did not make these same observations, then my categories for articulating these resonances with
their performance making would risk the fallacy of misplaced concreteness: I risked mistaking my own analytical categories for descriptions of the experiences and ‘facts’ of the world of practice. My concern, then, became to align the language of my analysis with the ‘insider’ language of the artists with whom I had spoken in interviews, and, align this too with my observations of their practice. I returned to a close examination and analysis of the earliest transcribed interviews with first wave practitioners, and conducted several more with individual artists whose works figured in the second wave. I collated recurring motifs and metaphors, organising the material into a production sequence: from training, through devising and rehearsal, to performance, testing the emerging themes in subsequent interviews.

As I encouraged my subjects to articulate dimensions of their embodied experiences – I turned to phenomenological thought in order to develop an account of those experiences. The work of Michael Polanyi and Drew Leder, for example, have focussed on skills learning, and offered models for writing about tacit and embodied knowledges (Polanyi 1958; Leder 1990). Leder’s notion of the focal disappearance of a body’s deeply incorporated skills at the time of their application to particular tasks or problem solving offered ways of understanding artists in general (1990: 11-35). Artists consistently reported a periodic explicit direct apprehension of their bodies when, in training, their own bodies became objects in their own perception. This was thematised by the difficulty of the tasks they were undertaking. Leder calls this mode of experiencing one’s own body “dys-appearance” (1990: 69-79).

Ed Casey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have informed the ways I identified and will discuss how artists negotiate, appropriate and adapt spatiotemporal learning from training into their relations with places of training and performance. The sociological writings of Pierre Bourdieu offer ways of interpreting the artists’ accounts in terms of their positions in a field of cultural production: a field that I map out in Chapters Three and Four. That is, Bourdieu’s account of habitus offers a means for understanding the development (and then the later reframing) of a particular ‘feel for the game’ of performance making and performing as a kind of bodily gestalt. I will expand further on these theoretical perspectives in the following section.
1.2 Theoretical synthesis

This section is an overview of the theoretical frames for the analyses in the final chapters of this thesis. In particular, it lays out the thinking that informed my interpretation of the accounts of the artists I interviewed, in order to develop what Clifford Geertz called an ‘experience near’ analysis (1993, 57); that is, an account that is as close as possible to the conceptual and experiential categories of the practitioners themselves.

The key insight underpinning my work is that articulated by Merleau-Ponty – that a body reveals ways of being-in-the-world:

The body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to the actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance: this is true of motor habits [sic] such as dancing. Sometimes, finally, the meaning aimed at cannot be achieved by the body's natural means; it must then build itself an instrument, and it projects thereby around itself a cultural world (1962, 146).

As I dwelt with the artists’ transcribed talk, witnessed performances and rehearsals, this central idea addressed both their bodies’ perceptual capacities and their morphology. The pronounced corporeality in their theatre making projects could be understood, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, as the production of meanings aimed at through the building of a set of skills or an instrument, to enable the projection of new cultural worlds around their performances. Through the comportment of groups ‘onstage’ and with spectators, a general medium of being in the world is extended and, in some, ways shared in experiences and ontologies of intercorporeality.8 Experiences of having an extended shared body offered a transitory experience of having or being in a world.

The extent to which experiences of intercorporeality are facilitated, that is, the extent to which performances open out a world for spectators and things ‘show up in that world’, depends on spectators being absorbed in the event. Generating such an absorption was critical for these performer-makers, and was a key part of the artists’ “intentional arc” (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 136) in SMAT training and devising. Often, particularly amongst the first wave of SMAT-practitioners, whose aesthetic investigations were identified in formalistic terms, the potential meanings of those
investigations were often ambiguous and elusive. This undecidedness was often a goal in itself. One local Suzukian practitioner Molino registered why this spectator absorption was at stake for artists in the Sydney scene who did not bank on any narrative drive to propel engagement during their performances. “You have to be more interesting than the person you are sitting next to in the audience” (Molino interview 2001).

While Merleau-Ponty privileges bodies’ roles in constituting worlds, popular discourse about bodily techniques was grounded in the mind-body dualism Merleau-Ponty was attempting to displace. That discourse relegates human bodies and actions to an instrumental role. It parallels notions of technology of machines, of manufacture as a dominant connotation of ‘technique’ in performing arts. In this paradigm, ‘skills’, or ‘techniques’, are positivistically acquired by individuals for the purposes of fulfilling preconceived goals of a discreet and cognizing intelligence. This common sense distinction, separating thought from action, is re-inscribed in many ordinary language expressions. The language that my physicalised theatre artist informants had ‘to hand’ tended to cast SMAT in this instrumental role.

At the same time, these informants wrestled with this language, trying to find better ways to express their experiences. ‘Talking about’ the link between training and performing was very different from ‘doing’ that training and performing. Further, SMAT was clearly not simply a technique for realising preconceived plans. If these assumptions remained unexamined, no insight could be gleaned about the interdependency of bodily experience and conceptualisation in their practice; at the very least, such assumptions misrecognised the very particular creative agency involved in these practices. Indeed, the title of Allen’s and Pearlman’s 1999 anthology of texts derived from this scene – performing the unNameable – encapsulates the stance of artists, in the first wave, who actively sought to avoid instantiating conventional theatrical ways of making meaning by beginning with embodiment of performer-makers in the ways they conducted rehearsals. For Baylis, Speaking retrospectively, Baylis an early contemporary performance makers in the local scene, asserted the work of the first wave of post-SMAT artists was guided by an interest in the body as a cultural object worthy of enquiry in and of itself, and an
associated scepticism about what he called “Big Ideas”, especially one’s own (Baylis 2004 and see appendix P).

At stake, then, is a reconceptualisation of creativity in the terms of an embodied practice not subordinated to an overarching intention, other than that identified above: to create, with an audience, a shared experience of new worlds in and around their performances. In a sense, this is a direction without direction: an inquiry posited as a radical hypothetical – what would it be like to be together in an entirely new, unprecedented way, about which we know little? Further, this arc was to reveal itself as – and was predicated upon – a process that unfolded, ‘on the floor’, without the guidance of the established role conventions of rehearsal.

Hans Joas has theorised the creativity of play by way of a critique of Rational Action Theory (RAT). According to Joas RAT, as the paradigm of an instrumental understanding of human activity is unable to account for creativity, as it is premised on an abstraction of the actor-subject from situations in which people act. RAT also assumes that a subject has the capacity to have a disinterested overview of situations that surround them. Thus, action is assumed to be based upon, and explicable in terms of, prior plans and intention.

Conceived behind the notion that an act of goal setting must precede action is the assumption that human cognition is independent of action or that it is or should be made independent of action (1996, 157).

Human identity is thus conceived as independent from the world or circumstances in which action takes place. Simultaneously, this makes conscious planning the ultimate cause of human action. Joas argues that an alternative, non-teleological understanding of intentionality and action is required to understand relationships between thinking and corporeality. Joas’ alternative is
to conceive of perception and cognition not as preceding action but rather as a phase of action by which action is directed and redirected in its situational contexts. According to this alternative view, goal setting does not take place by an action of the intellect prior to the actual action, but is instead the result of a reflection on aspirations and tendencies that are pre-reflective and have already always been operative (ibid).

Aspirations become locatable in our bodies.
It is the body's capabilities; habits and ways of relating to environment, which form the background to all conscious goal setting, in other words, to our intentionality. Intentionality itself then consists in a self-reflective control that we exercise over our current behaviour (ibid).

In Joas’ schema, the situational contexts in which people act are constitutive of their intentionality. Conscious intentions towards situations remain salient, as intention and situation are reciprocal preconditions of each other. He draws on Dietrich Bohler.

Situational orientation and goal-orientation are interlinked with one another from the outset. For if we did not have certain dispositions towards goals, no matter how vague, which are given ante actu in the form of needs, interests and norms, an event would not occur for us as a situation we are in, but would remain devoid of meaning and mute (Bohler in Joas 1996, 161).

This reciprocity of goal and situation is pronounced in creational rehearsals for new works. An overarching purposefulness permeates devising, yet the pathway towards the public event is not mapped or assured. Creative decision-making and the collaborators’ corporeality, in theatre making in the scene, interpenetrate. John Baylis spoke about devising in THE SYDNEY FRONT (hereafter ‘THE FRONT’):

I can’t think until I see the bodies moving. Until then, it’s all just ideas, and it is dangerous to think beforehand that you are getting anywhere (Baylis in Martin 1992, 3).

A process of tacking back and forth between conscious deliberation and corporeally immersive improvisatory action typified THE FRONT’s collaborations. My focus group described creative action inside ensemble theatre-making as requiring participants to be alert to unintended meanings in unanticipated action. In a sense, these group-working situations were set up as platforms for fortuitous accidents. No matter how exquisite the detail of pre-planning, even the most experienced practitioners developed the capacity to relinquish dominant authorial control. Artists opened themselves out to interventions, scrutiny, infection, reinterpretation by others, who re-contextualised their material, their bodies and actions in a trice. Adeptness in exercising prompt judgement and response was a valued, albeit unspoken virtuosity. Artists spoke of suspending one’s own agenda and of ‘entering into collaboration’. This is a movement into a relatively bounded micro-field of creative action constituted within the world of each project.
Baylis described the collaborative dramaturgy of *The Front* as an example of putting ‘deconstructive strategies into practice’, starting with the structure of the troupe:

A good way to avoid master plans and a single authoritative voice in one’s work is to have no artistic director. In this way, the single-mindedness that tends to afflict us all is necessarily blocked by the need to accommodate the contributions of others – Out of all this comes a severely compromised artwork that reflects our various failed attempts to grab the steering wheel, does justice to none of our intentions fully, and so is far richer than anything we could do separately (Baylis 1990).

One of the focus group, on devising in contemporary performance, described a state of not actively ‘directing’:

- I say go with faith. Collaboration is one of the hardest things in the world because it is about knowing when to shut up. That’s a terrible thing to say because it is supposed to be a form of communication – I think there is a point where you have to step back and say “Let’s see”, because you will [see], if you are willing. Everyone has a controlling interest and sometimes things pop out, when things are allowed to happen. Sometimes I’ll just sit on something and go, “Ok. Let it happen. Let it happen” (Focus group interview 1997).

This informant assumes collaborating artists work in an alert state of deep listening and attentive watchfulness. Baylis and my focus group informants offered compelling examples of “passive intentionality”. For Joas, theories of action that seek to account for creativity and invention need to acknowledge precisely these kinds of “states of passivity, sensitivity, receptivity and imperturbibility” (1996, 168). He uses as an example Merleau-Ponty’s depiction of how humans allow, rather than will, themselves to fall asleep, as the paradigm for such an approach to problem solving:

In order to solve a problem, you must precisely not adhere rigidly to one type of action, but must rather open yourself to ideas and new types of action that result from the pre-reflective intentionality of the body (*ibid*, 169).

Possibilities ‘allowed to happen’ on the rehearsal floor in the flow of bodily action is an example of such a ‘meaningful loss of intentionality’. And, while it is the case that all theatre practice to some degree shares this kind of collaborative creativity, the Sydney contemporary performance scene enshrined this model as the sine qua non of their practice. Such work required a willed leap of faith, trusting that one’s collaborators’ practices would be relevant to the shared project. While the shape of performance works was unknown in advance of their making, there was an
assumption that there was a work to be ‘discovered’ or ‘recognised’ during their devising (Heddon and Milling 2006, 198). Additionally, trust depended upon a group’s potential for attunement to each other; attunement that could be gained, refined and intensified in training together or in similar disciplines. The efficacy of Suzuki’s method in facilitating such an attunement was accepted within the scene. While Sydney artists did not emulate Suzuki’s theatre works or reproduce his training method’s vocabulary on stage, they took SMAT’s potential efficacy as preparation for performing and devising as proven. For example, Kellaway described his stance on Suzuki’s theatre aesthetic and the conventions of Suzuki’s theatre works as it manifested in his training regime. “It is after all, possible to respect conventions without necessarily embracing them” (1994a). That is, practitioners may train in SMAT and respect Suzuki’s theatre works but reject any proto-dramaturgy implied in the regime.

Banking on the efficacy of trained embodiment supported an openness to the unforeseen in creational rehearsals. Practitioners were willing to trust their practice to produce the kind of work for which they, and their audience, had developed ‘a feeling’. This supported groups of artists who were restless and dissatisfied with the then-current state of theatre practice, yet who were without a manifesto or blueprint for future theatrical or social utopias.

The aspiration towards an aesthetic founded upon a radical receptivity to collaborators of embodied practice can be usefully theorised in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s model of ‘the logic of practice’. For Bourdieu, what is at stake in a scene such as the one I am describing is the formation and effects of ‘habitus’. Bourdieu’s notion of habitus in his theorising of the ‘logic of practice’ echoes experiences of fluent exponents of highly physicalised performing disciplines. It accords with important threads in the practitioners’ talk about the place of SMAT in their practices. Habitus, a durably installed generative disposition imposing its particular logic ensures

the active presence of past experiences, which deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms (1990, 54).
Habitus or the ‘feel for the game’, to use Bourdieu’s grounding metaphor, is the outcome of ‘inculcation and appropriation’, gained either in learning in the course of upbringing, on-the-job or through formal education. While Bourdieu developed this notion in context of anthropological field work in non-arts settings, he accounts for the consistency of practice that develops in fields where the major mode of transmission, in the absence of written manuals or notated scores, is from body to body or, in the wonderful phrase used by dancers in the Kirov Ballet, ‘foot to foot’.  

There is a widespread belief in fields of theatrical performance that practitioners cannot effectively use capacities engendered through training that have not become second nature. Barba describes the aim of effective training as the development of a “second nervous system” (1997, 128). Suzuki continually asserted the need to move beyond “the grammar” in order to develop a ‘sensibility’, a kind of corporeally mediated ‘second instinct’ which he described as “an operational hypothesis” (1991, 242). Fluency in performance is understood, in such accounts, as a function of the backgrounding of conscious ideation.

Such an understanding is consonant with phenomenologist Drew Leder’s theorization, in The Absent Body, of the quotidian disappearance one’s own body. We are generally not aware of our own bodies until they either fail us, or we embark upon the acquisition of new skills. Upon acquisition of fluent skills, our bodies again recede from our awareness; the skill becomes second nature. Leder developed Polanyi’s notion of the ‘unspecifiability’ of skills by the possessor of ‘personal knowledge’ (Polanyi’s appellation for skill) (1958, 61). Similarly, philosopher John Sutton emphasises the necessary “expertise-induced amnesia” of proficient sportspeople and dancers when their embodied habits grooved into memory allows them to engage fluently in the game or choreography with finesse and without conscious monitoring (2006, 10). This tendency to forget the effects of skills at the very moments of their application in performance making accounts for some of the difficulty my artist-correspondents had from time to time finding words to recall the intimate imbrication. That is, those occasions when they performed fluently inside devising they did not ‘think’ about what they were doing. While Polanyi’s ‘personal knowledges’, Leder’s ‘absent body’ and Sutton’s ‘grooved patterns’ each encompass
a way of knowing through embodiment that does not rely on conscious mobilisation to be effective, Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is much wider in scope, and is predicated upon his account of individual’s membership and participation in particular social fields. Focussing on habitus highlights the impacts of individuals within groups within the local field of cultural production, as they brought “schemes of perception, thought and action” to bear. Bourdieu presumes some degree of agency embedded in perceptions and embodiment—artists literally carry their habitus for performance in their bodies. Habitus, as conceived by Bourdieu, is an art of invention in the logics of practice that while transmitted, both in training and rehearsals, does not eclipse differences between artists. As Bourdieu’s editor summarises in The Field of Cultural Production, the dispositions of habitus “are transposable” in that they generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity, and they are “structured structures” (Bourdieu 1990, 53) in that they inevitably incorporate the “objective social conditions of their inculcation” (Johnson 1990, 5).

For Bourdieu, habitus is unthinkable without a simultaneous thinking of ‘field’. Indeed, the link between field and habitus is “a genuine ontological complicity (that) obtains between the agent and the social world” (1992, 128). This complicity is

between two realisations of the historical action in bodies and things. It is the double and obscure relation between habitus, i.e. the durable and transposable systems of schemata of perception, appreciation, and action that result from the institution of the social in the body (or biological individuals) and fields, i.e. systems of objective relations which are the product of the institution of the social in things or in mechanisms that have the quasi-reality of physical objects; and of course, of everything that is born of this relation, that is, social practices and representations of fields as they present themselves in the form of realities perceived and appreciated (1992, 127).

The interpenetrating relation between habitus and field operates in two directions. The field or state of the field, during the extended phase of inculcation and later transformations, conditions habitus which, in turn,

contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one’s energy’ (ibid).

Thus belief is an inherent part of belonging to a field (1990, 67). A coincidence pertains between dispositions and a subject’s position in a field. Performers’ ‘sense of the game’ of performance echoes their positions and positions taken in the local relatively autonomous field of cultural production, in its states of hybridization,
during the 1980s and 1990s. Having inculcated the prior objective social conditions of the larger fields in which these artists formed, their habitus was, as Bourdieu argues, pre-adapted to the emerging creative practices of the period. Their ‘feel for the game’ of performance and devising emerged from and generated further invention and adaptation in their ensemblesque practice, thus setting in train more and distinctive field activity. Their undertaking of SMAT participated in attuning their habitus to the contemporaneous state of the field. Elucidating how this can be understood constitutes the body of rest of this thesis.

Bourdieu drew on Pascal to encapsulate the nature of reciprocity between field and habitus:

> The world encompasses me but I comprehend it precisely because it comprises me. It is because this world has produced me, because it has produced the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident (ibid).

For Bourdieu, the social world is accumulated history (1997, 241). Social fields are constituted structurally by practices, schemes of thought and people who have a stake in those fields. Habitus registers the investment people make in the meaningfulness of fields. Those investments are made in various species of capital: cultural, social, symbolic and economic. Each field places esteem and practical value on different kinds of capital. For example, possessing particular kinds of cultural capital is pertinent in fields of cultural production in arts, science, academia, education and religion, while it determines the possible positions that shape and structure that same field. Thus the notion of capital central to Bourdieu’s theorisation of fields maps the structures of power of various groups, castes or classes and the meta-relations between various fields in relation to the field of power. The framing of artistic cultural practice as disinterested production of “purposeless practices and products” arises from the positioning of arts fields as subjugated to those of the dominant and principally economic fields.¹¹

The structure of fields is defined by the distribution of specific forms of capital that are active in it (1992, 108). Thus practices cannot be reduced to a “discontinuous series of instantaneous mechanical equilibria between agents who are treated as interchangeable particles” (1997, 241).¹²
Fields, then, are structured by the particular logics of practice by individuals and groups.

(S)ocial agents are not ‘particles’ pulled and pushed by external forces – rather (they are) bearers of capital – (D)epending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy in the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital, they have a propensity to orient – toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution (Bourdieu 1992, 108; italics in original).

The structure of a field is defined by the structure of the distribution of specific forms of capital that are active in the field (1992, 108). The edges or borders of a field can be detected by where and when the relevant capital in that field no longer has effects, no longer is active; the limits of the field are what is at stake in the play/competition within that field. As any specific form of capital only exists and functions in relation to a field, these active and embodied properties constitute something akin to eligibility for participation in that field. Habitus is pre-adapted, its dispositions compatible to the demands of a field of cultural production as they have durably inculcated

the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the ‘objective conditions’ of the field (1990, 54).

For example, local physical theatre practitioners’ habitus of banking on their embodied performance skills and corporeally-saturated judgment was formed in poorly resourced circumstances with little access to, or use of lavish stage technologies in their venues, unlike the set and lighting design of the state theatres. This offered possibilities and opportunities to deeply explore the reliance on and power of these skills to communicate with spectators while it was also a necessity.

The ‘strategies’ of habitus are not rational plans operating without resistance or inertia to the logic of the field. Rather they are “objectively oriented lines of action which social agents continually construct in and through practice that seek without a conscious search success and a future” (1992, 128). Habitus acts as a system of cognitive and motivational structures of “already realised ends.” The field-habitus complicity sets in train praxial dispositions that are
'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, (that) can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor (1990, 53).

So this research began to focus upon articulating the active properties of habitus that had effects in this restricted field of cultural production. To activate Suzuki Tadashi's own metaphor for his training method as a whole, stomping became a blood test in tracing its own complicity with the emergence and evolution of the field. As I analysed my conversations with the artists a picture of their investments emerged; as they did so, so did a picture of contemporary performance as a field, a field in which a particular species of capital – the experience of Toga and the sensibilities developed and honed in stomping (pre-structured, as habitus, were congruent with their aspirations and ideals).

1.3 Knowingly having a habitus
A number of local performers engaged in deconstruction and reconstruction of their embodied patterns of performing. Some – not just those who engaged in Suzukian methods – might call this the breaking down of habits. Some practitioners in the precursor history of the local field went so far as to attempt to break, or abandon, the entire profile or outline of their existing embodied habitus. In the 1970s, based on a belief that an essential hidden concealed core self existed, practitioners influenced by Grotowski's via negativa sought to cut away or abandon recurring features of their habitual socialized behaviour. Later scene practitioners engaged in butoh practices, such as Min Tanaka's Body Weather, which uses a similar strategy. In these, practitioners posited themselves as empty non-socialised entities available for construction by natural environmental forces for extended periods during training. SMAT carries a similar notion of 'emptiness of self' in another form derived from its noh roots. (More about this later in Chapter Six) However, Suzukian training presumes the presence of spectators every second, embedded as it is in a paradigm of theatricality rather than dance or ritual – unlike butoh practices which do not insist on an audience. It was as if they trained in SMAT both with a knowing cognisance of their existing habitus for performing and also a wish to reconsider it in training. This points to a degree of consciousness in entertaining their habitus for performing. In this, Bourdieu's theorization of habitus, as operating beyond the will of subjects as a set of already realized ends, is somewhat transgressed.
In the initial phases of entering into a new regime, specific ideas, discourse, goals and aspects of theories about performance stand out prominently. Practitioner attention is directed necessarily ‘to’ their bodies, including processes of vocalisation. Upon attaining the second nature threshold of habitus formation an artist might still make conscious recourse to its known rules periodically in order to deal with an obstacle or solve a problem. Mottos, bon mots, coaching points, maxims and personal criticisms in previous training and rehearsals continue to interpose themselves; in the course of making theatre, one’s memories of these verbalisations array themselves around all actions.

Equally important in practitioners’ appraisal of their existing habitus in the complicity between habitus and field is SMAT’s appearing to have no particular artistic roles or a dramaturgy for making theatre encoded in its repertoire, that can be readily recognised through categories extant in broader Australian performing arts. One artist described SMAT as appearing to have “no baggage” of this kind (Baylis interview 1996). However, its structures incarnate in the dialogue between the habitus of already experienced performer-makers and SMAT’s coordinating practices resonated with the artists’ desires. They did not require this be spelt out to generate dramaturgy. The inclinations towards emphatically physical performance and concomitantly training-oriented practice were describable habitus traits of the practitioners in this study in the classically Bourdieun sense. Yet early in the contemporary performance scene, development of these ‘second natures’ was often thought provisional and able to be manipulated, in contrast to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Artists in the local field were conscious of having a habitus qua second nature for performing. Refashioning it in new performance trainings undertaken during the late 1980s was consonant with desires of the first wave with post-modern inclinations to extricate themselves from the ‘grand narratives’ of artistic mission statements thus their desires and need to work within a new field or reshape one the existing one. The uses of training regimes authored by earlier modernist directors and choreographers to create utopian programs for dance or ‘theatre of the future’ were known to local artists. If habitus is complicit with the positions taken in a field and a field shaped by positions taken, then unhinging the neat fit by changing habitus through training held the possibility of reshaping the field. This raises the question of
where belief lay. In the modernist phase, trainee’s beliefs were vested in the theatrical visions of a regime’s progenitors. In the local artists’ approach to training, reproducing thus believing in the designer’s vision was not the driving force. Rather, their investment or belief was in their future capacities to create new works in the Australian context without adopting Suzuki’s own goals in making theatre. Their beliefs and confidence was in how they would deploy what they learnt to reconsider what was possible in their future performances.

The concept of habitus rather than notions of grooved bodily routines foregrounds embodied skills as meaningfully generative of further knowledge and invention in ways consonant with local practitioners’ understandings of trainings being ‘performance or theatrical languages’. Embodied knowledges cultivated, reformed and extended through training were presumed to offer language-like powers to represent to stage images and to understand how representations in stage action and imagery came into being, thus these could be manipulated. (See Chapter Three)

Bourdieu argues habitus has a tendency for earlier experiences to immunise against the influence of later practices. Thus chronological order of each artist’s learning of diverse disciplines was salient. Artist-interlocutors referred to continuities between current practices and earlier trainings, demonstrating the very propensity to transpose and adapt. Yet deeply incorporated practices and discourses beyond range of conscious apperception resist change but not transformation. As Bourdieu argues dispositions are ‘durable but not eternal’. The ‘feel of the game’ of performance is itself transformed when incited in adaptations to the novel demands of each new project. As the praxial dispositions are formed in specific fields, transformation of habitus and field interpenetrate over time. Radical ruptures in fields due to such things as technological change, migration, war and even being sacked, bring with them experiences of dislocation that threaten the total fit, thus the making of sense, of value and even hope (after Hage 2003). In a less intense way, entry into each new training regime, like SMAT, brings with it a disorientation of habitus. Thus a reflexive dialectic about beliefs embodied is catalysed when the link is problematised as “(b)elief is an inherent part of belonging to a field” (Bourdieu 1990, 67). In the field-habitus dialectic the task that presented itself in this research was to locate and identify regularities that existed in rehearsal / creational practice, in SMAT and
performing in the self-organising flux of the Sydney scene. This entailed developing categories for making these distinct without reifying in an ahistorical way.

Leder marshalled ‘thematisation’ as a term to clarify how embodiment or corporeality brings distinct recurring qualities or ideas into the foreground of an individual’s apprehension (1990). When attention is ineluctably drawn ‘to’ a body’s capacity for sensing and action, embodiment comes into the foreground. In registering how embodiment overwhelmingly commands attention in this ‘to’ state Leder titled this state, the dys-appearing body in a trope of dysfunctionality. Foregrounding of attention on corporeality is thematisation. While Leder elucidates, with great clarity, periods of dysfunctionality in experiences of pain, which I return to in a later section, thematisation is not only completely dysfunctional. In outline, Leder glosses the ‘to’ and ‘from’ states, the ecstatic and dys-appearing body, in a complemental series, where the dominance of one indicates the absence of the other. This broad tendency is, even for Leder, too simplistic as a totalising account of corporeality:

After a complex series of thematisations thrown up in the initial stages of mastering a new skill, successful acquisition coincides with a phenomenological effacement of these thematisations that disclose worlds of meaning and potential action (1990, 31-32).

Awareness shifts from the opacity of embodiment ‘to’ possibilities opened up by incorporation. Leder offers an everyday example of how skills change relations to the surroundings.

The lake outside my window looks different than in my preswimming days, when it could not be crossed and offered no access (1990, 32).

Altered capacities change, through skills development, the self-world reciprocity expanding recognition of affordances, as properties of places, materials and social properties of groups of artists in the devising environment. Literally, how the sensorium of a performing artist is ordered through training pre-empts what can be realized. Specific capacities for action draw and enhance specific sensorial aspects: i.e. awareness of closeness and distance, falling and flying, tempo and duration, pitch and volume, thresholds of pain and pleasure. The affordances of particular material
and social situations that come into view are then available to be used individually and collectively in devising.

'Themes of practice' is my term for what emerged from my analysis of the collected materials of fieldwork. This title refers to the thematisations in SMAT that were taken into devising. Practitioner awareness of these themes oscillated. On the one hand, they could and did talk about these themes but, on the other hand, they also had difficulty articulating those moments in devising when their effects were more intuitively exercised.

These themes of practice analysed in Chapters Five and Six arose with an awareness of local relations between habitus and field by the artists and myself. These themes in practice come from and apply to this field of cultural production and are not advanced as ahistorical categories for analysis of other trainings. They offer a perspective to account for the reflexivity and the means by which hybridisation of arts practice unfolded in contemporary performance praxis in Sydney during the 1980s and 1990s.

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1 Mme Zora Semberova took a position as a lecturer at Flinders, where she had been visiting, after her home city Prague was invaded and occupied by the Soviet military in 1968. She was 'an honoured citizen' of the Dubcek regime of the Prague spring so could not return. Mme Semberova was also leading expressionist dancer, dancing Prokofiev's first ever 'Juliet' as a young woman in Czechoslovakia. She was honoured with lifetime achievement award from Ausdance in the National Dance Awards in 2002. The significance of Semberova's contribution to Australian dance and movement theatre culture has also been acknowledged in choreographer, Leigh Warren's film and live dance work, A Dancing Life, 2002.

2 For more detail of these principles see Kroschlova, J (2000). Semberova was a seminal teacher at Flinders University for a number of key artists and commentators in Australia, including directors, Gale Edwards, filmmaker Scott Hicks, singer and musician Mara Kiek, actor Jenny Hope, and comedians Glynn Nicholas and Greg Pickhaver. Interestingly, Chris Ryan, later of THE SYDNEY FRONT studied with Semberova in a company and studio she established outside the university, called the AUSTRALIAN MIME THEATRE, although our paths did not cross at the time. I reacquainted myself with corporeal mime during an intensive with Leisa Shelton, also a Decrouxian, in the now defunct studio called Theatre is Moving in Surrey Hills, Melbourne, in 1996.

3 In conversation with author, Adelaide 1984. Kylian was also a student of Zora Semberova's in Czechoslovakia.

4 In 1976 I ran away with my 'peers' NEW CIRCUS for a long two state coastal tour, and briefly flirted with this as an avenue. Core members of this group went on to form CIRCUS OZ.

5 Specific contexts included student political actions such as the occupation of Flinders University registry building in 1973, protests regarding education funding and in marches to defuse tensions with
police and prevent arrests during campaigns against uranium mining and the presence of US military bases and for women's rights and the establishment of the women's refuges. This thread in my own practice re-emerged during my time devising and performing as a tap dancer, in the context of advocacy campaigns around women's and gay health issues. Examples of topics include AIDS/HIV, youth access to contraception, promotion of dietary health and against the abuse of minor tranquillisers, promotion of literacy and emergency housing in Adelaide.

6 This is not an exclusively undergraduate propensity. I have witnessed this amongst postgraduate artist-researchers whose art works, generated within their candidature, have been tailored to demands of 'academia', too.

7 These concerns were also circulating in Sydney contemporary performance field. A work called Orientalia, directed by Sally Sussman, staged Brecht's misrecognition of Peking Opera at the Performance Space. Sussman had spent several years studying Peking Opera and one of the four performers who was an ex-patriot Peking Opera virtuoso of women's roles. See Sussman and Day 1996

8 For a more detailed discussion of the notion of models of collective comportment in performance, see Gibson 1997

9 Heddon and Milling are referring to the devising procedures of the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment however the orientation towards devising apparent amongst the Sydney contemporary performance makers. However the local groups were not off say with the processes these groups used to devise so cannot be considered derivative of these artists. (See Chapter Three)

10 The phrase 'foot to foot' to describe the official and dominant process of transmitting the choreography of major ballets, from one generation of prima ballerinas to the next to sustain the continuity of the repertoire within the Kirov and other European ballet, was used by my teachers to describe the work and necessity for accuracy in learning throughout my own ballet education. I've always known this term. Finding any written or alternate source for this has not been possible. Documentaries on the Kirov would confirm this interpretation, as it is regular working terminology.

11 Bourdieu cites a telling example of a visual artist, Hans Haacke, who created and exhibited in the Guggenheim Museum in New York a painting that set out how the Guggenheim family accrued the wealth that underpinned their status as patrons of the arts. A consequence was that the director of the gallery had to leave his position or lose his credibility amongst artists. Bourdieu cites this as an occasion when an artist having found a decided function for his art in relationship with the dominant field of power, being economic power, this artist uncovered the limits of his autonomy as an artist. (1990, 109-110)

12 Here I have in mind Keith Gallasch, the editor of RealTime, who has likened the life of the contemporary performance scene to "slime moulds" (Gallasch 2005, 11) presumably, an undifferentiated mass of spores able to infiltrate, infect, and thrive in any possible environment. Gallasch's biologic metaphor, appealing as it may be to artists who understand themselves as somehow 'underground' or countercultural, is predicated upon a worldview uncomplicated by the kinds of distinctions to which Bourdieu directs our attention.

13 Psychologist J.J Gibson coined the term "affordance". It refers to all "action possibilities" latent in the environment, objectively describable, and independent of the individual's ability to recognize those possibilities. Further, those action possibilities are dependent on the capabilities of the actor (sic). For instance, a set of steps, each a metre high does not afford the act of climbing, if the actor is a crawling infant. So affordances are only identified along with the relevant actors. (Gibson 1986. 127-134)
CHAPTER TWO
Locating Suzuki and the development of training method

The internationally known performer-training regime called the Suzuki Method of Actor Training (SMAT) is identified by the name of the director who systematised it. As a set of preparatory practices, it was designed within the collaborative interplay between Suzuki as a director and the successive constituencies of his ensembles of actors in the distinctive aesthetic and socio-political environment of Japan during the 1960s and 1970s. The method did not arise from investigating Suzuki’s own capacities as a performer but those of others. The evolution of his development as a director was forged within the interpraxial relations of one ensemble in particular, the WASEDA LITTLE THEATRE (WLT).

As these interpraxial relations were pivotal in the genesis of SMAT as a regime, I will set out a historical overview of the evolution of Suzuki’s dramaturgy through his collaborations. A picture emerges of the method’s gestation being contingent on the energetic collective theatre-making environment at Waseda. These interpraxial relations functioned as enabling constraints upon the genesis of the method. These conditions may not be perceived as explicitly inscribed in the method’s practices by those who practice who are unaware of its history, SMAT’s design responded to creative problems in the formulation of Suzuki’s dramaturgical practice at different stages. Key themes of Suzuki’s theatre practice crystallised in collaborations with performers, several of which this short journey will articulate. Those themes include: the performers’ relations to the place of performance, the assertion of the centrality of corporeality in handling written texts in dramaturgy, enquiry into the nature of a performer’s identity and the embrace of demanding corporeal and collaborative relations. These alongside the impacts of the wider social context taken together constituted the conditions of possibility and constraint on the method’s development. The traces of these in the regime resonated with and were amplified by the local conditions when SMAT was taken up in the Sydney scene over a decade later.

There is a substantial literature documenting Suzuki’s artistic development. In the following, in order to offer a succinct overview, I draw upon the work of Yukihiro Goto (1988), Brandon (1976), Goodman (1978, 1982, 2005) and Hoff (1978 and
1985). In his PhD thesis Goto (1988) wrote the first comprehensive history of Suzuki’s theatre practice and literature, focusing on the earlier period prior to 1984 at Waseda’s Little Theatre. David Goodman was also an English-speaking participant in the post-treaty radical arts movement, launching and editing an influential arts magazine of essays, interviews and criticism. His writings place Suzuki in the context of the first wave of the little theatre movement. James Brandon was the first western Japanese theatre scholar to visit the Waseda Little Theatre in 1976 and observe training. Hoff appraises Suzuki’s notions of acting within the traditions of noh theatre. Additionally, two recent comprehensive histories of Suzuki background this account, the first is by Allain (2002), and the second by Carruthers and Takahashi (2004). Both place the training regime in the context of Suzuki’s total theatre oeuvre, including his international phase to the present.

This chapter does attempt to account for Tadashi Suzuki’s total development. Rather it builds up a picture of what shaped the structures and practices of training in the course of theatre making. This account argues that traces of these objective and aesthetic conditions in which SMAT was formed are echoed in the beliefs, values, kata and organization of sessions in both conscious and unconscious ways. The theoretical synthesis laid out in Chapter One informed the reading of this body of published literature. The formation of the regime was not the outcome of an abstracted and reified evolution of disembodied thought. Specific actual relations with particular writers, actors, places, circumstances and events decisively influenced the design of training regime mediated by Suzuki’s reflections on this thick matrix of experiences. This prompted presentation of this writing in the form of a brief history that ends just after Australians first travelled to Toga.

**Phase One: Creating the WASEDA LITTLE THEATRE (WLT) (1966-1972)**

Suzuki’s earliest theatre experiences were in the realist shingeki mainstream theatre, an orthodox modern theatre patterned after European models which sought, through an adherence to Stanislavskian realism, to modernise and break with the traditional theatres. Suzuki’s contact with shingeki was in the politically active student theatre of Waseda University, where he was studying economics (Brandon 1978). At Waseda, Suzuki read translations of Stanislavski’s texts and directed several plays, including Chekhov’s Three Sisters and Miller’s Death of a Salesman. Playwright
Minoru Betsuyaku, who was to join Suzuki in the WLT, was attracted to Beckett and European absurdist Ionesco and Kafka. For the student theatre movement, Chekhov was a model of Soviet social realist art: a model that did not appeal to Suzuki (Goto 1988, 23-24).

Student theatres such as those at Waseda were directly linked to the massed anti-treaty rally organizations of 1959-60. The anti-treaty protest movement had been building through the 1950s, and focused upon the controversy over renewal of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty in 1960. At stake, for the ‘anti-Ampo’ protest movement,

was whether Japan could truly be a sovereign nation if the Treaty allowed American forces to be stationed on Japanese soil. When the anti-Treaty movement failed, further overt political activity seemed pointless to many, and a substantial number of the young demonstrators channelled their prodigious energy into achieving cultural autonomy where complete political sovereignty had been placed out of reach (Goodman 2005, 8).

The disillusioned included many young artists. Faith in the possibilities of a robust democracy faltered. This resistance spawned a widespread angura, or loosely translated, an underground theatre movement, at the vanguard of which were Suzuki and his colleagues, emerging from the university theatre scene. Satoh Makoto, renowned first wave angura playwright of the BLACK TENT, or THEATRE CENTRE, identified three features of this ‘first wave’ of angura.

- A liberation from the conventional proscenium theatre, in favour of ‘black box’, tent, and outdoor performance;
- The reinstatement of actors’ performances as the key component of theatrical expression. Attention was to be given to the actor’s physicality, especially in the notion of Tokken-teki nikutai-ron, a theory of the privileged body, developed by Kara Joru, and in the Suzuki Method;
- Performances of original plays attached to particular performance groups/theatre companies (Satoh 2006, 2).

Like other artists developing amidst the extensive social activism, Suzuki questioned the assimilation of Western-styled modernism into Japanese cultural life, including its manifestation in the shingeki theatres (Goto 1988, 69-70, 186, 188; Allain 2002, 17; and Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 2,3, 116). Takayashiki explains that the appellation given to this – generation, all born in the 1930’s – yakeato sedai – translates as “the generation coming of age amidst the burned out ruins after the war” (Takayashiki 2006, 1). Others of the yakeato generation, such as the writer
Betsuyaku, were even sceptical of the standardisation of Japanese language – seeing this as a borrowed, if not imposed, western process – a scepticism that undermined confidence in all linguistic communication. This kind of scepticism towards the modern language was especially conspicuous in the new field of Japanese theatre and drama, the so-called ‘Little Theatre Movement’ or ‘post-shingeki movement’ that began in the 1960s (ibid).

In this charged political context, the form the alternative theatres were to take was responded equally to financial limitations. Goodman refers to the lack of any external funding for all arts:

[m]oney was of course a major problem. None of the activities of the Black Tent Theatre were supported by grants or other outside funding, which was unheard of in Japan at the time. The Little Theatre Movement, as it came to be known, like modern theatre in general in Japan, was underwritten by its participants through a troupe tax, an essentially voluntary contribution of up to 60 percent of members outside income, usually the income from appearances in or writing scripts for radio, television, and films. All modern theatre troupes supplemented ticket revenues in this way (Goodman 2005, 5).

For Goto, the financial strictures also manifested in the difficulty theatre-makers had finding spaces in which to work. “One of the persistent problems of modern Japanese theatre,” he notes,

is the lack of performance space, and for this reason tight program schedules in rented halls are generally required. Few acting troupes can afford more than one or two rehearsals in rented playhouses prior to opening performances (Goto 1988, 2).

The nascent WASEDA LITTLE THEATRE set up a small atelier theatre above the Mon Cheri coffee shop near Waseda University. Despite the poverty of the individuals and the collective, $US59, 500 was raised by the theatre troupe itself to fund the fitting out of the room above the coffee shop as a theatre-studio. The venue opened as a theatre in 1966. This small space with limited technical facilities had a decisive and continuing impact on Suzuki’s understanding of theatre, as he explained in 1979:

[the theatre’s small performance space, where the audience could easily sense the actor’s breath and sweat invalidated all the decorative elements of the shingeki stage. That is to say, no matter how small the actor’s gesture might be, the space immediately revealed whether it was of true nature or ostentation.

Also the small stage could not provide the dazzling effects of spectacles produced by machinery in a large theatre. I had no choice but to believe in the power of the actor’s acting—the power of his words and the power of his physical gestures that were projected
upon the audience. In other words, as a director I had to rely only on the physical energy radiating from the living body of the actor.

It was a great discovery for me that the energy of the actor alone enabled the cultural activity called theatre to be accessible to so many people . . . Although I had no choice but to use the small theatre, the experiences I gained from it have, to large degree, set my theatrical direction ever since (Suzuki in Goto 1988, 52).

A continuous residency enabled the company to construct their own rehearsal schedules, making the place one of intense collaboration. Most members worked in paid employment during the days. “Suzuki was, within the formal organization, always identified as the head of the troupe. At the same time, the group was formed jointly from the beginning, and the basic operating method was that the troupe members would contribute to rehearsals” (ibid 80). The twenty members, seven of who had worked in a transitory troupe Suzuki drew together out of the student theatre, included Minoru Betsuyaku (playwright) and Hiroshi Ono (actor). The relationships between Suzuki and his ensemble reflected and refracted the changing state of the field of cultural production in which it was embedded. Their habitus or feel for the game’ of theatre making was being transformed as the Japanese field was changing.

The tenor and emerging goals of collaborative practices at Waseda

The imperatives of creating new works in rehearsal, and aspirations to transform acting in Japanese theatre, were co-determinants in praxial environment in which Suzuki’s training regime evolved. The reconceptualisation of acting was decisively influenced by series of working relations. The collaborative relationship between Suzuki, writer Betsuyaku and actor Ono at the WLT from 1962 to 1969, for example, was intensely antagonistic. From Goto’s research it is clear Suzuki goaded and challenged Ono to achieve the qualities necessary to perform Betsuyaku’s non-descriptive, suggestive and recursive use of simple language. Betsuyaku describes the trio’s deliberate exploitation of their opposite temperaments as a springboard for creativity:

[We] kept studying each other with avaricious curiosity. I certainly don’t believe a friendship establishes a good working relationship. Rather, if it can stand it, work is better done with animosity. We three shared animosity with one another. Since then, I have never had such a tangible working relationship It was the most concrete and condensed working relationship I have ever experienced (Betsuyaku in Goto 1988, 64).
After Betsuyaku left the troupe in 1969, Suzuki extracted textual material from kabuki plays to stage performances that reflected the abilities of actors other than Ono in the company. In nightly acting sessions, actors improvised, created pieces they were interested in and critiqued each other’s presentations. Working as a kind of ‘dramatic composer’, Suzuki synthesized segments of kabuki texts, directing what the group called “collage drama” (Goto 1988, 74, 108; Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 16-19). Suzuki began to use a surrealist compositional device he called, borrowing from the French surrealists, *dépaysement*, or “dislocation” (Goto 1988, 106). Texts gathered by the troupe were literally ‘displaced’, taken out of their context, and then used as pretexts to assist WLT actors to create a performance as they synthesised their responses.

Without a writer in rehearsals, Suzuki’s dramaturgy in rehearsals involved four steps, identified by Goto as collection, decontextualisation, exploitation and construction (108). In brief this involved, first, the collection of theatrical texts by the troupe from various sources (for example, Beckett, *kabuki* classics, Shakespeare and diaries of modern Japanese writers), secondly removing these texts from their original theatrical context, thirdly their exploitation by improvisation and juxtaposition with various task-like actions executed by performers and, finally, construction, whereby Suzuki as director wrapped, around the whole, a fictional circumstance or simple storyline that emerged from their joint creation to link the pieces. Through this process Suzuki aimed to have the performers’ acting determine the nature of the final performance and the interaction with audience, rather than a playwright’s script.

The troupe unequivocally rejected *shingeki*. Suzuki’s theories of acting and theatre coalesced in the late 1960s as part of this rejection via a diagnostic critique of the realist *shingeki*. Suzuki published essays in Japan about these issues, few of which are wholly translated into English. Suzuki’s first substantial text translated into English, *The Way of Acting*, appeared in 1986. Prior articles appeared in theatre journals, with only one essay *The Sum of the Interior Angles*, translated by Goodman and Hoff, published in 1978. Suzuki’s thinking was informed by his enthusiasm for the ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty whose text *The Phenomenology of Perception* was translated into Japanese in the mid 1960s, along with other French philosophical texts, such as those by existentialist, Sartre. Suzuki’s articles reveal
that he studied the works of Zeami prior to 1970 (Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 18).

Goto’s account of WLT practices indicates that key principles that informed the later systematizing of training became apparent in devising *On Dramatic Passions II* in 1970. This was the first production to bring the WLT and its director to critical acclaim inside Japan, with the enthusiasm of critics drawing audiences of artists and students. Suzuki’s directorial practice in this period contrasted with that of shingeki directors, who characteristically stood outside the group and organized rehearsals around an interpretation of a play text. Goto notes that

> he was inside the group and part of the troupe’s collective creation. He shared in the collaboration, stimulating and focusing actors’ creative energies toward the presentation of performance material (1988, 121).

As well as being the principal composer of WLT’s works, as a director, Suzuki explored his conception of acting as an encounter with an actor’s own self, and focussing on individual actors’ experiences of relations between their bodies and minds. Suzuki’s dépaysement rehearsal strategy, coupled with his collage of fragments of text, created a state of disorienting dissonance for the actors asked to perform actions in contradiction to the ostensible meanings of the language in each fragment. This set in train a process of confrontation with their own selves and, in turn, a confrontation with their spectators (Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 20).

*On Dramatic Passions II* used well-known passages from a range of kabuki and shimpai plays, the latter a popular melodramatic form, depicting stories of middle class family life, derived from a late 19th century western-style political theatre (Goto 1988, 78). Suzuki intended that audiences familiar with the text fragments would see and feel the effects of their collaged displacement. In 1970 Suzuki used the analogy of light for the impact he sought these juxtapositions to have on their audiences:

> Just as a certain medium is required to make physical light appear as illumination, my theatre uses unfamiliar angles so as to elucidate things which people take for granted or which they passively repeat (paraphrased by Goto 1988, 132).5

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Suzuki relentless provocation of individual actors towards encounters with their own selves amplified the disorientation of dépaysement and fuelled his dramaturgy of collage (122). Suzuki deliberately drove actors into tight corners, as an observer of WLT rehearsals in the early 1970s, Tsuka Kohei, noted:

[he hardly gives his actors directions or answers to their problems. Or, rather, with a nonchalant air he denies the directions he had given on the previous day. To some, working under him may seem a disaster. Such a directorial approach is probably based on his own conviction that if he agrees with his actors, their acting abilities will lose life and stall ... Suzuki censures actors by criticizing every fault they have. Sometimes the censure even includes the actor's personality, family, and lifestyle (Kohei in Goto, 121).

Working with actress Shiraishi Kayoko on the rehearsal floor reinforced Suzuki's speculations about acting and an actor's reliance on audiences for the realization of any notions of, either their personal identity or fictional persona. As Goto notes, Suzuki considered his discoveries in these rehearsal situations were similar to Grotowski's ways of relating to Ryszard Cieslak in creating The Constant Prince (116). Suzuki was particularly affected by Shiraishi's creation of the role of the Madwoman; his account of the process is a significant milestone in the development of his work, and is worth quoting at length:

Shiraishi's process of creating the role of the Madwoman seemed indeed insane. We thought Shiraishi might be really going mad ... In the beginning I had Shiraishi and another actor play this scene, using a situation similar to that of the original drama: the geisha, Ocho is asked by her lover, the college student Hayase, to end their relationship. By trial and error, however, we eventually ended up having Shiraishi alone play the scene ...

Then I came up with an idea of tying Shiraishi with chains and whipping her. Of course, my actors were hesitant at first, but Shiraishi insisted. I had her speak a line immediately after each whiplash. Whip! She uttered, "Hayase-san!" Immediately again, whip! "Why don't you tell me to die?" And again, whip! "Tell Ocho to wither!" This went on and on. In the process, she concentrated upon her physical act of speaking the lines. Out of this torture-like exercise, the actress gradually created the protagonist of Dramatic II - a mad woman chained in a cell yet in her fantasy enacting the scene of two lovers sadly parting. Even long after we stopped beating her, the physical energy and intensity that Shiraishi had built never disappeared.

Shiraishi is that kind of actress. She performs according to her own physiological sensations. This is why, I think, once she stands on the stage and performs, she establishes her corporeal presence, fusing everything - words, movements, the conscious and the subconscious - into oneness, a physical entity, Thus in rehearsals we attempted to effectively explore Shiraishi's physiological sensations (Suzuki in Goto 1988, 115-116).

This extreme example could be reduced to a portrait, on the one hand, of the somewhat masochistic tendencies in an actor synchronizing with the somewhat sadistic tendencies of a director. That would be to miss the point. While in Suzuki's later works his attention as director was not always so directly exercised on the
embodiment of each individual actor, key themes emerge in this example that anticipate the development of the training regime. The design of demanding corporeal experiences for actors who choose to enter into tightly structured training kata arose in this type of rehearsal situation. That the proscriptions, including the duration of each kata, are inescapable and resist easy execution, mirroring Shiraishi’s process, suggest a deferred directorial agency embedded in their design. Suzuki’s story about Shiraishi shows how intrinsic company collaboration within the ensemble was effectively precipitated the gestation of formalized training.

Shiraishi’s corporeal approach to acting led Suzuki to develop a distinctive frame story device in which a madwoman is possessed by the dialogue of several kabuki and shimpā plays drawn together into a multi-layered fictional world. This frame story encompassed all the performances of each member of the troupe that was On Dramatic Passions II. It is a vivid example of how ways of acting catalyzed dramaturgical principles for a whole mise en scène; an approach Suzuki has sustained through all his subsequent works. Suzuki’s account anticipates the development, a couple of years later, of systematic training disciplines based on noh and kabuki in collaboration with key practitioners of these arts and the Waseda troupe.

While he acknowledged his debt to Shiraishi, in the formation of his theories and practices, Suzuki was at pains to position the qualities he admired in her work as manifestations of a national tradition. He described Shiraishi’s ability to revive the “essence” (sic) of kabuki language through her physical consciousness, as the embodiment of a collective memory of the Japanese people. Critics hailed her as such, comparing her to the “possessed shaman of ancient Japan” and as an “atavistic reincarnation of the actress founder of kabuki, Okuni with all her pristine magical power” (Gunji and Takahashi in Goto 1988, 168-169). In The Sum of Interior Angles (1973) Suzuki argued that Shiraishi’s physical consciousness suited kabuki texts, and that bodily perception was the key to acting. Alluding to Shiraishi’s performance, Suzuki explained how he understood her handling of Nanboku’s 18th century kabuki texts in performance:
Nanboku wrote each text for a particular actor, thus each text is a kind of documentation of the abilities of an individual. Naturally when someone else plays this role, the text is altered (Beeman 1982, 89).

Echoing what he interpreted about 18th century kabuki acting and inspired by what Shiraishi showed was possible, Suzuki “devised numerous physical exercises, to help restore magical power to the actor” (ibid).

**Phase Two: International success: systematizing training (1972-1976)**

With the success of On Dramatic Passions II, the WLT entered its second phase. In 1972 the company was invited to an international theatre festival in Paris, where Shiraishi performed one scene from On Dramatic Passions II. Audiences and critics alike received the work – and Shiraishi’s performance in particular – rapturously. At this same festival a noh performer, Kanze Hisao, performed a solo excerpt from Dojoji, a traditional work, on a stage with very similar dimensions and proximity to audiences. Suzuki was very excited and impressed.

[In these] unusual circumstances, I was made to recognize noh’s superb theatricality. The rigorous training that had tempered and shaped the body of the actor produced a brilliant liveliness on the stage, right down to the tiniest details of movement. The masks and costumes I knew so well sparkled in a new light. Noh in Paris was superb; the spectators bewitched. For the first time I began to realize what Zeami meant when he spoke of yugen, of stillness in a performance or of the visions beyond sight (Suzuki 1986, 71-72).

As soon as he returned from France, Suzuki read and consulted further with scholars and artists of noh and kabuki. He began to devise what he referred to as “disciplines” with the WLT actors for their shared training, based on elements of the kata of noh and kabuki (Brandon 1978, 31). Early in the next year WLT’s first collage drama, Don Hamlet (1973) showed signs of this work in its spare minimalist style of physical expression and devices like those of traditional solo narration, katari.7 From 1973 Suzuki also began working with Kanze Hisao— the collaboration continued until Kanze’s death in late in 1978. Their collaboration culminated in the first performance of his adaptation of the classical Greek play, Trojan Women, in a larger Tokyo theatre, Iwanami Hall, in December 1974. This work had Kanze Hisao, Shiraishi and Ichihara Etsuko, a renowned shingeki actor, all performing according to their own traditions and training. In reviews, Shiraishi’s acting is described as “kabuki-like” (Nagao in Goto 1988, 150).8 The second work in Suzuki’s Greek works, The Bacchae (1978) drew Kanze Hisao and Shiraishi together again.
The formation of training practices and Suzuki's response to his contemporaneous social and theatre world in Japan was one of dialectical complicity. Training was informed by the emergence of the new genre of *angura* while Suzuki’s theatre company and training contributed to transforming the shape of that field of *angura* itself. Scholar of Japanese theatre, James Brandon, surveying the anti-*shingeki* little theatres in 1976, observed that

> [e]ach group bases its work on ensemble playing, so that in the midst of the exploration, some consistency of performance style has seemed desirable (Brandon 1978, 30).

Suzuki addressed the relationship between solo and group work in training in an interview with Brandon:

Brandon: I notice that there isn’t any solo work. What effect does it have on the actor to perform all disciplines as a member of the group?

Suzuki: It’s intentional. In my theory, no actor can expect to progress in individual self-expression until he has mastered, together with the other members of the acting company, common patterns of movement and voice—the whole basis of the discipline’s effectiveness is doing them as a group (35).

The move to company training was intended to forge an ensemble around a common physicality and reduce the WLT’s reliance on the powers of individual actors (Goto 1988, 143-144; Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 29). Brandon’s documentation of WLT in 1976 describes a distinct, coherent regime, rather than simply a recreation of either *kabuki* or *noh*. In contrast to the traditional model where training was tied to the practice of particular plays, the WLT’s training consisted of a condensed repertoire of *kata* separated from a specific canon of traditional plays, taking effect over months, rather than a lifetime of training. Nor did the WLT’s training reconstitute the totality of relationships between actors, the works and their audiences in these traditional theatres. Indeed, Suzuki’s reformation of traditional practices risked being seen as a heretical endeavour, or at least as producing effects that were considered counter to the achievements of *noh* and *kabuki*. As Hoff explains, however, *noh* artists in general lauded his efforts as extensions of, and honouring, *noh* traditions (Hoff 1985, 17).
In *The Sum of the Interior Angles* (1973), Suzuki contrasted his use of *kata* to the traditional uses of conventionalised acting patterns in *kyogen* plays:

> [t]he distance separating 'art' from *kata* is enormous. Art implies the recreation and not the imitation of tradition. For the actor as artist, the *kata* exist to be destroyed. At most they are useful hypotheses to work from—The *kata* do not exist to be uncritically mimicked but play a highly ambivalent role in the actor’s life. The actor must be conscious of *kata* as a reference line as he strives to objectify his self. *Kata* exist as indispensable aids for an actor to use in objectifying his own body, but precisely because that is the case, their function is necessarily a negative, fictitious one (22).¹⁰

Decontextualised principles and fragments of actions from traditional *kata* were recontextualised by what particular WLT actors could physiologically and psychologically achieve, filtered by Suzuki’s perception of parallels between traditional theatre and his dramaturgy. Suzuki envisaged his company would use the newly reconstructed *kata* as a reference to support “each actor in his individual confrontation with technique, that assists him as he strives to attain a special awareness of himself as a performer” (*ibid*).

That Suzuki saw his approach to *kata* as part of the post-*shingeki* angura movement is evident in his criticisms, in this article, of a *shingeki* group using traditional *kata* which appeared at a Polish festival. “The staging” he observed, “lacks both the destructive force and constructive élan one expects of avant-garde performance” (*ibid*). Suzuki preferred the term ‘disciplines’ (*kunren*) to ‘exercises’ (undo) or ‘physical conditioning’ (*taise*). Suzuki explained the injunctions he shouted during company training in 1976:

> Any time an actor thinks he is merely exercising or training his muscles, he is cheating himself. These are acting disciplines. Every instant of every discipline, the actor must be expressing the emotion of some situation, according to his own bodily interpretation. That’s why I don’t call them exercises (undo). Physical fitness teachers don’t go on the stage. We do. I know muscles hurt, the chest heaves during disciplines. It doesn’t matter. You have to act (Suzuki in Brandon 1978, 31).

Suzuki had understood that, in traditional productions of *kabuki* and *noh*, traditional *kata* played a role equivalent to that of a director:

> In a sense the *kata* perform the function of a director in the world of *Kabuki*—for like the *kata*, the director’s first purpose is to actualize the ‘drama’ that the body of an actor holds as potential and to give that drama a specific form in relation to a given script and audience. Only through the mediation of a director or of the *kata* can an actor develop his own unique
meaning. But in performance, the less the director or the kata are in evidence the better (Suzuki 1973, 22).

It is as if Suzuki invested in the power of his kata to carry and disperse his deferred agency through the ensemble so they might participate somewhat in the ‘direction’, even if, in practice, rehearsals were carefully arbitrated by Suzuki. The pedagogic style, involving a formal master-pupil relationship and the repetition, each session, of relatively stable kata has been consistent over time. Most of the disciplines Brandon described in 1978, for example, were still present in the Suzuki training in Sydney during the late 1980s and early 1990s.11 The stable spatiotemporal forms of the disciplines have resisted erosion through their transmission over the last two decades despite the diverse situations in which they have been taught, and despite Suzuki’s withdrawal, except on rare occasions, from teaching over the last sixteen years.12

In addition to drawing upon traditional Japanese forms to construct a stable training platform for his work, early in the 1970s, Suzuki reiterated a desire to emphasize the particularity of the Japaneseess of the emerging style of the WLT. His collection of Greek plays (1974, 1978 and 1982), for instance, referenced specifically Japanese post-war historical contexts, drawing on pop and militarist Japanese melodies in shocking juxtapositions refracted by the WLT’s training (Beeman 1982, 86; Goto 1988, 262-3; Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 133,161-2). In 1976 Suzuki explained that

[1]through the disciplines I want to arouse the unconscious ‘Japaneseess’ of their acting ... Theatre in Japan originated in the single performer’s skill or art (hitori gel) – juggler, singer, dancer, actor. As time went by, words necessary to create a play were added to this existing performing art. So the actor and his physical presence are basic to acting in a ‘Japanese’ manner (Brandon 1978, 34).

There is, then, a fascinating tension between the overt orientation, in Suzuki’s aspirations, towards an inherent ‘Japaneseess’, and the formal stability of the emerging system, which, as I will suggest throughout this thesis, allowed the system to effectively transcend cultural boundaries and retain coherence. Aspirations to revivify acting in a Japanese manner, for Suzuki, were locatable in actors’ bodies (after Joas 1996). As this for Suzuki could not be achieved by the quotidian capacities of actors’ bodies, he was compelled to ‘build an instrument’ (after

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Merleau-Ponty). In this case, construct a training regime to project around the bodies of the WLT’s actors a cultural world, both in rehearsals, theatres and the field.

Insofar as it was oriented towards a reawakening of a fundamental ‘Japaneseness’, Suzuki’s dramaturgy and his investment in developing training aligned him with other first wave of the post-shingeki artists. Goodman understood these shared concerns in terms of a rejection of

(1)he common underlying obsession of shingeki dramatists with the West and their implicit acceptance of the notion of Western universalism and Japanese particularity, the concept that the West somehow constitutes the mainstream of history and Japan, if not exactly an aberration, is little more than a special case ... This rejection of the West as a model and ideal has been accompanied by a new insistence in the post-shingeki movement on the legitimacy of particularity and the value of being an anomaly (Goodman 1982, 64-65).

For Goodman, the affirmation of distinctive Japanese theatricality by post-shingeki artists “served an essential function: to allow the movement, and its playwrights in particular, to treat all those irrational, anomalous, particular aspects of life and thought that modern drama in Japan had either refused or been unable to explore” (ibid). Most did so by breaking with the language and linear logic of the narratives of shingeki and European theatres; a recurring strategy for all the first wave angura. Interestingly, while Goodman in 1968 and 1982 sees the early angura as transgressive and radical in this way, by 1997 Uchino sees resonances with the neonationalist discourse of nihonjinron in the promotion of Japanese cultural homogeneity.13

For Goto and Carruthers, after On Dramatic Passions II the WLT became a director’s theatre. This, then, was a significant break. By 1976, Suzuki no longer made collage dramas based upon the contributions of WLT performers in rehearsals. Instead, he assembled whole ‘scripts’ constructing a dramatic arc from carefully edited selections from translations of Greek and Shakespearean texts, into which he periodically interpolated contemporary Japanese poetry. His ‘Greek classics’, in particular, were to raise his international profile through the 80’s. In rehearsal, the prepared scripts would be subject to modification through the collective engagement of the actors in a production’s creative problems. Trojan Women, the most famous of these Greek works, took almost a year to develop (Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 30). These works presented ‘doubled’ worlds that slipped, in their references,
between the world of Hellenic myth and the post-war social life of contemporary Japan. The personae of these worlds were both mythical and actual. As with the framing device used in On Dramatic Passions II, a persona or group initially fantasised the story or figures from the Greek tragedy, then literally become them, instantaneously slipping unheralded from one world into another (Beeman 1982, 83; Watanabe in Hoff 1985; Goto 1988, 153; Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 26, 157, 162,164). Sometimes both worlds would be present in a single scene – Beeman describes a scene from The Bacchae:

John Rensenhouse, playing Cadmus, and Shiraishi, playing Agave, break character after Agave is brought to recognise that the head she is carrying is that of her son. The two sit down to eat a snack together, only to be murdered by Pentheus, who enters in character (1982, 86).14

This phase of Suzuki’s theatre was also a theatre of ideas and social criticism, even if the references to contemporaneous and historical Japanese social life did not resonate with theatre audiences who did not share this history. In accounting for this shift in his approach to forming a whole work, Suzuki drew upon traditions of honkadori or allusive variation, and sekai, a kabuki device involving drawing together “disparate known worlds into a new situation” (Goto 1988, 244-250; Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 18, 125). Collage had become honkadori.

Phase Three: The shift out of the Little Theatre and opening out to the West
In 1976, the WLT was one of three enterprises to respond to a call, by the local municipal government of the village of Toga, for enterprises to relocate to the small mountain village 400 miles north east of Tokyo in Toyama prefecture. Toga elders hoped this would revitalise the village by encouraging their young people to stay in touch and open out contacts with the rest of the world. This was serendipitous for WLT, coinciding with the expiry of the lease of their Waseda home.15 Under Suzuki’s leadership, the group embarked on a five year plan to develop their new precinct, both materially, by building theatres and their own accommodation, and culturally, as a centre for theatre performance, devising and training. The WLT worked there in spring and summer, as the snows were too deep in winter.16

After obtaining some uninhabited gassho farmhouses in the first year, Suzuki, in collaboration with internationally known architect, Isozaki Arata, built a small
theatre, Toga Sanbo. This refurbished farmhouse, transported to the site, has
performance and audience spaces resembling, in its dimensions and features, a noh
stage, but with a greater flexibility of entrance and exit possibilities. Suzuki offers a
detailed description of Toga Sanbo (Carruthers and Takahashi 2004, 44). The
publications of SCOT contain photographs of the interior with its black gloss
anodised aluminium floor tiles and shoji doors (SCOT 1991, 11-14). Suzuki drew
together a coalition of local and prefectural authorities and multinational businesses
in The Japanese Performing Arts Centre to promote activities at Toga with a number
of aims:

1. to hold an international festival at Toga
2. to produce performances of various kinds of performing arts – theatre, music, dance, etc.
3. to train performing artists
4. to hold international conferences on the performing arts
5. to establish and run a performing arts library (SCOT’s 1991 booklet, 60).

In 1982, at the inaugural Toga International Arts Festival, a newer version of The
Trojan Women opened an outdoor theatre modelled by Isozaki Arata closely on an
ancient Greek amphitheatre, built downhill from the Toga Sanbo. This theatre seats
800 people and has a stage with two old noh-styled hashagakari (runways) built over
an artificial lake. Suzuki’s desire to draw on the theatrical traditions of both Japan
and the West was here realised materially in the source texts, performance space
design, and their proximity to the village. At Suzuki’s invitation as director, the
Festival welcomed key figures of the Western theatrical avant-garde, including
Taduesz Kantor, Robert Wilson and Meredith Monk, leading experimental avant-
garde directors of the postmodern period, and whose work emphasises visual and
aural images over staging of theatre texts. Thus he signalled an intention to
internationalise the company’s work.

Suzuki’s company embarked upon a sustained international program. At the behest
of influential European directors such as Jean-Louis Barrault and Grotowski, the
company performed and demonstrated training at a number of European festivals
(Goodman 1978, 20). Indeed, between 1972 and 2006, Suzuki’s companies have
toured American and European festivals annually. The first two of the Greek trilogy
works toured most in the early phase: The Trojan Women toured Paris, Rome,
actors from WLT and graduates from University of Wisconsin, a bi-lingual version of *The Bacchae* was created and performed in Toga, Milwaukee and Tokyo in 1981. In addition, Suzuki took up residencies teaching in American universities, including Julliard and University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee.

The WLT premiered a bi-lingual *Clytemnestra* at the 2nd Toga Festival in 1983, coinciding with its first annual summer international training program. These residential training intensives were designed to have half the cohort of 20 to 30 from Japan (including WLT members), and the other half from abroad. The following year, 1984, overseas participants in the summer training intensive were mostly directors from Europe and US. This group restaged a multi-lingual production of *Clytemnestra*. Nigel Kellaway, [of whom much more below], was in this training program in 1984, and told me about this staging of a version of *Clytemnestra*. That same year the eighteen year old WLT changed its name to the SUZUKI COMPANY OF TOGA and became known both in Japan and on tour by its romanised acronym, SCOT, reflecting Suzuki’s multiple identifications with Japanese culture through the name ‘Toga’ and with Euro-American theatre networks. At Robert Wilson’s invitation, triumphantly, SCOT headlined at the Los Angeles Olympics Arts Festival in 2004 with *Trojan Women*.

For several years prior to the Master training session in 1991, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) supported an additional residential summer school in Toga, where overseas and Japanese participants stayed with village families. Around this period Suzuki and UCSD sought to establish a continuing relationship. UCSD aided the construction of the final building in Toga, the library, which included a tiny studio theatre used during festivals, and which opened in 1987.

In 1989, Suzuki took up the directorship of the Arts Center Mito in an urban centre only one hour’s train journey north-east from Tokyo. Isozaki Arata again designed the buildings. This time however with generous support from municipal government the theatres were built into a modern multi-function complex. This theatre space still enshrined more intimate spatial relations between audiences and performers akin to the proximities of a noh stage but with a deep thrust closer to design of
Shakespeare’s Globe. Suzuki founded an acting company at Mito (ACM) SCOT performed there in 1990.

After 1996, when Suzuki took up the artistic directorship of the Shizuoka Performing Arts Centre, his SCOT company relocated its base. The Shizuokan prefectural government invested generously in building an arts precinct with several theatres and runs an annual festival. Suzuki, in collaboration with a group of internationally known directors (Theodoros Terzopoulos, Robert Wilson and Yuri Lyubimov), launched an international arts festival hosted each time in a different country called the Theatre Olympics (Allain 2002, 24). These aim to provide a forum for exchanging knowledge about contemporary theatre across national, generational and linguistic boundaries by assembling classical and experimental works. Four of these festivals have taken place in: Delphi (1995), Shizuoka (1999), Moscow (2001) and Istanbul (2006). Shizuoka, unlike Toga, is a day’s train trip from Tokyo and the main theatre is in metropolitan Shizuoka. The festival in Shizuoka attracted 76,000 people.

The majority of the Mito actors joined SPAC. Allain suggests that the fact that all members of each of Suzuki’s companies engage in training as soon as they join serves to unite each company in a model of organization instantiated in the way training sessions are organised ‘with the leader separated from the otherwise equal trainees’ (Allain 2004, 25).

**Style of collaboration**

While, as Suzuki’s own profile and status grew, the collaborative nature of relations within the company, have tended to be overlooked. Even in the company’s international phase, it persisted. Michael Cohen, an Australian independent performance maker and theatre researcher, summarised his experiences of working in a range of Japanese performance contexts in the early 1990s.

In artistic circles, license for personal expression is controlled very tightly at the top and trickles slowly down. The results of this approach can be astonishing. A group commitment to one vision can reap intense rewards. It is worth noting here that in Suzuki’s company, the few foreigners are people who have lived for a long time in Japan and can consequently understand these dynamics (Cohen 1996, 56).
One was Leon Ingulsrud who was translator for Suzuki for a number of years as well as occasionally acting in SCOT productions. Ingulsrud has been a member of the SARATOGA INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE COMPANY (SITI) since 1995. Ingulsrud’s account of the first creation of The Chronicles of Macbeth in 1991 with SCOT is consistent with Cohen’s observations. Ingulsrud stressed that all performers were expected to exercise their own artistic initiative, and to contribute on multiple levels in creating a work. “It is important to see theatre people not as actors, not as technicians, not as administrative staff but as theatre workers”, quotes Carruthers:

“When we did the original Macbeth, Suzuki came in and told us “We want to do this Banquet scene and we want you to give the impression of royalty but it must look fake, as if you had gone out and scavenged something in which to look royal. So go out and find it!” So we went out and made our own costumes. We had the entire cast – most of whom had never worked on costume at all – in sewing. When we had the basic idea and the actors had worked out what they wanted their individual costumes to be, then our wardrobe regulars came and made adjustments. We’d say, “I want it to look like this, but I don’t know how to do it.” It’s the same sort of thing with acting. We say to each other, “I’m having a problem with this line, this movement; how should I do that?” (Ingulsrud in Carruthers 1996, 230-231).

Ingulsrud indicates that this kind of approach was tacitly judged in ways that had social effects within the collectivity of the company.

Suzuki will give you something to do and he doesn’t necessarily say, “Now go off and elaborate on that and find what’s interesting.” But the ideal of the company is that an actor is someone who always digs away to find something interesting in what they’re given to do. So it’s assumed ... (you) dig into the intricacies of it. And failure do that will affect the way you’re regarded: “You are just doing what I told you to do – horrible!” The theatrical principles that the community is oriented towards require you to work on what you’re given. If you don’t, you’re like a black hole within the energy field. You’re expected to contribute something different that other people can react to, and adjust into, their own work.

(SCOT) is organic in the sense that it’s not run by rules. If you’re the sort of person who goes off and works and comes back and brings something in, then you are part of that community. If you don’t, no matter how sociable you may be – you’ll become marginal (ibid).

This story of collaboration reveals the degree of investment actors and director assumed in forging meaning through designing an actor’s appearance. It explains why no separate designer, apart from Suzuki, was credited for any of SCOT works.

Suzuki’s theatre works have formed around the performances of individual actors, actors who have used Suzuki’s kata in training together; new kata have emerged through the demands of actors in their engagement with material in making new works. According to Carruthers, for example, the Slow Tentakaten kata was
developed to aid the choreographic work on The Bacchae in 1978 (2004, 84-85). From 1966 with the Waseda members, through to the working with American actors in early 1990s, Suzuki training evolved in a dialogic interplay with theatre making: intimately braided together in mutual contingency. While the type of collaborative relations in the WLT, SCOT, ACM and SPAC and the way ideas are handled in theatre making may not be culturally familiar, be recognised as collaboration or be desirable for many performing artists, Japanese and otherwise, it was central to the realisation of Suzuki’s works. Despite Suzuki’s auteur-like style, that collaboration has been intrinsic to his development is undeniable.

Suzuki’s intracultural search to transform traditional acting practices was shaped by a series of pressing circumstances at the WASEDA LITTLE THEATRE. The spatial constraints of the black box theatre above Mon Cheri coffee shop, the adversarial relations between writer, actors and director; the dilemmas that the continuing post-war occupation presented for the formation of a viable democracy and cultural identity for the Japanese as citizens were all decisive influences. These concerns were interwoven in the process of making their landmark work On Dramatic Passions II. Amidst these what actors could realise presented a way forward. In the conclusion to his thesis, Goto proposes that

[w]hile it is true that the Suzuki method grew out of his interest in traditional theatre, it can also be said that the method was created to transfer Shiraishi’s unique ability to use the body to other WLT actors (288).

Suzuki’s social commentary in the WLT’s classic Greek works later relied on the company’s training, on their embodiment speaking’ to their audiences.

It is unlikely that without Suzuki’s artistic adaptability and entrepreneurial leadership whether his companies would have achieved so much. Equally without the investment of his performer collaborators neither his works nor the method would have been created. As social and cultural theorist, Hans Joas suggests, Suzuki’s thinking about, even the assertion of the necessity to create a shared training regime for the ensemble emerged out of his reflections on his continuing directorial practice and about acting and theatre practice in the then-current Japanese theatre world (Joas 1996,157) Key themes in the practice of the earliest SMAT kata were shaped by
WLT’s theatre devising. Themes arising in WLT’s devising practice have endured in the transmission of SMAT such as:

- the cultivation of a highly receptive sensibility to the materiality of the places and times of performance, of particular training and rehearsal rooms and actual stages,
- the cultivation of a disposition towards creating theatre within the constraints of an ensemble,
- a shift in what constituted acting from being based on the writings of playwrights to being grounded in the corporeality of actors themselves within the context of a widespread scepticism about the efficacy of the national language,
- the embrace of difficult demands on actors’ bodies and psyches and interpersonal relationships amongst collaborators to provoke creativity.

Taken together these themes throw the emphasis in theatre creation processes from one assumed to stem from the cognitive and linguistic resources of artists involved onto an intense engagement with the materiality of places, people’s bodies, objects, clothes, voices, relationships as a catalyst for artistic reflexion. It could be seen as a kind radically material approach to theatre, akin to the one that seeks, as Artaud worded it, “to make space speak, to feed and furnish it” (Artaud 1958,98).

In the next chapter, I turn to developments in the state of practice in the Australian performing fields leading up to the mid 1980s, when SMAT was taken up in Sydney to prepare the ground for a closer analysis of the relations between this local field of cultural production, training practice and the influence of SMAT’s praxial themes on particular artists’ practice in the second half of this thesis.

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1 The work of Carruthers (1995, 1996), Uchino (2000), Allain (1998) and Rimer (1986) also informed this section, even though they are not directly cited.

2 Shingeki is generally dated to 1909, when director Osanai Kaoru visited the MOSCOW ART THEATRE and diligently copied down Stanislavski’s direction in rehearsals, and used this as a model in setting up his own theatre in Japan (Goto 1988: 1, 8, 69-70, 87-88; Allain 2002, 14-15).

3 Makoto does not list Suzuki in this last category. He cites Kara Jūrō and Jōkyō Gekijō, Terayama Shūji and Tenjō Sajiki, Saičō Ren, Satō Makoto and Jūjō Gekijō.

4 For a record of Betsuyaku’s collaborations with the WLT see the chronology in Carruthers’ (xiii-iv) [note: I don’t understand this citation] discussion of his ways of working with Suzuki and Ono (10-13).
Suzuki repeated this desire in his rationale of juxtaposing unexpected elements in discussion with my own training cohort in Toga in 1991. However this staging principle was never alluded to or suggested during our SMAT practice sessions, it only arose in his lecture.


Hoff (1985) describes traditional performers’ approaches to katari – solo narration in noh – in depth.

In performances at a Polish festival in 1975, Shiraishi’s performances were compared to those of Ryszard Cieslak (Allain 2002, 150).

Masakuni Kitazawa, scholar of traditional Japanese theatre disputes Suzuki’s lineage as an inheritor recuperating traditional acting practice (Kitazawa 1993, 10-12).

Hisao’s brother Kanze Hideo, banished from the famous Noh family Kanze, described his relation with noh kata in his own reconstruction of their use in similar terms in 1970.

Noh today, though, has gotten to the point where neither of these matters. All that matters is how closely you can approximate the predetermined pattern. My problem is that to act according to predetermined patterns is too easy. It bores me. Sometimes it even disgusts me. So my approach tends to be rather confusing. I act according to the dictated patterns and try to watch myself objectively from the outside. Then, on the basis of my observations, I try to destroy the patterns (Hideo 1970, 8).

New disciplines formulated for rehearsal preparations in what was to be called the SUZUKI COMPANY OF TOGA (SCOT), have since been added. For a detailed account of the changes in the kata practiced by Suzuki’s company over several decades, see Carruthers and Takahashi, 2004 – particularly Chapter Three. The ladder kata was referred to by Kellaway but not practiced in Sydney. Several katas, including Moving Statues, the specific spatial formats of Slow Tentakaten, Basic Number Four, Pivoting Statue (a turning figure) and the Crazy Arms exercise do not appear in Brandon’s record.

Key company actors, including Katoh Masaharu in Japan, and, in the United States, Ellen Lauren, assumed responsibility for teaching of the method until circa 1998. Training inside Shizuoka Performing Arts Centre has since been led by Kuboniwa Naoka and Nihiro Kiyosumi. I am indebted to Dr Ian Carruthers for this updated information.

Goodman summarised the outlook of the writers and editors of Theatre Centre 1968/69 publication, Concerned Japanese Theatre:

Our vision of what Japan had been and could be were very different from the mythical monolith Mishima and other cultural conservatives envisioned. We saw Japan as a diverse, pluralistic civilization to which women as well as men, non-Japanese as well as Japanese had contributed and would continue to contribute” (Goodman 2006, 10).

See also see Uchino 2000. For further discussion of the revival of nihonjinron in the late 1980s, see Ivy 1988.

An earlier typical example comes from Night and Clock, an adaptation of Macbeth in 1975 by critic Akihiko Senda:

What is presented here is not Shakespeare’s tragic world but Japan’s shadowy past and her contemporary situation. For instance, when an aged man (excellently performed by Tomigawa Jun) who has been confined in the asylum since 1941 gloomily utters dialogue exchanged between Ross and Macduff (IV, iii), the speech becomes a critical view of Japanese society and man: “Alas, poor country! Almost afraid to know itself? It cannot be called our mother but our grave, where nothing but who knows nothing is once seen to smile; where sighs and groans, and shrieks that rent the air, are made, not marked where violent sorrow seems a modern ecstasy” – Right after the speech, the old man dismembers a grotesque-looking doll and
scatters its intestines over the floor while passionately singing Mori Shin'ichi's mid-70s hit song: "When the evening comes to Tokyo, the crowd fills the city. Lonely I sit and stare, my tears my only friend - Oh night in Ginza, o beloved one that I see, why won't this sake drown my soul now and set me free." At this moment we cannot but laugh bitterly to ourselves (Senda in Goto 1988, 153).

15 Carruthers and Takahashi place the move in context of nation-wide campaigns to halt rural depopulation, and to encourage Japanese tourists to visit different parts of their own country (2004, 36).

16 During my own stay at Toga in 1991, I was told this by the village family that hosted me about the three metres of snow that buries all buildings in Toga throughout the winter. Toga is also an alpine skiing tourist destination and sports training region. Its other major annual festival revolves around ice sculptures.

17 *Gassho* is short for *gasshozukuri*, a gable-roofed farmhouse. Suzuki explained to my training group in 1991 that *gasshozukuri* referred to the construction of the gabled roofs of these buildings, which he likened to praying hands, with the fingertips touching. He clearly saw these structures as imbuing the theatrical spaces contained within them with a special, almost religious, liminal atmosphere, even without any events staged in them.

18 I am again indebted to Dr Ian Carruthers for pointing out that distinction between these ‘runways’ and the more popularly known *hanamichi* of kabuki. He also pointed out a useful way to describe the relation of the artificial lake for a reader – that it replaces the skene back wall in a classic Greek amphitheatre.

19 A list in the company’s 1991 booklet lists sixty-nine directors or groups visiting Toga between 1982 and 1991. This figure included sixteen from the USA, eight from Northern Europe, six from the Indian subcontinent, three from Australia, and twenty-four from Japan.

20 Isozaki was also principal designer of Tokyo’s Globe, a reproduction of Shakespeare’s playhouse in London, completed in 1988 (Allain 2004, 79-80).

21 For further elaboration of the ACM and Suzuki’s work with Mito see also Carruthers and Takahashi [date?], 204.

22 The impact of close traditional supervision from a leader or *sensei* like Suzuki is also referred to and discussed in Allain 2004, 25-29.

23 Other non-Japanese company members have included Americans: Jim de Vito, Kameron Steele [who has freelanced as an actor and director working with Mexican company, South Wing, and Robert Wilson since leaving SCOT in 1994 (Artist’s own website)]; Ellen Lauren and Tom Hewitt now with Saratoga International Institute.

24 In the spirit of *honkadori*, Carruthers points out that Suzuki has re-approached and staged seasons deriving from Macbeth as a script source 31 times, starting with Night and Clock with the WASEDA LITTLE THEATRE in 1975 (2004 chronology, xxiii-xxxiii).

25 These observations about the fluidity of roles of actors in the administrative and production work of the company are also discussed by Allain (2004, 25)
CHAPTER THREE
Contemporary Performance in Sydney

3.1 Physical theatre prior to 1986

The antecedents of what was to become known as ‘contemporary performance’ in Sydney are readily discernable amongst the approaches of a number of small theatres extant in the 1970s and early 1980s. These antecedents evidence continuities in practices and a positioning of those practices with relation to a putative ‘mainstream’ theatre culture. In this chapter, I will trace the various groups, ensembles and individual artists contributing to this nascent scene up to the time of the impact of Suzuki upon the scene in 1986. Prior to the ‘arrival’ of Suzuki method in 1986, there was already in place a thriving performance community across which a set of interests in the broad areas of physical theatre/performance, corporeal training and collective theatre making were discernable. Indeed, the vigour of this nascent scene presented the conditions of possibility for the subsequent impact of the Suzuki method.

‘Physical theatre’, though a term of currency in the early twenty-first century in marketing brochures, academic writing, festival programs, magazines and newspaper listings and reviews was not, in the mid 1980s, a term regularly used in Australia. It is, however, possible to discern four distinct kinds of physicalised performance pursued locally prior to 1986:

1. a variety of dance-identified genres;
2. mime and puppetry traditions;
3. theatres with heightened gestic body use on the part of actors;
4. circus.

The predispositions of contemporary performance practitioners in Sydney, their investment in highly corporeal modes of devising and performing were forged in the flourishing of these four kinds of physicalized performance locally. This continuity with the earlier shape of an ‘alternate’ field in Sydney during 1970’s and 80’s had more powerful effects than the circulation of innovative ideas of the international avant-garde, who briefly visited and publicly funded educational institutions and theatre companies. The cultural and social capital of artists that underwrote the later self-organising field is
laid out more descriptively in this chapter. It was against this praxial background that SMAT’s foregrounding of actors’ corporeality was received, filtered and put to work. It was seen as an extension and deepening of local artists investments in their bodies’ meaningfulness in the processes of creating compatible with prior tropes of physical theatre. The habitus of local artists were already ‘pre-adapted’. That this cultural capital was distributed in this sector of the local theatres – not in the mainstage theatres – facilitated the take up of SMAT in the mid 1980s. The active presence of past experiences in the schemes of perception, thought and action forged in the local physical theatre scene guaranteed continuities without the articulation of formal rules, norms during training. The kinds of social capital necessary to support the subsequent evolutions of the local field were also part of the objective conditions – in the form of networks of artists who took an interest in each others’ works, valued and participated in training, developing skills and knowledge about devising and offered mutual assistance in the generating of new works. The habitus of the first wave of contemporary performance practitioners was informed by ‘possibilities and imperatives’ of the earlier Sydney scene, beyond the conscious orchestration of public campaigns, mission statements directed towards arts development or manifestos of individual artists.

The work of five Sydney groups extant from the late 70s are of particular significance: **One Extra Dance Theatre, Sydney Corporeal Mime Theatre, Kinetic Energy and Death Defying Theatre** and Rex Cramporn’s **Performance Syndicate**. While not all these groups had a significant public profile, their diverse approaches to creating theatre were influential in the artistic environment into which Suzukian training arrived.\(^1\) Local evolutions echoed alternative physicalised theatre activity in several Australian capital cities, most notably in Adelaide and Melbourne, although exorbitant interstate touring costs mean that groups were rarely seen by peers in other capital cities. This was critical in the formation of a distinct ‘Sydney’ scene in the 1980s. Throughout the following I identify the participation of artists from the later contemporary performance ensembles, **The Sydney Front** and **Sidetrack Performance Group** and independent freelance artists who worked with the physical theatres or their genre of training prior to 1986.
Dance genres

Those genres of performance that arose under the influence of modern and ‘new’
dance traditions came to be known in the 1970s and 1980s, as ‘dance theatre’. In a
fusion of forms and creative production processes, choreographers concerned about
the limitations of the aesthetic abstract expressivity of modern dance sought to
open out ‘pure’ dance genre through experiments with narrative and actorly theatre
conventions.²

Formed in 1976 by choreographer and dancer Kai Tai Chan, ONE EXTRA DANCE
COMPANY was the most influential local example of experimental dance-based
physical theatre. The choreographies of the company were commonly referred to
by reviewers Jill Sykes and William Shoubridge as ‘dance theatre’, in recognition
of Chan’s drawing upon culturally diverse dance and theatre vocabularies. Chan’s
work addressed the multiple and hybridised cultural identities forged in the
contemporaneous historical maelstrom of sociopolitical forces Australian society
(Lester 2000, 133-159). In 1985 the company had a full-time ensemble of four
dancers. Referring to ONE EXTRA’s Midday Moon in 1985, Sykes recognised
Chan’s “long-term efforts to fuse dance and drama into a form of theatre that has a
character of its own” (Sykes in Lester 2000, 142). The formative influence of this
particular company on artists in the Sydney field is widespread: four of five core
members of THE SYDNEY FRONT, for example, performed in ONE EXTRA works (ie.
John Baylis, Clare Grant, Nigel Kellaway and Chris Ryan). Nigel Kellaway
performed in a number of works from the early eighties.³ Baylis worked as an
administrator for the company (For artists’ biographical statements see Appendix P
and for further examples of dance theatre in Sydney in this period, Appendix C).

Mime and puppetry

The key groups working with mime throughout this period were the SYDNEY
CORPOREAL MIME THEATRE (later to change its name to ENTR’ACTE).and RED
WEATHER. The members of these troupes trained respectively in the contrasting
styles of French mime of Decroux and Lecoq, Elizabeth Burke and Pierre
Thibadeau, the founders of ENTR’ACTE were the first to introduce Decrouxian
mime to Sydney through training in their company. Subsequently, Andrea Aloise (later in Sydney Front), Deborah Leiser and Katia Molina were all members of the company for substantial periods (See artists’ biographies Appendix P). Baylis, Kellaway and Ryan also performed in works in 1987. The company’s first works showed substantial signs of this heritage (See photo documentation Appendix M).

Red Weather emerged from the Drama Action Centre, established in 1980, by Francis Batten and Bridget Brandon in the grounds of Rozelle Hospital, to teach the mime, movement, clowning and buffoon of the Lecoq School. Red Weather formed by Andrew Lindsay, Nicoletta Boris and Nique Murch, deployed principally the buffoon style of this tradition. Their first performance was in 1983 in the Craft Council Gallery in the Rocks. The following year they performed Keep the Dream Running at the Performance Space, and were artists in residence in University of Sydney’s Theatre Workshop. In the early 1980s members of stilt company Stalker, then recently relocated from New Zealand, including David Clarkson, Emily McCormack and Rachel Swain, studied at Drama Action; Clare Grant also did workshops in mask and commedia there.

Between 1976 and 1983, under the directorship of Richard Bradshaw the Marionette Theatre of Australia (MTA) transformed the forms of puppetry from using strings and pre-recorded soundtracks to using rod, shadows and visible puppeteers often interacting with actors with live dialogue creating a huge repertoire of new works. The repertoire reached out beyond its children’s audience base, embracing political satire and issue-based themes for adult audiences (Wilson and Milne 2004, 40). Nationally puppetry received healthy funding that underwrote extensive national and international touring and experimentation, especially in its mix of lighting, sound, live object animation with human movement (from dance through to aerial). In the early 1980s. An early key work of visual theatre at the MTA’s base in The Rocks Theatre, was an adaptation of Dorothy Hewitt’s poems Rapunzel in Suburbia by interdisciplinary theatre artist, Kim Carpenter, who formed his own highly visual Theatre of Image in 1988. Hybrids of puppetry-visual image and highly physicalized theatre continue to evolve in Sydney and environs, popular in public precincts and festivals up to time of writing.
**Heightened gestic theatre**

Grotowski conducted workshops in Sydney in the mid 1970s (Waites 1999, 7), participants in which included Mike Mullins, first director of The Performance Space (TPS), in inner-city Redfern. Mullins spent two years training with Grotowski in Poland subsequently. Although he did not establish a performance troupe per se, Mullins was involved in the dissemination of Grotowskian practices in workshops and devising activities at the Theatre Workshop in University of Sydney’s Seymour Centre. Among the participants in Mullins’ various activities was John Baylis. Mullins identified himself as a visual artist and is recognised as part of the politically activist thrust amongst visual artists in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸

Director, Rex Cramphorn energetically sought funding for and repeatedly worked with groups of actors in Sydney during 1970s and early 1980s (several bearing the name THE PERFORMANCE SYNDICATE) developing an approach to theatre making based on Grotowski’s exercises in a committed endeavour to cultivate “theatre’s unique asset … the actor’s physical presence” through “arduous research and experiment, resulting in an original stylistic communication of an unforeseen nature but relevant to its Australian environment in the way that, say, Grotowski’s is to Poland” (Maxwell 2005, 178-184).⁹

**KINETIC ENERGY**, an ensemble formed by Jepke Goudsmit and Graham Jones, fused modern dance approaches with those Goudsmit carried from eight years of working with KISS, Jean Pierre Voos’s Theatre Research group in the Netherlands and a year in 1974 working with Grotowski (KISS 1982). KISS’s work was broadly Grotowskian in orientation.¹⁰ Two key performers who were to be pivotal in the evolution of Sydney contemporary performance, Clare Grant and Mémé Thorne (later SIDETRACK, see Appendix P), were also members of this Grotowskian troupe. Interestingly, although Goudsmit used the term, neither Grant nor Thorne called what they did with KISS ‘dance’ (Appendix B).¹¹
Circus

Perhaps the most internationally visible of these four genres of activity derived from the traditions of circus and acrobatics. Circus has received most attention in the published commentaries and histories of Australian physical theatre and is still, arguably, the most internationally recognised form of Australian performance practice, appearing regularly in festivals in Europe, U.S., Japan and South America. Indeed prominent theatre historian, Peta Tait has defined physical theatre purely by reference to these origins. For Tait, ‘physical theatre’ is

the descriptive term used by practitioners in Australia, Europe and North America who in manifestly physical modes and draw on techniques and skills of popular theatre forms related to circus, mime, slapstick, clown, new vaudeville and outdoor performance (Tait 1994, 194)

Sydney artists were aware of evolving ‘new circuses’ such as those of the Women’s community circuses of Melbourne and Perth, SOAPBOX CIRCUS, a political physical theatre that came out of Melbourne’s AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (APG).in the late 1970s and Brisbane’s POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE, as these groups toured interstate more frequently than the other physicalized theatres. Few circus groups, however, set up or persisted in Sydney prior to 1986.

Of the Sydney groups, DEATH DEFYING THEATRE (DDT) between 1978 and 1986, and children’s circus PIPi STORM (1975-83).were amongst the few which consistently worked with techniques drawn from circus related and acro-balance genres, largely because of their commitment to street performance and theatre-in-education. The style of DDT works, as Black has argued, was similar to those of the Women’s community circuses, SOAPBOX CIRCUS and the POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE (Black 2001: 41). In the early 1980s, Lolly’s warehouse, a venue in Leichhardt was, Black records, a “hub of many women’s performance groups” performing variety and comedy acts in demonstrations and university events (ibid).

**Other local performance genres prior to 1986**

By comparison with the long US military occupation of Japan, during the 1960s, 70s and 80s no singular and overwhelming force catalysed and polarised Australian artists engagement with their socio-political world in the way Suzuki’s development was
influenced. The popular resistance to Australian military involvement in Vietnam, the gathering nuclear arms race and growth of grassroots movements to address matters of social inequity for indigenous people, women, immigrants, refugees and the economically disadvantaged, the explosion of concern with ecology all drew artists’ awareness to their place in the ongoing debates about national identity. Questions about the social role of theatre continued to circulate in the public domain and amongst artists’ networks through the 1970s.

The other kinds of theatrical performance that proliferated beyond the state flagship companies and commercial theatres were community theatre and theatre in education. Art in Working Life projects, supported by commonwealth and state funding agencies and hosted by unions at a local level generated theatre in workplaces across the country.\textsuperscript{12} SIDETRACK and DDT created works in these schemes. SIDETRACK’s Loco project culminating the in-theatre work Down and Out from Under (1983) toured interstate, and bringing the company into public prominence. This had evolved from their engagement with railway workers under the auspice of an Art in Working Life initiative.\textsuperscript{13} DDT originally formed, as CARTWHEEL THEATRE in Sydney’s eastern beachside suburbs, dedicated to socially relevant theatre in public spaces toured to working class towns, factories and malls (UTP 2006). In 1990 the company relocated to Auburn in the heart of the culturally diverse western suburbs. DDT’s democratically-governed performers’ ensemble staged travelling street theatre, using clowning and variety-like acts to tell stories, focusing on ‘giving voice’ to concerns of the culturally diverse communities of the western suburbs. Both companies had broad political activist inclinations, without being directly involved in organised public demonstrations around specific issues.

Popular amongst young metropolitan audiences were the clubs where comedy, cabaret and live music line-ups regularly attracted large followings. Of these, the Gap at the Trade Union Club in inner city Surrey Hills was most famous for its eclectic programming. A number of the key avant-garde musicians, including SEVERED HEADS and live acts worked together on its stage. It was described, by key informants of this study, as THE place to go for ‘alternative culture’ in Sydney through the 1970s and
1980s. A number of key performance groups, such as Red Weather, Even Orchestra, Etcetera, Funny Stories and Grotesqu Monkey Choir, when not working in galleries, community, outdoor events or touring the interstate comedy and fringe festival circuits, worked at the Gap. Before she joined Sidetrack, Même Thorne, was host and MC of a regular ‘salon’ program of alternative acts. Additionally, The Stanley Palmer Culture Palace in Darlinghurst and the Theatre Workshop in Sydney University’s Seymour Centre were lively venues for alternative performance during the 1970s (Chan et al. 1995, 5; Lester 2000,187; Baylis 2004).

Beyond the recognisable physical theatre precursors of contemporary performance in Sydney was an extensive field of performance art. Installation and conceptual art works throughout the 1970s and 1980s featured visual artists’ bodies as the main objects and medium. In her history of performance art in Australia since 1969, Anne Marsh (1993) categorised these works under such titles as ‘body art’, ‘ritual performance’ and ‘analysing the social body’. All Out Ensemble, whose members’ practices crossed visual arts and theatre, staged works at an artist-run space, Art Unit in Alexandria, Sydney in the early 1980s. Kellaway performed in one work, and Baylis was aware of their work (Baylis 1987, 33). The catalogue of the 1994 touring exhibition 25 years of Performance Art in Australia lists twenty-two out of its forty-one artists and groups that had worked, exhibited and performed in Sydney leading up to 1986.

In conclusion, by 1986, there was a vibrant, if diverse, physical performance scene in Sydney, ranging across genres, but already characterised by overlapping networks of artists and influences. This scene had not yet, however, crystallised into a distinct community of practice.

3.2 Training in physical theatre prior to 1986
Prior to 1986, alongside their artistic programs, several of the physicalized theatre groups offered open-to-the-public training, generally in the bodily and vocal disciplines intrinsic to their own work. Workshops conducted to support company members in maintaining their practice and to develop new works, were opened up
to augment income. This also had the effect of bringing interested people closer to these companies as both spectators and potential members. These were short-term fee paying programs, mostly offered in venues outside of the curriculum of tertiary institutions in the same hired halls used for rehearsals.\textsuperscript{18} Kai Tai Chan of ONE EXTRA considered training in diverse skills was important for triggering artistic cultural development. ONE EXTRA's regular summer schools and open workshops were in the diverse dance practices of visiting overseas guest artists and members techniques, for example, Graham technique, Chinese, Balinese and Indonesian dance (Lester 2000, 92, 106) (See appendix C). ENTR’ACTE offered annual summer schools in corporeal mime in their downtown Liverpool St premises. The Theatre Workshop at Seymour Centre, regularly hosted workshops. Some circus training took place at Lolly's warehouse and Addison Rd.

Additionally, training overseas at various places with reputations for dance and mime training was popular. London Contemporary Dance (eg. Chan of ONE EXTRA), Lecoq's International Theatre School (eg. Lindsay of RED WEATHER studied at Lecoq in 1979 and 1980) and Decroux (eg. Burke and Thibadeau of ENTR’ACTE and Leisa Shelton) were popular. The first three-month intensive training camp of the Nanjing Acrobats in 1983 was cited as influential by Brian Keogh and Brigid Kitchen, who with Matthew Lafferty and Kristin Robson, formed LEGS ON THE WALL in 1986 (Allen and Pearlman 1999, 170).\textsuperscript{19}

Artists working in all these genres in Sydney prior to 1986 were, in various ways, committed to the corporeal training processes of performers. These particular training regimes emphasised the embodiment of the performers in turn shaped how works were devised and meaning was communicated during performance. In so doing, practitioners were simultaneously, at least amongst themselves, implying the theatrical conventions, working circumstances and to some degree audiences that a group or individual were operating within, prior to when the title, 'physical theatre' could identify these earlier hybridisations of different skills.

3.3 The local context: The place Tadashi Suzuki's actor training first landed in Australia
The cluster of practices, community of practitioners or alliance – however we might wish to name that which constitutes the field of contemporary performance in Sydney – emerged untidily, by fits and starts, over a period of time. As we might expect, no neat bookends leap out marking the inauguration of a new movement (See Appendices A and K). The evolution of a distinct performance community in Sydney can be traced through a handful of key events. In 1987, a range of artists and academics gathered for the Politics of the Body conference at TPS. They included Red Weather, members of Etcetera (Carlos Russell and Greg Clarke), comedienne Wendy Harmer, Greg Hordarce (contemporary dancer), Jack Cheslyn (All Out Ensemble), Bruce Keller (Entr’Acte), Sue-Ellen Kohler (dancer-choreographer), and in Derek Kreckler’s Telling – Ion Pearce (composer) and Yuji Sone (visual artist/performer) (See appendix D). In 1990, Sidetrack mounted the first of its annual seasons of performances and workshops under the rubric ‘Contemporary Performance Week’ (CPW). This was the first time that the local field was ‘named’. Three years later – the year in which The Sydney Front disbanded – at another conference (‘Bleedlines’: The Limits of Performance, convened at the Centre for Performance Studies at the University of Sydney), Elizabeth Burke of Entr’Acte was able to identify, and critique, a distinct ‘Sydney Style’ as being characterized by the “ossification” of repeated stylistic marks (Burke 1993). The vigour of the ensuing debate was itself a sign of considerable achievement in developing a body of works that marked out a field

Keith Gallasch, a senior member of what I will call the ‘first wave of contemporary performance’ published the first article about the history and evolutions of the local ‘alternative’ field as a whole in 2001. Gallasch touched on a series of key forces and conditions in the trends of the field; in particular the work of key precursor artists and organisations.

The performance scene found its home in Sydney in the early 1980s when performer Mike Mullins established The Performance Space. Here, The All Out Ensemble (originally from Adelaide) created a dynamic synthesis of installation and performance. Kai Tai Chan’s One Extra Dance Company’s expressive dance theatre and Entr’Acte Theatre provided seminal experiences for a number of key players in the performance scene, including members of The Sydney Front which became the most prominent and playful of the performance companies, provocatively and progressively undoing all the rules of audience engagement from the 1980s into the 1990s. Open City (also ex-Adelaide) found a place for the musical complexities of everyday conversation in cross art form performance. Meanwhile, in their own studio, the ground-breaking Sidetrack community theatre (formed in 1979 in suburban Marrickville in Sydney) transformed into the
Sidetrack Performance Group producing powerful theatre and site works. At The TPS and other sites, the performance ensemble Gravity Feed expanded on the spaces within which performers and audiences could coexist (2001, 38-39).

I will use 1986, the year THE SYDNEY FRONT officially formed, to mark the shift in the continuity in the field. This works for several reasons. First, it acknowledges the pivotal role THE FRONT played in catalyzing local art practice. Second, THE FRONT’s formation also offers insight into the continuity with existing local performance praxis, in which the ‘Fronters’ themselves participated immediately prior to the formation of their own ensemble. This is particularly important, as it will focus my account on the continuity of practices within that field, rather than upon the conceptual impact of the contemporaneous ‘arrival’ of post-structuralist, deconstructionist and post-modern discourses within the broader artistic/cultural domain. No doubt these intellectual movements did inform practices, as did contemporaneous forms of Australian feminism and gender political discourses.21

In making these claims, it is not my intention to rehearse the hoary old division between theory and practice. In fact, the work of the artists about whom I am writing often defies such a ready distinction, as I will discuss later in this chapter. Rather, my intention is to draw attention to the thinking undertaken by these artists in the process of their practical art making: to argue, in part, that praxial developments, and not primarily the evolutions of academic discourse, provided a platform for the later works of the second wave. In developing this, and related, arguments, I will construe the artists in question as ‘manual public intellectuals’, building upon a classical observation of the role of pantomimes as ‘manual philosophers’ (Hare 2006).22 This formulation acknowledges the artists’ engagement with the broader local and national body politic rather than purely in the putatively autonomous realm of ‘art’ per se. As Olivier Sidore, a French-Australian performer-maker from the scene, who trained and performed with Suzuki explained in a rhyming epithet, “you can’t have aesthetics … if you don’t have ethics” (interview 1987).

The political tenor of post ‘86 Sydney performance is also continuous with the hybridized practices from which it emerged, as Guthrie explains.
If, too, as Auslander has summarised, there is a generalised view "that postmodern culture seems unlikely to provide much foothold for political art practices as traditionally conceived", this was the kind of view frequently taken of the formal theatre experiments in Australia in the nineteen seventies (Auslander 1992, 21) However, this thesis has contested any simplified assumption that political radicalism was absent from alternative theatre in the nineteen-seventies. So too, it is evident that the major proponents of post-modern performance in Australia in the early nineteen-eighties – including Jenny Kemp, Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch, Don Mamouney, John Bayliss and Nigel Kellaway – were not apolitical, nor were they cynically turning away from political issues to the post-modern pleasures of surface and form. Indeed the surfaces and forms employed in their work were harnessed to both overtly political and implicitly political intentions. The "rejection of history" in the case of Australian postmodernism has been dominantly a rejection of the colonial history, both among the consciously political theatres and the groups devoted to formal experimentation. Rather than a depoliticising process this had been expressly political (2000, 304). 23

As signs of the increasingly confident local milieu, even if their significance were not noted at the time, several companies – most notably ONE EXTRA DANCE COMPANY, SIDETRACK and ENTR’ACTE – had developed a sustained profile by 1986. Additionally, alliances of artists, organisations, venues and artworks reached a critical mass that was to underwrite the new genre, alongside a synergy of less visible forces. Those that consolidated the conditions of the first and subsequent waves of contemporary performance in Sydney, by way of summary, include the:

- migration of artists from overseas and interstate to base their work in Sydney and work amongst the networks of artists (see Appendix B);
- establishment of a series of small theatre companies of artists working locally, who had found studios and alternate venues (see Appendix C);
- dissatisfaction with mainstream theatre aesthetics of state flagship companies;
- growth of non-institutional workshop based training, broadly auto-didactic in flavour (see Chapter Three);
- formation of informal infrastructure of centres for experimental arts practice and venues (La Frenais 1985, 7-9).(see Appendix C);
- cross-fertilization of genres of arts practice involving live performance (see Chapter Three)
- rapid expansion of art schools, university arts studies and academic research in Sydney from the mid 1970s (Chapter Three and Appendix F); and
visits by overseas avant-garde performance companies, briefly during festivals, and the affordability of overseas travel and study opportunities (see Appendix G).

These points are addressed in more detail in the remainder of this chapter. As serious scholars of avant-garde arts histories might expect, from these complex, synergistic beginnings emerged several successive waves of locally-based innovation in hybrid live performance and, indeed, a distinct, albeit somewhat fluid, ‘scene’.

Subsequent waves have taken up the impetus of the initial groups, up to the time of writing, constituting a local tradition of contemporary theatre practices that has survived in spite of challenging physical, financial and, often, social and personal conditions.

The first wave

The nascent contemporary performance scene in Sydney developed through the collective efforts of ensembles both in continuity with, and in rupture with what Guthrie has called the “alternative theatre” of the 1970s and 1980s (1996: 147), or those practices generally referred to as ‘fringe’. The Sydney artists tended to reject the marginalization the prefix, ‘fringe’ implied, as they were not invested in mainstream theatre developments. Sydney’s contemporary performance field could be understood as paralleling non-mainstream practices that theatre historian Veronica Kelly identifies thrived by the mid 1990s in her survey Our Australian theatre in the 1990s:

The growing dichotomy between a more or less literary and text-based main stage and an excitingly innovative and hybrid physical theatre flourishing on its sometimes near, sometimes remote outskirts, wherein middle class old-Australian or ‘Anglo-Celtic’ voices are easily matched by queer, indigenous or new-migrant visions. While they remain largely precarious community ventures and prey to economic uncertainties many of the companies ... display erotic spectacle, physicality, multi-arts hybridity, communal responsiveness and informed critical attack which [director Barrie] Kosky and [reviewer Bryce] Hallett find lacking in the current mainstream (1998, 6).

Kelly’s ‘precarious communities’ encapsulates the nature of the networks of artists who relied on each other’s investment and contributions in creating and staging performance.

The first wave manifested in the sustained work of seven local ensembles, THE SYDNEY FRONT, ENTR’ACTE, the morphed SIDETRACK PERFORMANCE GROUP, OPEN
CITY, ONE EXTRA, STALKER and LEGS ON THE WALL (see appendix K). At best infrequently recognised or acknowledged by performing arts leaders, state subsidized theatre, dance, opera companies or government agencies at the time, these first wave ensembles survived on a mix of mutual assistance, barter and often the donation-in-kind of the unpaid labour of core artists. Without established names or wunderkind directors, celebrated writers or actors with which to brand their endeavours, funding was hard to attract. Local performer/makers were not celebrities or known figures in Australia, pursuing experimental theatre to enrich or give artistic credence to their practice in popular theatre, television or film. Most of the first wave ensembles were not emerging artists just graduated from training colleges, but were experienced artists, who had performed and devised for quite some period: ‘mid-career’ artists, committed to and confident of their capacities to generate works in aesthetic contrast to that of the ongoing, funded, mainstage performing arts.

For the most part these ensembles sought to set aside the then pervasive default division of labour between, on the one hand, writers, directors and designers as the original creative team, and on the other, actors and dancers, as was the model dominant in mainstream theatre. Customary divisions of labour were melded: performers directed, wrote text and music, choreographed and designed their own mise en scène – rather than deferring to a single leading artist. At the same time, while privileging the work of performers, these ensembles had a place for writers, choreographers and directors involved in creative processes on the basis of ‘one amongst equals’. This inclination towards cooperative creation embraced visual, sound, lighting and screen based artists. The emergence of hybrid forms gave local artists the confidence to continue generating works. This hybridity was not an awkwardly forced syncretism of previous forms self-consciously derived from dance, theatre, performance art, installation or circus; rather, what might be characterised as the broad, democratically-inclined ensemble dynamics facilitated the hybridising of practices that took place. Innovation entered practice through the skills, knowledges and audience experiences carried in the bodies of those who worked together. With little funding, and located outside the mainstream, the collaborators’ biographical differences constituted the environment and catalysts (and
constraints) within which each ensemble created work. Rarely fuelled by loyalties to auteurs, the membership or ‘boundaries’ of groups were porous; from the outset, the scene was characterized by the overlap of collaborators.

The hybridisation of physical theatre and contemporary performance through the emergence of ‘performance languages’

By the late 1980s, local performer-makers began to use the term ‘language’ to refer to the cluster of training and devising practice, often as a shorthand for ‘performance language’ or even ‘theatrical language’. As a term this usage of ‘language’ has a range of meanings, referring variously in different contexts to a theatrical convention (and thus means of communication with audiences); ways of devising, styles of performance; training skills, tricks, combinatory effects of different elements in staging and attunement amongst ensemble members or “sense of ensemble”. In Sydney, the SMAT-influenced cohort recall that “we shared” or “had a language”, and that this language was not merely speaking or writing. Rather, it involved a certain recognition shared by performer-makers who might say: “We would see things on the floor and that was the language”. Clearly, such a usage points to an idea about shared understandings about practices of devising and communicating with audiences. The recognition, amongst a hitherto diverse range of practitioners, of the idea that they could evolve a meaningful discrete ‘language’ that emerged in devising each project that they shared marks a moment of consolidation and, perhaps, maturity: the emergence of a ‘scene’. The term ‘language’ attempted to recognise continuities with previous genres at a time when a stable genre label did not exist for rapidly emerging hybrid subsequently called ‘contemporary performance’.

British choreographer Gary Rowe, in his discussion of the genre term ‘physical theatre’, writes of ‘movement language’ in terms of ‘choreography’.

‘Choreography’ implies the art of creating a movement language, whatever and however that language is used (on stage). I would prefer to call my work choreographic in that the whole work concentrates on language; not only is the dance highly choreographed but the space and visuals as well ... Still there remains a resistance to seeing ‘dance’ as ‘theatre’ but that has more to do with how the artists are defining themselves (1997, 21).
The idea of ‘choreography’, decontextualised from the limits of the genres of dance or dance theatre, achieved some currency in the emerging Sydney scene. When asked if he thought what he did in ‘performance ‘slash’ theatre’ was choreography, Chris Ryan, a founding member of THE SYDNEY FRONT, explained how he used the term:

Choreography is a metaphor. Choreography is about setting a task. What is personal has to be contextualised if you are going to present it publicly in a theatrical context. If you are dealing with dance and looking at natural movement, that is the beauty of the body, I think that is a very different perspective from performance and drama. I don’t want to talk dance. If I talk about ‘choreography’ (i.e. in a theatrical performance or rehearsal) I am talking about setting or blocking – movement, rather than exploration of human movement per se (interview 2001).

Ryan also referred to dancers he had recently seen in DV8’s Can We Afford This? (2000) as ‘performing tasks’, rather than as dancing in the strict sense. In recollecting the impact of Suzukian training upon the early days of THE SYDNEY FRONT, however, Ryan used the metaphor of ‘language’:

As soon as we started rehearsals, training was an hour, an hour and a half each day. And that was the language. And it was also a desire to do it. Like everyone went, “This is great.” This is full-on. It was a way we’d found, a way of – I can only speak for myself – but of centring, focus, pushing your body, finding your own limitations, or pushing your own limitations in a very simple set of exercises; and because it involved the voice it was interesting for me as a performer (ibid) 27

Similarly, Don Mamounay, director of SIDETRACK, distinguished the genre of performing that defined the late 1980s contemporary performance in Sydney by referring to its differences from dance, and by implication, from ‘choreography’ as an organising principle:

As a generalisation, I think actors create characters in recognisable social psychological situations and play them out within there. I think performers do it via physical constructions … It’s not quite dance, and it’s not mime. I think the language is … it’s the recognition of the physical spatial language in the communication with the audience with the knowledge that the audience has a vast vocabulary of visual and aural recognitions that are embedded within them, in specific cultural formations (interview 2001).

This use of ‘language’ facilitated for performers the alignment of their own multiple training backgrounds in which they had become fluent. It allowed in some ways the aggregation of the powers of their various ‘skills’ to be united in solving creative problems in devising. It is a field marking discourse term par excellence for the continuing hybridisation of body-based and cross-art form performance practice. The
working term 'language' carries both the sense of shared investment as well as simultaneously implying differences between ensemble members' contributions. Like oral languages, they evolve by speakers reforming languages through speaking and hearing them. Contemporary performer-makers created the syntax relevant to each work in the 'context of utterance' in devising assuming it would be 'read' in the 'context of utterance' in performance by audiences.

The affiliation between explicitly physical theatre and contemporary performance practitioners has remained close in Sydney since the beginning of the 1980s. This continuity is also registered in the Australia Council’s 1991 marketing guide In Repertoire prepared for international arts festival producers, which was subtitled 'a guide to Australian contemporary performance'. That the guide inclusively lists under this banner circus, physical theatre, outdoors, multimedia, site-specific and performance demonstrates the broad alliance. Physical theatre practitioners perceive common ground between the aims and styles of each other's works. All can see themselves belonging to a broad category of theatre performance that pivoted on the embodied performances of its actors or performers and all depended on the particular artists who made work together in more egalitarian collectives. Just as these kinds of genre categories have become much more differentiated in other parts of the world over the last decade, practitioners in Australia and in Sydney are more particular in drawing distinctions between their types of work presently. The differentiation is evidence of the maturation of knowledge about devising, shifts in understanding amongst artists and audiences of diverse ways meaning is transmitted by human movement in theatrical performance, undertaking trainings with skilled performer-teachers in a variety of disciplines and the expansion of the global touring market and the necessity to be recognised by government funding agencies.

**The second wave**

By 1992-93 a strong sense of scene or field was established with an annual itinerary of occasions, network of venues creating a local circuit for presentation, and overlapping sets of artists working with each other. A range of pivotal works from the seven core ensembles had been performed, attracted project funding and critical attention. The
Open Season and Evenspace at the Performance Space, evening programs at
Contemporary Performance Weeks, the Independent Dance Seasons, Steps I, and even
the Open House session at Belvoir St – a venue more readily associated with text-based
mainstage theatre – were occasions for short works and works-in-development presented
to gain exposure to audiences in Sydney.

The second wave of contemporary performance emerged from the audience of the first
wave, as trainees with them and some time collaborators. Amongst this second wave
were younger artists, graduates of visual arts and theatre degrees, and artists returning to
Australia. Three ensembles formed: the post-arrivalists (in 1993), Gravity Feed (in
1992) and later Kantanka (1995). This second wave continued to extend local
performance making practices in a kind of critical dialogue with the first, inspired by
their example, and equally desirous to experiment.

Deborah Pollard, one of the second wave younger artists (who also went on to train in
Toga in 1991) described the experience of entering a distinct, coherent field when she
moved to Sydney in 1990. She saw others’ performances, the ways in which they
experimented in their relations with audiences, did workshops, saw performances where
people no longer played characters and trialled short performances and devised with
then-emerging performance art artist, Victoria Spence. She understood her emerging
work in regard to a network of practices linked by common audiences with artists
viewing each other’s work as a critical audience (see section – Theory as Jumping off
Point – following).

The second wave, while not totally disavowing the impact of theoretically informed
deconstructive art practice, had encountered a range of the limits of such practice. Some
sought to parody and undermine the serious attachment to the kind of theorising and
styles of the first wave, explicitly targeting ‘political correctness’ and ‘good’ taste in fine
arts practices they thought obscure, irrelevant, academic or excluded access to broader
audiences.28 These artists, including the Postarrivalists, Frumpus, and Hot Banana
Morgan often used tactics derived from, and positioned themselves as promoting, the
pleasures of popular entertainment, b-grade, club and trash aesthetics, apparently
eschewing interests in developing virtuosities. At the same time, it is noteworthy that some of those initially most resistant to the aesthetics of virtuosity – in particular the iconoclastic POSTARRIVALISTS – later developed sophisticated skills in particular areas.\textsuperscript{29}

Some post-Suzukian artists of the first wave – for example, Grant, Kellaway, Leiser and Ryan – when their individual concerns could not be encompassed by the ensembles’ trajectories of practice, also created full-length and short solo works (see appendix J). Along with the emerging artists of the second wave, these artists actively reconsidered performance strategies developed in the context of deconstruction, instead seeking to ground and embrace specifically socially embedded identities in terms of generational, gender and cultural diversity. The works of Andrea Aloise, Deborah Leiser-Moore, Mème Thorne, Regina Heilmann, Deborah Pollard, Clare Grant, Nikki Heyward, Joel Markham, Katia Molino, Victoria Spence, and Alicia Talbot, who all had experience in SMAT are exemplars. These artists, although less likely to form ensembles, shared the first wave’s disposition towards collaborative performance making, frequently drawing a group of interdisciplinary artists together in a transitory ensemble, often with key solo performer. Artists, Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch, who prepared for performance with Min Tanaka’s Body Weather, also produced works with this model of working relations.

**The practice-theory nexus in the Sydney contemporary performance**

The same quote from Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment* was reproduced, in 1988 and 1994 in essays about contemporary performance and ‘performance art’, the first by Noelle Janaczewska, and the second by Sarah Miller.\textsuperscript{30} That the same extract was drawn on early and at the point of the highest activity by the first wave reflects the exchange between physicalised theatre practice in Sydney and post-structuralist theory:

The body ... is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations ... it is largely as a force of production that the body invested with relations of power and domination: but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (...); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive and a subjected body (Foucault in Janaczewska 1988 and Miller 1994; their elisions and punctuation).
Janaczewska and Miller both assumed a continuation of alliances between art forms and artists whose work arose from genres of art practice with distinctly different histories. Both located the interest in performer embodiment practices within a broad, but explicit interest in political power. Both assert the potential for physicalized performance to generated knowledge not just visceral affect. Janaczewska draws on it to locate and signal emergent frameworks for understanding embodiment in performance making. In 1988, Janaczewska looked forward to theory’s usefulness, generating future performance where embodiment did not remain ‘mute’, unable to transmit knowledge “relegated to the epistemological sidelines” (ibid). She was not alone in this desire. Miller’s 1994 perspective looks back over a period of practice where “the very idea of performance was translated into a kind of critical or theoretical performance” (ibid). Simultaneously, theorists were drawing on models of theatricality as a metaphor to revivify their discourses about the nature of knowledge, philosophy, signification and power. Miller also mobilised Foucault as part of her critique of the under-resourcing of artists who used their skilled bodies’ capacities as their major medium in a critique of the valourisation of more readily sold art objects, that have longevity as product and can be more easily documented than live performance.

The Sydney performers, in particular those of the first wave, sought a relationship between their practice and a range of theoretical positions that was in marked contrast to the usual relations between theatre and its theorists. Certainly, influences from the canon of modernist theatre theory can be traced in Sydney’s contemporary performance practice. The writings of Artaud and Brecht had some currency and Grotowski’s thought and practice had been influential earlier in the 1980s, even if locals resisted certain aspects of their paradigms (see Baylis 1990 and 2001; Kellaway 1994a and 1994b; Mamouney 1998, Maxwell 2005 and Waites 1996).

An important early theory/praxis nexus arose for the local theatrically-inclined when they observed the theory-inflected works of visual arts based performance art and exhibitions. They witnessed what was ‘done’ with theory; art works as demonstrations of theory, as catalytic idea/question, cited inside works or used as theoretical exposition translating the work in accompanying catalogue essay (Eckersall 2001, 152). Three
documentation photographs of the performance installation Fill (1990) by artist Derek Kreckler demonstrate the overlapping networks of artists from diverse art fields in the Sydney scene (Marsh 1993, 186-187). They show key first wave contemporary performance artists—all the members of THE SYDNEY FRONT, performers from SIDETRACK and OPEN CITY set amongst 28,000 beer cans, with a 15 x 22 metre slide projection of three words projected upon them, in succession: “WORDS – FILL – ME”. In the performance, the subjects stood still and repeated the word “everyone” in crescendo, from a whisper to maximum volume for the duration of the projections. The final sentence in the caption reads: “A subject caught in language yet trying bravely to assert its collective subjecthood” (Marsh 1993, 186-189).

Works like Fill were indicative of the interdisciplinary relations that contributed to the emerging field. Contemporary performers from amongst those pictured engaged in a number of collaborations with each other. Some of these works like Fill were identified by academics like Marsh or daily newspaper journalists as ‘performance art’, derived from modernist avant-garde experimentation in visual arts. For a number of contemporary performer-makers, their first point of contact with the burgeoning corpus of post-structuralism was through the use of that theory in these collaborations involving visual, dance-based and physicalised theatre practitioners, and not with artists working in conventional theatres. This is evident in the identities of speakers and participants at the Politics of the Body conference at TPS in 1987 (See Appendix); there was no representation from the mainstage theatre world. Visual, media and sound artists regularly participated in SIDETRACK’s eight Contemporary Performance Weeks (CPW) until 1997. The-then new experimental arts centres from the early 1980’s – Art Unit, TPS and Artspace supported the growing mutual cross-disciplinary interest via their programming. Eventspace programs (1991-95) in TPS’s gallery mounted performances and installations to provide a platform for these interdisciplinary endeavours. Two of the early directors of TPS were recognised as coming from a visual arts heritage, Mike Mullins and Allen Vizents. Rob La Frenais arts journalist visiting from the UK on watching seven nights of short works in the Performance Space as early as 1985 speculated whether he was witnessing an “act of reconciliation with traditional theatre, and performance art (that) has come more than half way” (La Frenais 1985, 28).
A less formal but powerful enduring forum for interdisciplinary, critical and discursive exchange about artworks and theories has been the ‘foyers’ and galleries of openings. Weighing up and debate triggered by responses to performance vivified ongoing discourse outside study, reading and conference presentations. These informal exchanges have sustained the bridges between diverse artistic genre, emerging and established artists, academics and critics. Visual artists attended works of musicians and dancer-choreographers. Theatre artists attended performance art exhibitions and dance.\textsuperscript{34} Up to the time of writing, interstate and overseas visitors and ex-patriots returning to Sydney have noted this persistent dynamic at TPS’s Redfern premises since the mid 1980s.\textsuperscript{35} As a sign the early affiliation and less formal exchanges between art form fields, Kellaway recalled the responses by an early director of Adelaide’s Experimental Art Foundation and practising visual artist to his performances:

Noel Sheridan commented on watching me work on one piece. He said whenever he sees me walk across the stage he’s always tossing up whether in fact it’s really a slow dance or really fast sculpture (interview 1994).

The relationships are registered in the catalogue of 25 years of Performance Art in Australia (June 1994 to May 1995) held in galleries and institutes of contemporary arts which lists works by members of Sydney’s contemporary performance theatre field, dancers and other movement-based performers who had been working in Sydney over the previous decade.

In Sydney, Artspace and TPS, as well as the Power Institute, a visual arts organisation based at the University of Sydney, hosted a succession of large conferences that drew a mix of artists, academics and students as their audience (see Appendix B).\textsuperscript{36} Conferences disseminated contemporary critical thinking: writings by Barthes, Bataille, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari and gender theorists such as Butler, Irigaray, Kristeva, Grosz and Diprose were amongst those cited. Artist John Gilles recalls Baudrillard’s visit as keynote speaker at Futur*Fall (1984) sparked a rock star’s reception (Baylis 2004).\textsuperscript{37} Some emerging and mid-career contemporary performers were audience to academics, local and visiting from overseas, particularly visual arts theorists. Sydney academics like Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton were key early
translators and popularisers of Foucault, Baudrillard and Deleuze. Some artists spoke about theoretical discourses in their work (Jones 1988). TPS also mounted an array of single topic discursive forums where artists talked about the conceptualising of their own art making. SIDETRACK’s annual CPW always included panels for speculative discussion on theoretical topics currently impacting on arts practice.

For Marsh the two discreet traditions of performance art and theatre in Australia were effectively mediated by critical theory and became a kind of interdisciplinary lingua franca:

[Theory] is no longer seen in terms of an ‘absolute’ but rather as a way of extending debates about the artist, the artist’s role in society and the construction of meaning ... The ‘anti-intellectualism’ associated with the 1970’s, a decade in which the instinctual or cathartic response of the artist was stressed, has been replaced by ideas of interpretation as a relative exercise ...

In performance art of the 1980’s and 1990’s, the most interesting works are still concerned with the subject and his or her position in the world. Performance [as distinct from the exhibition of art objects in a gallery situation] lends itself to this type of exploration because of the artist’s and spectator’s presence ... The unconscious, language, memory and desire are all concepts which continue to interest performance artists in the 1980’s and 1990’s; however, all these things tend to be considered in terms their social construction.

Performance art has entered a more accessible area in terms of practice and reception. The distance between performance art and theatre has been dissolved in many respects. Artists no longer feel impelled to insist on a difference. The distinction between ‘real’ life and the illusion associated theatre dissolves against a background of theory which analyses both social construction, so that the subject has little authenticity, and the constant play of the signifier, so that all becomes interpretations (Marsh 1993, 203).

Theatre, with its emphasis on communication with spectators brought the accessibility, to which Marsh refers, to the party. The only non-dance performances (outside Melbourne) recognised by Marsh as early examples of these interdisciplinary and collective approaches to production were those staged by the ALL OUT ENSEMBLE in the early 1980s; she overlooks the work of THE SYDNEY FRONT, SIDETRACK and others in the Sydney field.

The demarcations between visual arts and theatrical performance, however, remained a troubled border issue in the Sydney artists’ networks. After a decade of prolific contemporary performance activity in Sydney, Sarah Miller, then director of TPS, and an active artist, entered into the debates in the visual arts around genre identification of artists.
The relationship—often disavowed—between performance by visual artists and those coming to it from a more theatrical background has also prejudiced the place and function of performance/art. In the '70s many artists went to great lengths to disassociate themselves from the taint of theatricality … the outstanding shift in practice during the eighties was to a more theatricalised understanding of performance which is not at all the same as a ‘dramatic’ understanding. In simply accepting the cliches which have determined notions of the theatrical versus the visual arts and in rejecting the usefulness the ‘performative’ or the ‘theatrical’ in art, certain practices are simply reinscribed as marginal in relation to ‘purer’ kinds of performance art (Miller 1994, 8).

Miller vehemently defends close affiliations with visual arts’ performance art, while highlighting the consequences generic demarcations had for contemporary performer-makers working in a restricted field of cultural production. First wave artists in THE SYDNEY FRONT and SIDETRACK and others continued to stage works in theatre/studio-type buildings and drew on theatrical conventions in relations with audiences. The multiple influences of staging locations, links with theatre theories and embodied knowledges/histories carried by the local artists also support Miller’s recognition of the term ‘theatrical’ to identify local contemporary performance. Emerging enthusiasms for site-specific relations with outdoor places were also platforms for cross arts working relations in the period, especially for those in the second wave of Sydney performance, including GRAVITY FEED staging a work in an elongated underground Miller’s point industrial wharf warehouse in 1996 and the POSTARRIVALISTS’ events in car parks, abandoned nightclubs and busy night streets in 1993.38

Sydney’s growing university population mediated the relations between practice and theory. A vital and recognisable fraction of spectators for contemporary performance came from the massive and expanding undergraduate arts student population that had been building in Sydney since the late 1970s (see Appendix F).39 A number of first wave artists attended university, but rarely in drama programs. Second wave artists who encountered the first wave during their undergrad years, often completed art school, theatre or film studies degrees such those at Nepean, the University of Wollongong, University of Technology, Sydney and the College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales.

Another register of theory praxis relations was those occasions where academic speakers reflected on their reception of the works of artists through the lens of their theoretical

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stance. Importantly this register garnered a critical audience, interweaving academic responses to performances in ways that mirrored the identity of the most enthusiastic and expanding section of their audiences in the period. These published critical responses manifested at times as recognition of works as incarnations of theory, whether those theoretical ideas triggered the artist or not. As their works were formed in the presence of the local theoretical melange, artists had some investment in academics’ responses refracted through theory, when these published public responses to particular works circulated soon and amongst the community of artists they lent weight to a work’s importance and reception and were poised to become part of discourse or even “buzz” around a work. Artists referred to how these responses were included in and, at times, framed the pitching of works to funding authorities (Pollard and Baylis in Ekersall 2001, 152).

During this period, a number of magazines, newsletters, journals and catalogues that discussed the cross-disciplinary and hybridised art practices in a theoretical tenor were published locally. The earliest was SPECTATOR BURNS, from TPS, of which three issues were published in 1987 and 1988. Interviews with groups and individual artists, articles by academics bearing on issues of the moment (Goodall 1997), arts funding, solicitation of submissions for cross-disciplinary ventures and seasons of short works, regular reviews of works from across the spectrum of visual exhibition, film and electronic media, sound, dance and contemporary theatre works continued in TPS’s smaller magazine-like journal, of 16 issues published quarterly between 1993 to 1997. Both journals involved Performance Space directors in their editorial boards, found some appeal amongst sections of their audience but, unfunded, they had difficulty expanding their readership or generating financial sustainability. SPECTATOR BURNS focussed explicitly, in contrast to the next TPS journal, on the nexus between theorising performances, actual performances and also the role of ‘the body’ in performance. While focussing on the work of women writing for performance, PLAYWORKS, published an extensive and lively newsletter for members from 1994 to 2006. In 1994, Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter launched the bi-monthly free interdisciplinary arts magazine RealTime reaching out to a national audience through a professional distribution service with a focus on developing writing about performance, exhibitions
and more recently contemporary sound/music and filmic media through reviewing, features, interviews and articles on issues de jour relevant to arts communities. *RealTime* extended beyond the more niche concerns of the earlier TPS journals. At the time of writing this journal is in its thirteenth year, its 77th volume and has offered models of arts journalism in intensive residencies publishing and cultivating local writers at dozens of international contemporary arts festivals in Europe, United Kingdom and the US.\textsuperscript{43}

The then new post-structuralist epistemologies concerned the interrelations between visual, linguistic and corporeal representation in all social domains. Baylis identified sometime in the late 1980s there was a swing in concerns in the local artist networks from a paradigm of embodiment as ‘expressivity’ in performance to one of the ‘construction’ of identities via bodily expression (personal correspondence). The writings of the post-structuralist theorists offered epistemological hypotheses, speculations and analyses about corporeality in the use of an abstract term: ‘the body’. This term, sometimes preceded by adjectives (‘the abject body’; ‘the x body’; ‘the y body’), created a meta-body, a reification in discourse that belonged to everyone and no one in particular, stripped of context, and easily argued over in abstract terms. This set up a certain tension across the field, with the abstract theorization sitting uncomfortably with the sweaty, breathing immanence of practice. When physical theatre practitioners’ instantiated speculations about signification, ethics and philosophy, they were aware of the immediacy of their relations with spectators in within their given socio-historical contexts. Their lived, embodied knowledge gained through undertaking training and the trial and error of on-the-job performance making enacted in live stagings grounded their explorations in specific instances, people and places.

**Theory as jumping off point**

Pollard recalls entering a Sydney milieu marked by interests in poststructural and deconstructive theory braided into performance making practice, and in particular the interest in public discussions of postmodern theory hosted by TPS (interview 2001). For
her, the impact of the theoretically-inflected works of others was a transformation of her self-identification: from ‘actor’ to ‘deviser’. Her account is revealing:

I think my first contact with theory came when I moved to Sydney ... because the scene in Sydney when you don’t fit into the mainstage/mainstream sort of ‘look’ – even though that’s what you intended to enter into as a young person getting into theatre – you wanted to go to NIDA, you wanted to play Lady Macbeth and your emphasis on performing at that stage was “It’s a meaty part and I’ll look really good in that frock” – to being rejected by that world and having to ... [seek alternatives].

It [theory] opens up your intelligence in a way, that rejection, because all of a sudden you still want to be on stage, to be performing. You’re still operating from that ego base at that point, but you start to devise work ... After a while of drawing on that purely character-based work which you’re used to from your theatrical training, you get bored with that and start to look around and you realise people are doing things that are examining things like the relationship between the audience and the performer and the space, and the character is no longer a fictitious character but is the self. And it’s at that point that you start to engage with I suppose critical theory in a way which is doing the same thing, discussing those same points (Pollard in Eckersall 2001, 150-51).

Theory was redefined in contemporary performance praxis to include any source or mode for developing ideas for a performance. Any value published theory had for practitioners pivoted around its potential contribution to producing performances. As creative developments ‘on the floor’ involved what Susan Melrose called an “up-building” of a myriad of decisions (1994, 7), rather than an analytical breaking-down process, sometimes explicitly theoretical concepts yielded principles and questions that informed decision making along the way. Reading theoretical texts or discussions with academic researchers were part of an extended intelligence-gathering phase of dramaturgical preparation and research around themes that occurred prior and periodically during a project. This intelligence-gathering register formed part of a constellation of reference points of a new work for those inclined. Post-structural and selected theatre theory intertwined and was mediated by embodied knowledges, traditions and histories of local performance practices constrained by the limited resources and opportunity that constituted the cocktail of influences. The relation in some ways parallels the influence of dramaturgical research into interpretations and social context in play production undertaken by writers, directors and dramaturgs in or prior to rehearsal of a play. However, in the ensembles all this creative labour was dispersed amongst, and taken up by, the performer-makers themselves, as a function of their own excitement about particular ideas, rather than in programmatic terms.
Baylis admits he approached published theory as a dilettante (ibid, 153). He explains how local artists encountered ‘theory’ and how he positioned it in his devising:

It can be completely inchoate or highly articulated ... theory is where we get the ideas from going into a work ... some people get it from academic type literature, some people get it from other arts practice, from peers, from pop culture, from press, whatever. I don’t make much distinction between them. Sometimes it’s more articulated, that’s all ... It’s all about the ideas going in, the stimulus for art making. What comes out the other end is another thing again. The kind of work that I don’t like is work that ‘proves’ the theory. That’s been the bane of a lot of visual arts practice in the last fifteen years or so. If that happens, then theory hasn’t been a stimulus. It’s just been a grid, a kind of a paint-by-numbers ...

I like to read widely but not too deeply. If I read too deeply I know too much about it and I know the pros and cons and see all sides and it’s no use to me any more. I need one little stimulus. Often I’ll start a project and I’ll read a lot around the periphery, not the central bit. I’ll want to leave it blank until I get into the rehearsal room so that can kind of form itself ... Six months out, I’ll be a serious researcher, three months out I’ll be kind of a panic stricken grab-ideas-from-anywhere and one week out I’ll be the archetypal director/problem solver blocking, you know do this, do that, doesn’t matter what it means, just do it! So your persona changes. If I was still the serious researcher one week out, the show just wouldn’t happen or it would become so trapped in its theoretical construct that it wouldn’t have grown. And I trust that process too. I trust that when you’ve done that preparation, when you’re at that last moment, solving staging problems, you are actually solving more serious problems at the same time without having to think it through. You can trust that if you have immersed yourself in the theory at the outset, your staging solution may also be a conceptual solution (ibid, 153; italics in original).

Baylis’s deployment of his reading is part of a speculative transposition of single ideas; a kind of ‘what if’ proposition tested by a particular set of performers in a particular place to see what might happen. He recounts his ‘use’ of Derrida in the FRONT’s early days:

I was animated by Derrida’s ideas about presence. He was deconstructing the illusion of presence in literature. I was saying ... ”Theatre is nothing but presence.” The charisma of the live performer is what theatre is about, so how can you deconstruct that? That issue has kept me going for fifteen years, trying to handle that in different ways. But what comes out the other end, if someone said,” Oh Derrida!” I’d be a bit disappointed. I hope it’s deflected and refracted and comes out as something more than that (ADSA roundtable first draft, see also Eckersol 2001, 152)47

Notwithstanding the interest in theory, efforts directed towards illustrating theory in performance were actively resisted across the community. Some took no interest. Other artists found jargon impenetrable, felt marginalised, and objectified by jargon-laden presentations at conferences.48 Pollard, for one, opposed staging tableau vivants of theoretical constructs:

The more entrenched we become in academic codes and language and the language required for writing grant applications, we start to believe that language and the rhetoric we throw at the
funding bodies and then we feed it back into our practice. The more we start to do that, the more conservative our work becomes and it actually starts to follow another fashion and that’s the fashion of high academia and high art (Eckersall 2001, 151).

For Baylis, theory always took a back seat to an idea about accessibility:

I don’t like the idea of the programme note which tells the audience the theoretical viewpoint they’re supposed to adopt ... I want Derrida to seep in through their pores, not through the programme note ... the performance itself still has to be able to stand. If the theoretical idea is a good one then it’s a manifestation of something that is already there in the culture around and you’ve got to find a kind of equivalent in a performative language, not rely on the theory to give your performance authority. So that’s my justification for the idea that work should be accessible. But, when I mean ‘accessible’ – you are also relying on a certain amount of kind of cultural literacy from the audience. And depending on the context, if I make a community show where I know at least half the audience may have never gone to theatre before, I take that into account in a creative way. You use the fact that they’re not going to bring boring pre-suppositions to the theatre. Rather than feeling you have to do it from some theoretical construct, do it in some “old-fashioned” way – you know, give them a nice little story with characters to explain the ideas. This, of course, may explain the ideas but it won’t be the ideas (ADSA roundtable draft, see also Eckersall 2001, 157).

Ideas were valuable when instantiated in action. It was this anti-programmatic deployment of theoretical concepts that distinguished contemporary performance from earlier Brechtian work, where particular social constructs or interpretations of history were illustrated or acted out, even if made ‘strange’. Brecht’s mode presumed a shared worldview amongst its audiences, including a set of utopian social relations that could be striven for and faith live theatre could activate social action by spectators. In contrast to this way of using concepts, all three precepts were absent or rejected by the contemporary performance makers. This is important to note, as some Brechtian devices were still drawn into works, and early critics and newly collaborating artists more invested in the ideas originating in playwright’s scripts had trouble recognising where ‘thought’ lay in the works. Some assumed that the illustration of theoretical concepts was the goal, which they either condemned as too didactic or not unambiguously laid out enough to tell them as spectators how to ‘read’ performances.49

On occasion a work of live performance was framed as a practical investigation into a theoretical proposition as operating belief in a kind of laboratory for trialling ideas. Miller referred to these as “critical or theoretical performance(s)” (Miller 1994, 8). A number carried a subtitle such as “an interrogation into ...” or “a speculation upon ...” One such example is contained in the program notes of Stages of Terror in 1993:
Devised by seven of Sydney's most fantastic female performers, 'Stages of Terror' is the performed speculation on theatre's affiliation with psychic and political terror—the terror that conditions our experience of being in the world.  

By contrast, Pollard gave an example of how a post structural idea was intertwined with her conception of a performance event—this one with a visual artist collaborator, Denis Beaubois.

I've turned to critical theory as a point of inspiration and a point of extending the concepts that I place on stage ... The last work I did with Salamanca in Tassie (Panopticon) very much would fit the model ... The initial idea came from stumbling across Foucault and seeing this beautiful structure of a separate prison system, the panopticon and going, "Gosh, that's so theatrical". So my theatrical brain steps into place and says, "Whoa, what does it actually mean to build a structure like that and separate an audience?" Then you start to get into all that stuff which we talk about in contemporary performance of disrupting the audience. All of a sudden they can no longer operate as a singular block, which was the historical purpose of an audience coming together. They were a collective body and that's why you go to the theatre and not watch television. So that in itself was interesting ... To add to that was the historical context to place it in. I found myself in Tasmania and all they can refer to is their colonial history— that's the frame ... and Port Arthur aside from its contemporary tragedy is what they promote—its historical tragedy. So then I started to literally work with a critical theorist and an historian. That was to allow my conceptual base to extend beyond my own knowledge so I had to draw on the expertise of the academic world because I hadn't taken a lifetime out to study the intricacies of the Port Arthur separate prison system whereas this wonderful historian had. And the meeting point of us sitting around a table going I want to present this work and discuss these issues and him talking about the way that history is read all of a sudden took the work into an area that I couldn't have hoped for.

But I'll end by saying that I'm dead against putting straight theory on stage because I think it is boring and the art-making process is to be able to take the theory and use it as the inspirational jumping point for your work (Pollard in Eckersall 2001, 152).  

Pollard referred to the resulting work at the SALAMANCA THEATRE COMPANY as "taking a Sydney practice to Tasmania" that reconsidered Australia's colonial history.

To conclude: means of exchange and interaction between published theoretical discourse evolved as the field emerged in Sydney during the 1980s. There were several registers in which local contemporary performance makers engaged with theory as a part of their performance practices: through seeing theory inflected artworks by other artists and working alongside them; dissemination through public discussions, published texts and having specific dialogue with academics; critical response and analysis both formal and informal and the creation of theatre works that displaced theory as critical, interrogative and speculative performance practice in their own right.
The post 1986 chronology of contact with SMAT in Sydney

From 1986, the Sydney contemporary performance scene developed increasingly intense relationships with Suzuki practice.

In 1986, Kellaway led rehearsal training during the devising process for ENTR'ACTE’s Ostraka, directed by Thibadeau, focused on Clytemnestra’s murder of Agamemnon. The performers included Andrea Aloise, Clare Grant, Chris Ryan, John Baylis and Kellaway, the group that later that same year founded THE SYDNEY FRONT, the first Australian company to incorporate Suzuki training disciplines during rehearsals of their works. Kellaway led that training. My discussion with other Fronters revealed he did not change or add to the kata he had learnt in Toga. One member of the troupe described what they practiced as “Nigel’s version” of Suzuki’s method (Baylis interview 1996). During THE SYDNEY FRONT’s six-month residency at Brisbane’s Expo 88, to raise funds for their own international touring, the company stomped regularly (Kellaway 1994 and Ryan 2001).

In 1988, SCOT performed Trojan Women at the Sydney Opera House as part of the Matsui Bicentennial gift to Australia. Members of SIDETRACK and some individual performers, including Deborah Pollard and Katia Molino, at the time theatre undergraduates at the University of Wollongong, saw these performances and training demonstrations. ENTR’ACTE performed The Memory Room at the 1990 Toga Festival. Cast members Deborah Leiser and Katia Molino did their first training intensive in that year. Lech Machiewicz, Polish-Australian actor and director, directed SCOT in Beckett in Circles the following year. Other Australian directors listed as attending earlier Toga Festivals include Nigel Jameson, Jean Pierre Voos and Jean-Pierre Mignon (SCOT 1991, 64-65).

By 1990, Kellaway was teaching in open weekly sessions, rehearsals or periodic intensives. While some participants were inspired by SCOT’s visit in 1988, others followed up an interest stimulated by THE FRONT’s work. THE FRONT used a shed for rehearsals – Hut 23 of the Addison Rd. precinct in Sydney’s inner western suburb.
Marrickville. SIDETRACK's studio theatre is in this precinct. Some individuals from this Sydney scene, including Michael Cohen, Deborah Leiser, Joel Markham, Katia Molina, Deborah Pollard, Olivier Sidore and Même Thorne attended the only Toga Masterclass for teachers in 1991, although Kellaway did not. The imprimatur to teach SMAT was first offered after this Masterclass. Some actors from the Playbox Theatre in Melbourne – Matt Crosby, David Pledger, Bruce Naylor, Peter Curtin trained in 1991 – and dancer John Nobbs from Brisbane – attended the summer school that year.

Même Thorne led SMAT training for company members at SIDETRACK over six years until 1996, and as a component of the SIDETRACK's seven annual Contemporary Performance Weeks of workshops, performances and forums up to 1997. She also ran weekly open training until 1995. Sydney performer-teachers who attended the Masterclass in Toga also conducted training at universities and other training institutes, including at the National Institute for Dramatic Arts (NIDA), Latrobe University, the University of New South Wales, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Wollongong, in private academies, including the Actors Centre and Actors' College for Theatre and Television, and independently initiated open sessions in hall venues. A very substantial body of solos and collaborative works was produced by independent performer/makers who had Suzuki training in Sydney's contemporary networks during the early 1990s; these performances are documented in Appendix A. At the time of writing, in early 2007, no regular public training in Suzuki method is offered in Sydney, unlike in major cities in the US.

Katoh Masaharu, actor with SCOT, led a two-week SMAT intensive in September 1991, the year before production of Suzuki's Melbourne PLAYBOX production of The Chronicle of Macbeth, sessions that to an extent constituted an audition for the project. Several Sydney scene performers participated in this workshop, including Leiser, Markham, Molino and Thorne. Joel Markham and Katia Molino were both cast.

In 1996, three full-length solo works by Suzuki trained women performer-makers (Leiser, Pollard and Thorne) were presented in collaboration with others with varying
degrees of exposure to Suzuki’s methods as either collaborating performers or director dramaturgs.⁵⁷

In contrast to Suzuki’s alliances with the US and European fields via the Theatre Olympics, Australian artists inspired and provoked by his training have not been very powerful or connected to large institutions. While several of the Australians have taught in universities, these have tended to be solo and freelancers, sometimes from the small companies. No alliance with large universities or cultural institutions such as those Suzuki forged with UWM, UCSD or Julliard has developed. Australia does not have an established widespread tradition of private benefaction supporting arts like those in the US or Japan. Also, from the mid 1990s Australian public universities and arts funding organisations began a phase of radical financial contraction. This has impacted most severely on medium to small company sector and tertiary creative practitioner arts education.⁵⁸

This completes my overview of the emergence of an identifiable contemporary performance scene in Sydney. In the next chapter, I will turn to the distinctive training, devising and rehearsal processes that developed within this context, in order to understand the material influence of SMAT upon the scene.

1 Alongside the groups I have identified here there was also a disparate but popular cabaret and comedy scene, where artists such as THE CASTANET CLUB, FUNNY STORIES, RED WEATHER MUSIC THEATRE, Mandy Saloman and Larry Buttrose appeared. As I will suggest below, this scene enjoyed some overlap with the burgeoning performance art centred on the gallery, Art Unit. It is reasonable to assume that audiences and artist networks would have overlapped.

2 Lester identifies this concern in the work of choreographer and teacher Margaret Barr and her most known pupil, Kai Tai Chan. Barr ran a dance theatre company during the 1970s and into the mid 1980s. She also opened her training to participation by those beyond the company (See the conclusion of Lester 2000).

3 The earliest work Nigel Kellaway performed in was One’s Man Rice in 1983. Dinosaur (1985), choreographed on the eve of THE SYDNEY FRONT’s formation is a prime example of the kind of overlapping collaborative, cross-disciplinary networks that typify Sydney contemporary performance (See Long 2005).

4 Ryan’s corporeal mime background, evident in his remarkable solo performance of the entire life story and crucifixion in mime in THE SYDNEY FRONT’s Passion, (1993) included training with Zora Semberova in Adelaide before he moved to Sydney.

5 “Refractions”, which enjoyed seasons at the Performance Space in Sydney and at the 1980 Adelaide Festival Fringe appears to be ENTR’ACTE’s first full-length work.
RED WEATHER were directed, in at least one project, by Carol Woodrow, and performed, like a number of other groups at the Seymour Centre and the Gap at the Trade Union Club. They received project funding from the Australia Council’s Theatre Board in 1983/84.

In the period, there were two troupes at the MTA, one touring and another creating new repertoire. Government arts funding for the MTA was withdrawn in 1988 and company ceased – its then venue at The Sailors’ Home. Relevant to the history of this study in this genre are SNUFF PUPPETS who concentrate on grotesque large-scale street puppetry formed in 1987 in SPLINTERS INC an outdoor spectacle collective of sculptors/art students, poets, actors and musicians based in Canberra. Splinters experimented with environmental and hybrid forms and toured ‘spectacles’ to Sydney via through the contemporary performance and visual arts networks in the early nineties (See Appendix A)

In her overview of the performance art scene, Anne Marsh does not mention Mullins’ work with Grotowski, although Baylis did speak about this in interview with me. Guthrie (1996) recognises both the activist and Grotowskian in Mullins’ works during the 1970s. James Waite gave an account of his experiences with Grotowski’s Australian workshops in RealTime No. 30, 7.

One work of the PERFORMANCE SYNDICATE toured to schools in South Australia. The author saw Cramphorn’s Tempest in 1972.

For descriptions of the activities of the KISS theatre organization, see Burnett 1982. KISS toured full length works to Australia in 1982 and 1983, Orestesia and Crystal. Both were part of a 24-hour collectively-devised performance. Jean Pierre Voos directed all aspects of the devising and company. He migrated to Australia and settled in Townsville, worked at James Cook University from 1985 and founded a theatre, TROPICLINE in 1987.

Other Australians who worked with KISS and did not return in the 1990’s to establish an ongoing theatre making practice in Australia were Richard Lawton, Jade McCutcheon and Richard Moore. Moore went into documentary filmmaking and producing. John de Feu worked with JP Voos at TROPICLINE as a writer from the mid nineties. Willem Brugman freelanced in Sydney peripatetically through the nineties (KISS 1982)

The Art and Working Life scheme was supported by the Australia Council for the Arts. Allied interstate theatres troupes would include MELBOURNE WORKERS THEATRE, Brisbane’s POPULAR THEATRE TROUPE, South Australia’s TROUPE THEATRE and MAINSTREET THEATRE INN, Mt Gambier, South Australia (See Watts 2001).

See http://railwaystory.com/loc0/loc04.htm. This site has a full description of the evolution and context of the devising of Loco in 1983 at Sydney’s Chullora Railway works.

GROTESQUI MONKEY CHOIR performed at the Performance Space alongside Margaret Cameron in Christopher Barnett’s ULRIKE MEINHOF SINGS (1986). Barnett was pivotal writer in the three first works of ALL OUT ENSEMBLE.

Private correspondence with Baylis, February 2007.

The final work by ALL OUT ENSEMBLE appears to be in 1984 – Archaeologic, directed by Nick Tsoutas, under the aegis of ENTR’ACTE, corporeal mime company in Sydney. This work also demonstrated overlapping group membership with performers including.

Nine were listed as mostly working in Victoria, eight from South Australia, and two each from Queensland, Perth and the Australian Capital Territory (Waterlow 1994).

Only one – THE DRAMA ACTION CENTRE – offered any certification with this training, and this was after 1986.
Brigid Kitchin considered participation in the first Nanjing intensive as pivotal in forming the original group that was Legs on the Wall – conversation with author in November 2003.

Hordacre went on to work in ENTR‘ACTE’s Possessed/Dispossessed (1992). Sue Ellen Kohler also worked in several SYDNEY FRONT projects up to and including Pornography of Performance 1988. Keller founded with Vietnamese performer, Ta Duy Binh – CITYMOON, a Vietnamese-Australian youth theatre in Sydney’s western suburbs in Bankstown. Taking the performance making strategies in dialogue with new untrained performers and audiences, he evolved into devising new works with these young performers.

Australian feminists’ concern with contemporary performance in Sydney is evident in the contributions by Gaten, Stern and Melrose to the debates in the Politics of the Body conference papers (1988; see Miller 1988).

The reference is to Lucian of Samosata’s citation of “the enlightened Lesbonax of Mytilene”. My thanks to Ian Maxwell for this. A full text version of Lucien’s Of Pantomimes which discusses the relations between the pantomimes physicality and spectators in the ancient theatre can be seen on John B. Hare’s website – http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl2/wl219.htm

See Baylis 1987. This article also testaments to the overlapping of collaborators and the influence of Nick Tsoutas and the works of ALL OUT ENSEMBLE, even few of their total body of works were seen in Sydney.

The role of proto-arts centre /venues such as the Stanley Palmer Culture Palace, Art Unit and the Theatre Workshop at Downstairs Seymour, were clearly decisive but their role as ‘godparents’ that spawned the Performance Space has only stood out retrospectively. As example of the mutual assistance this kind of nascent networking produced – Rex Cramphorn created King Stagg in 1977 with ONE EXTRA at the Stanley Palmer Culture Palace. Its public season transferred to the Theatre Workshop’s venue in the Downstairs Theatre at the Seymour Centre.

Two decades later, in the face of ever-tighter funding constraints, a mythologizing nostalgia for the supposed halcyon days of the 1980s overlooks the difficulties confronted by those foundational ensembles. The record does not support such a contention: things were ALWAYS tough.

Gallasch (2001) catalogues contemporaneous innovative performance developments in Melbourne. Most of those involved initiated projects with a group or cast as the leading artist in the role of director, writer or composer. Key figures included Robert Draffin, Jenny Kemp, Barrie Kosky, Douglas Horton, Jean Pierre Mignon and much later David Pledger. Gallasch registers in recognising roles of these individuals that the contrast between the Melbourne and Sydney fields shows the distinctive dynamic that drove innovations in the first wave in Sydney pivoted around its reliance on ensemble devising.

The role of training in generating a shared language for “creating units of image or text”, being the ‘vocabulary’ with which to communicate to audiences is a dynamic recognised by Heddon and Miller in their account of physical theatres in United Kingdom during the early 1980’s (Heddon and Milling 2006, 179)

Morgan promoted his solo work in January 1996 as “the first full length unexpurgated rock’n’roll wrestling match between performance art and standup comedy; Butoh vs. breakdance, mime vs. capoiera, acrobatics vs. slamdancing, issues of contemporary Australian male sexual identity vs. super league.” (TPS Issue #8, 6)

Founding members Lee Wilson and Morgan Lewis (aka HOT BANANA), both went on to train intensively and extensively – Wilson in acrobatics and aerial with ACROBAT and contemporary dance, and Morgan in break dancing, rapping and mc-ing.

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Noelle Janaczewska was artistic co-ordinator of the Politics of Body conference in 1987. She is also a nationally known writer who experiments consistently with the linguistic form writing for performance with a sustained interest in examining cross-cultural, cross-language relations and themes of migration and women’s experiences. Sarah Miller was director of TPS in 1993 and director of PICA from 1994 to 2006.

Elizabeth Grosz launched the 1988 Performance Space program with a similar ambition. Her comments were cited in Janaczewska’s introduction to the published papers of the Politics of the Body conference.

Theory is only one source of or input into the production and reception of art, on par with other influences and sources of inspiration. Art, in turn, provides one of the intellectual sources and critical perspectives from which theory is able to relay itself outside its domain: it is a commentary, critique or displacement of theory. Only if theory is regarded as another ‘creative’ or productive practice, (as) a fabrication of methods and discourses can it be freed of its authoritarian role as blueprint to guide practice before it occurs, or reflect on it after it is created.

If theory is one practice among others, it is able to link with, and learn from, art as co-operative rather than supervisory co-worker (Grosz in Janaczewska 1988, 9).

Simultaneously, an energetic debate was taking place about the formation of a new funding board committee inside the Australia Council of the Arts to support hybridised art practices. The board was to be called the ‘Hybrid Arts Board’, subsequently subsumed under the rubric of New Media arts (see Gallasch 2005).

Alan Schacher’s catalogue entry in the 25 years of performance art indicates a conscious interdisciplinarity in his ambitions and practice. John Gilles, video artist, created Techno/Dumb/Show (1991) with THE SYDNEY FRONT. ET CETERA artists have created a range of events for public art galleries and video artists. ETCETERA, which animated objects and created illusions in a puppetry mode, formed in Adelaide. Its members, Russell Garbutt, Julia Cotton and Carlos Russell continued to work after they moved to Sydney in 1986. Garbutt and Russell regularly work as a duo in art galleries. Russell makes visual arts installations and has worked with Urban Theatre projects in 2001-2 as an actor-devisor. Interestingly, they have also more recently worked in animated films like Michael Bate’s The Projectionist (2003).

Angharrad Wynne-Jones, director of TPS acknowledged during the second wave this cross disciplinary-disscussion sustaining effect of the Performance Space in

“situating itself within a group of overlapping, interconnected communities— which supports us and in turn, are supported by us. But although occasionally overlapping, these communities are distinct, with vastly differing objectives. Open Season ... highlight ... the grass roots community of the Performance Space, an unforced family laughing and bickering, dancing and vomiting, sitting in an open courtyard on cold winter nights because they are truly and unpretentiously interested in what their friends and colleagues are going to perform next (Wynne-Jones 1994, 3).

Sarah Miller, ex-director of the Performance Space commented, in September 2001, at public forum about the nature of arts centres in each capital city:

If we’re going to talk broadly about contemporary spaces and what they can mean, that home-away-from-home or office-that-you-live-in is my experience. Performance Space is one of the most important life experiences that I’ve had and I love PICA but the community that has been around this space since, in my experience, 1982-83 – that’s nearly 20 years – has been of fundamental importance to me.

Art Unit, a transitory arts centre in leased premises in Alexandria, that was an artist initiated endeavour that sought to promote interdisciplinary arts activities on its premises. EAF in Adelaide and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) hosted similar events. Plans and preparations for what was to become the first Museum of Contemporary Art emanated from the Power Institute.

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37 Private correspondence with video artist, John Gilles, November 2006

38 Continuing this thread of local practice, Theatre Kantanka in 1998, staged a site-specific work, Waters of Brightness in Darling Harbour’s Chinese Gardens and again in 2000, Ianna’s Descent in the caverns of the underground car park of Sydney’s central Masonic Centre.

39 From the mid 1970s approximately 40% of all undergraduates of Australian universities attended courses in Sydney and fully a third of these were enrolled in humanities and arts degrees (See analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics figures from 1945 to 1970s and DEETYA in Appendix F). Four of Australia’s largest and most established universities are in metropolitan Sydney and they housed two of the national visual art schools. Of the six universities in Greater Sydney, five had, by 1986, established theatre departments of some kind and two had dance degrees.

40 A few examples of local academic enthusiasms for identifying the theoretical enacts in art works of the period include Christopher Allen’s 1987 reading of ENTR’ACTE’S Ostraka as exemplifying a semiotic political strategy, Helen Grace’s 1988 analysis of the vulnerability of Perfume, a novel by Patrick Susskind.

41 William McClure published sophisticated fictions critical review to solo works by ex-Sydney Front – one of which participated in a Baudrillardian scandal effect around Kellaway’s This Most Wicked Body in 1995 as dialogue between two imagined post-structural philosophers (McClure 1995, 28-31).

42 Spectator Burns’ editors are listed as Christopher Allen, John Bayliss, Sarah Miller and Nicholas Tsoutas (two of whom were directors at different points and had an equal investment in visual arts practice). The editors of the 16 volume of the subsequent journal are listed as Angharrad Wynne-Jones, Jonathan Parsons and also Billy Crawford.

43 See RealTime website - http://www.realtimearts.net/

44 Pollard worked closely with another young then emerging artist, Victoria Spence, who was avidly studying postmodern theory at university at the time. In this work they sought to stage such concepts as ‘seduction’. This was Pollard’s first encounter with ‘theory’: through embodied practice, rather than on the page (interview 2001).

45 “In common sense terms … theatre’s specificity is and remains a most peculiar up-building process or synergic combination- that is, of a greater force than that generated by the sum of all constituent parts taken individually” (Melrose 1994, 7; italics in original).

46 There were times when individual academics were part of the intelligence gathering for individual artists or groups: Peta Tait worked on PARTYLINES’ Appearing in Pieces (1993). Tom Burvill engaged in dialogue with Don Mamouney at SIDETRACK over several years through his board membership, and William McClure participated in some GRAVITY FEED projects from 1999.

47 An earlier draft of this roundtable discussion was sent to me by one of the artists involved. There are slight variations between this and the published one. Where that has occurred I have indicated.

48 One interdisciplinary performance collective that performed in Sydney and had links with the contemporary performance practitioners in Sydney, SPLINTERS were more virulent in their rejection of theory. “We also steadfastly ignore the scribblings of theorists and critics” (SPLINTERS in Waterloo 1994, 51).

49 This intertwining of theoretical concepts and performance dramaturgy had become virtually mundane in local contemporary performance making practice by the time Melbourne playwright Raimondo Cortese was drawn into Country Love, an ensemble devising process led by Mamouney at SIDETRACK in 1997. He referred to just such an illustrative process as one with which he was very uncomfortable. Starting with conceptual provocations was, he claimed, “self-conscious of theme: in a way he considered an overly “conscious interference” in an art making process. He claimed “ideas don’t create good art” and indicated that he was not interested in politics except what he called the politics of everyday life. That Cortese and
four theatre performers from interstate in the newly collected and transitory ensemble of seven for Country Love project had not witnessed this kind of positioning of theoretical ideas about societal, history and cultural processes demonstrates how localised these distinctive dramaturgical practices were to the Sydney scene (Author's rehearsal documentation 1997 and program notes)

50 Six of the seven performers had substantial training in SMAT.

51 Pollard refers to the mass shooting of tourists at Port Arthur in 1996 by Martin Bryant. This traumatic event was publicised worldwide and still is prominent in a public imagination refreshed by intense media attention around the 10th anniversary of this event.

52 From interview with author at Deborah Pollard’s home, February 2001.

53 Sankai Juku also performed in this Mitsui sponsored program in 1988 at the Seymour Centre.

54 Alan Clark, Vincent Crowley, Sue Kennedy and Joel Markham also trained the year before in Toga.

55 I was auditioned and invited to join this first and now only master class for teachers run by Suzuki in Toga.

56 Inspired by Trojan Women, the SIDETRACK ensemble had attempted some invention of a SMAT-like training before Thorne went to Toga.

57 Thorne’s 1996 Burying Mother collaborators – dramaturg Pollard, director McHenry and designer Kellaway – all had extensive Suzuki training experience.

58 There has been some sponsorship of a handful of highly visible companies with a developed international profile, mostly heritage performing arts like ballet and opera with one modern dance, SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY and contemporary aboriginal dance company, BANGARRA.
CHAPTER FOUR
Practices that distinguished contemporary performance in Sydney

This chapter develops the account of the Sydney contemporary performance scene in three sections. First, I will discuss the role of training in developing and sustaining the emergent scene, and in particular including SMAT amongst the broad range of training disciplines available. Using The Sydney Front as a case study, I will discuss the ‘polypraxial’ nature of physical training in this scene, arguing that the impact of SMAT was mediated by existing bodily competencies.

I will then turn to the practices of collaborative dramaturgy in the scene, shaped through and by the experiences of training. I will draw upon a focus group discussion and two case studies to illustrate, in the first, a director-centred model as used at Sidetrack and the second, the more collective process of The Sydney Front.

Finally, I will briefly consider the implications of physical training (and specifically SMAT). and the devising processes based upon collaborative dramaturgy for the production of performance texts.

4.1 Training in the field of contemporary performance theatre in Sydney
In June 2001, at the Body Regimes forum at The Performance Space I conducted an informal survey. At a session attended by about 80 local and currently practicing artists, I asked people to stand up if they felt that they had a significant experience in one, two or three bodily training regimes. None stood up; many did not stand until I reached five. This represents a remarkable degree of eclecticism in training in the scene, and evidences a vivid interest in and willingness to experiment in a diversity of regimes; evidence, too, of a sense of search for training as part of a generative practice in the scene.

While a number of Australian performers traveled overseas to train and perform for extended periods, in the 1980s a lively community of training practice emerged in Sydney. However, a pervasive sense of a community of practice did not visibly distinguish the scene until around 1990, when Sidetrack designed and hosted the first of eight Contemporary Performance Weeks (CPW). This emerging subculture of non-institutionalised training was a continuation of and allied to the existing
independent training occurring around contemporary dance developments, acrobalance physical theatres and the corporeal mime training that were already underway in the local milieu, as described in Chapter Three, above.

The community of performance training of the first wave ensembles and second wave artists contrasted with the situation of ‘jobbing actors’ in mainstage theatres, film and television in Australia. Outside the commercial musical sector, regular weekly or daily training was not thought essential to mainstage productions, except in the context of mounting dance, fight or choral movement segments proposed by writers or directors. When Peter Curtin embarked on the Suzuki Project at Playbox in 1992 he candidly acknowledged that as a ‘mainstage’ actor, he had not engaged in regular or any new kind of performance training in 20 years (Carruthers 1996, 140). And although, in Sydney, The Actors’ Centre in Surry Hills was established in 1986 as a venue for mature professional actors to work out, train with one another and refresh their ‘craft’, this did not prove financially sustainable; the majority of its students are young and uninitiated into theatre, who use it as either a replacement for, or a preparation for entry into, actor programs in public tertiary institutions.¹ In state-subsidised opera, ballet and the few nationally funded contemporary dance companies, individuals are expected to undertake private tuition, or it is incorporated into weekly company class.

By contrast, despite severe restrictions on funding, training was regularly scheduled in rehearsal periods in four of the five first wave ensembles that initiated contemporary performance – Legs on the Wall, Entr’acte, Sidetrack and The Sydney Front – led by artists inside the group. Often that training was SMAT.

In her survey and analysis of theatre movement training, Pippin identified three models of training: those informed by manual literature; those led and shaped by master teachers; and those led by directors (1997, 30-32). None of the trainings conducted inside these ensembles fits Pippin’s categories. Only at Sidetrack and Entr’acte did leaders of training have the imprimatur of a master teacher to conduct classes—respectively Suzuki and Decroux. These trainers the single directorial force in performance works developed by the ensembles.² There was limited literature surrounding their practices but nothing that constituted a training manual. While skilled and accomplished as teachers, these trainers were also
collaborator performer-makers and therefore were more like internal workshop leaders than master teachers. The performer-students were peers; adult performance makers with substantial experience in several body based disciplines they brought to performing. For example, Entr'acte trained in both Decrouxian mime and SMAT during the devising of Ostraka in 1987, while The Front used yoga and SMAT, and Sidetrack incorporated some yoga and callinetics alongside SMAT (see photo document appendix M). Distinctively, all this was taking place outside established hierarchies of production roles in state subsidized theatre, opera or dance companies or academies.

While training is, and was, understood to have useful ensemble-forming effects within a rehearsal context, this potential was also more broadly realised in the local field when enough open opportunities for participation were supported by the infrastructure of several medium sized arts organisations. Sidetrack, Legs on the Wall, Stalker with access to the sheds at Addison Rd, The Performance Space, Entr'acte, Theatre is Moving studios and Omeo, in Newtown, all provided such opportunities, developing a critical mass that generated a network effect: a community of performance training practice. No single organisation or individual sustained this dynamic; rather, a combined effort was required to set it in play to the point where it became a self-organising network. At the plenary of the 1998 National Conference of Australian circus and physical theatre practitioners, I called these communities of practice “the Dispersed Academy of Shed Training” (Taylor 1999). The great enthusiasm and howls of identification these long unacknowledged communities offered in response to this appellation confirmed the existence of this dynamic.

This broad community of training practice generated loose ties, while the specifics of sharing a particular discipline, such as SMAT, inside rehearsals generated closer ties as embodied knowledges and aesthetics were more extensively practiced, and groups become attuned to each other. Any socially self-organising and non-institutional network, especially those invested in innovative practice, are enhanced by having possibilities for both loose and tighter bonds. The looser bonds of peripatetic trainings allowed new and diverse younger artists to participate in the community thus extending contemporary performance’s links to other disciplines of art and community practice. In actor-network theory, this is referred to as “legitimate
peripheral participation” (Lave and Wenger 1991, 29). The interdependence of training with devising and of doing performance with watching enhanced the bonds of mutual assistance that aided the emergence and sustained the early phase of the Sydney scene.

Specialised intensives in a diverse range of performance training were an essential feature of the September CPW microfestivals, held between 1990 and 1997 at Sidetrack’s headquarters at the Addison Road shed precinct in Marrickville. These microfestivals included workshops in improvisational movement, approaches to voice and singing, performance making and designing, and animating objects. Même Thorne led Suzuki training intensives in seven of the eight CPWs in sessions scheduled on the same days as forums between artists and programs of new short works at night, a relationship indicative of the links between making performance and training in the evolving field. The symbiotic relation between generating new live works in an ensemble context, giving audience to raw works, training and debate about conceptual matters concerning this art making, social context and philosophies was encapsulated in the organisation of the CPWs. These were consciously organised synergies that drew artists from around Sydney, interstate and from different genres of performance and art forms to work with local artists and sometimes overseas guests, including, in 1997, Lisa Nelson, pioneer of contact improvisation and Gennadi Bogdanov, master teacher of Meyerhold’s biomechanics. ‘Hanging out’ around the events facilitated dialogue between artists of differing cultural backgrounds, arts experience and ages.

The CPWs were not large affairs – they were smaller than most academic conferences – yet they formed hubs of activity, word-of-mouth networks and provided the opportunity for debates and sharing of ideas that extended their influence beyond their short duration. They made possible the belief that there was an audience outside the machinery of state subsidised theatres, film, television, radio, corporate music and the advertising industry. Alongside the rest of the dispersed shed academy, the CPWs became an audience generator, while resetting notions of what an audience might expect.

From 1990, then, there were a number of opportunities to train in a variety of disciplines: Suzuki, stiling, Min Tanaka’s Body Weather, acro-balance, corporeal
mime, yoga, contemporary release and improvisational dance approaches, to name a few (see Appendix I for chart of Suzukian training in the period). Training took place in the same halls, sheds and sometimes dance studios as rehearsals. These rented or loaned rooms were not purpose-built and mostly had unprung wooden floors. Two continuing non-dance studios, ENTR'ACTE and THEATRE IS MOVING, set up as studios for training, both in corporeal mime (1980-84). Sometimes, amongst the more acrobatically inclined, maneuvers and skills were exchanged and bartered. Some individual artists, including Pollard and Molino, wishing to sustain their own SMAT practice, opened public training opportunities. Freelance teaching also augmented meager incomes – some have sustained an ongoing interest in the art of teaching (Leiser, Pollard and Ryan).

Additionally, there was a range of periodic intensives offered by artists in the field each year in Sydney up to 1997. That performance makers were leading these various types of trainings influenced the character of this community. A kind of freelance auto-didacticism was at work: individual artists, when not training inside rehearsals, chose self-directed paths. Loose networks of people training outside rehearsals contributed to developing and maintaining the contemporary performance theatre field in a variety of ways. People training alongside each other met, and became familiar with other’s approach to performance and embodiment. Outside the hierarchies and goal-directed pressures of rehearsal or the ‘tyranny of projects’, training provided platforms for the exchange of ideas, for taking an engaged and critical interest in other’s work, and contributed to forming points of departure for potential collaboration. Information about activities, venues, ensembles, discussion forums, works-in-progress and performances by local artists also circulated through these networks.

As the works of the second wave of contemporary performers became visible, training was clearly understood as a way of entering the local field. Deborah Pollard, with peers Joel Markham and Katia Molino, ran open Suzuki training in St Stephen’s Hall in Newtown over four years following her return from the teacher intensive in Toga in 1991. She described her classes as big, each of about 25 students, and made up of “young people wanting to get into performance who were on the dole or at uni.” Pollard mounted short performances at the end of each course. Though no ongoing ensembles formed as a result, individuals continued to work as freelance
artists in the field and sustained contacts from within the group. In the case of Body Weather, Tess De Quincey has consciously used intensives as a means to identify future collaborators, and to form ensembles for specific projects.

Undertaking a regime of training was a sign that a participant was invested in highly corporeal theatrical expression and was drawn to the work of the artists who taught. A person within a training group could reasonably anticipate that others had goals, tastes and drives to devise that would be compatible. That people had chosen to be there with local working performers, not as part of institutional curriculum was also a strong indicator these others were allied in their concerns. Clare Grant referred to the commitment of a performer maintaining regular training, as a sign of aesthetic like-mindedness, prior to her founding alongside four others THE SYDNEY FRONT. From her time in KISS, Grant was so “accustomed to becoming more attuned to what my body was doing by doing the same exercises every day” that she continued her regular daily routine alone.

Nigel [Kellaway] had just come back from Japan and was working on his solo work. He came into the rehearsal room as we were leaving at the end of the day and said “I’m going in to bash the floor for two hours” — on his own. I was impressed by the fact that he was doing it on his own. When he said that he was doing it on his own, I thought he was a person who could do that. It sounded like dispelling the unnecessary trash you hold in your body and vanishing all that down in the floor that seemed like a good thing to do. And I thought that was amazing. Just in his little comment I thought quite a lot in that moment (Grant interview 1994).

**Suzuki training in the local community of training practice**

The association between Kellaway’s solo performances, THE SYDNEY FRONT’s works and SMAT, from their inception, within the gestation of the Sydney scene, framed perception of SMAT itself as engendering innovative ways of performing. THE FRONT’s works made in 1985 and 1986 were the first contact local artist-audiences had with Suzukian influences ‘onstage’. SMAT was framed from the mid-1980s as oppositional to, or at least removed from, the thrust of canonical actor training syllabi in state institutions. 6

While Suzuki’s development of his method pre-dated postmodernism in the arts, Kellaway saw a similarity between postmodernist thinking and Suzukian aesthetics that encouraged his interest and its deployment as part of THE FRONT preparatory work. That most of the first wave artists encountered Suzuki’s training via
Kellaway’s teaching deepened this metonymic association. This association drew younger artists to both seek out the training and to devise in the local milieu.

SMAT was particularly conducive to the development of ensembles and to a sense of collective artistic endeavour. Participants in SMAT sessions have extensive opportunities to watch each other perform. Those watching could witness how these others performed, their tenacity, whether they were able to attract and sustain interest of spectators and, to a degree, their history of and outlook on live performance as it bodied forth on the training floor. Formal auditions are in themselves widely dreaded by the majority of performing artists in all genres; SMAT sessions provided proto-audition opportunities for finding collaborators, interlocutors and allies for participants and the artists who led it.⁷

Interestingly, despite their intense SMAT training over a number of years, neither SIDETRACK nor THE FRONT promoted their work by association with that training. Neither group sought to gain credibility by association with Suzuki, as an internationally known avant-garde director nor sought standing for their work as an exemplars of Australian and Japanese intercultural theatre. They did not promote themselves as teachers in establishing their own academies, either. Indeed, across the Sydney scenes, SMAT was understood as being intrinsically braided with making and performing, rather than as a discrete practice. This is in contrast to the later Queensland groups, FRANK and ZEN ZEN ZO, which from 1992 set up and actively promoted training schools.⁸ (It is also in contrast to ENTR’ACTE’s promotion of their association with and training of Decroux technique evident in their early name THE SYDNEY CORPOREAL MIME THEATRE.)

**Past trainings and present practice: polypraxia**

As I suggested above, the training background of contemporary performance makers in Sydney was remarkably diverse, and often included formal experiences in music and dance. Few of the first wave had formal undergraduate degrees in theatre or drama degrees, although this was not the case with the second wave artists who were, as I argued earlier drawn significantly from an audience engaged in undergraduate study in theatre and visual arts. The diversity of background skills and training was a significant factor in mediating the impact of SMAT; although sometimes the embrace of SMAT took the form of a conscious rejection of what were considered
‘conservative’ prior trainings, more frequently, in practice, the engagement with the new model took the form of a complex, corporeal negotiation of existing capacities and the demands of the new training.

The experience of performers in The Sydney Front is exemplary of this. While Front performers carried a range of performance training experiences with them into that ensemble’s formation, from the first days of the troupe, SMAT, led by Kellaway, was the primary means through which they trained. They referred to their SMAT practice as ‘stomping’ rather than by its official name, the Suzuki Method of Actor Training. Kellaway did not change the movement or vocal repertoire he had learnt, and used a number of pedagogic images Suzuki had offered in Toga. The appellation ‘stomping’ drew a clear delineation between The Front’s (and Kellaway’s) enterprise on the one hand and Suzuki’s on the other. Kellaway was quite firm about this positioning. While Kellaway described himself as “not precious and nobody’s acolyte” (1994), he admired Suzuki for his achievement in codifying training.

There’s an aesthetic in Suzuki’s work. If there wasn’t, all he’d be was a teacher. But he’s not a teacher. He’s a theatre director, writer, and maker. He just happens to employ teaching like any good theatre director will do – an extremely efficient director who has got around to codifying his teaching methods and imparts them, but that’s all it is. His method is totally secondary but we are fortunate enough to be given some insight into how he creates theatre. It is not the basis for creating an Australian theatre, but unfortunately, that is how it is seen. A lot of people have the belief that, “If I learn all this, I’m going to be a great actor”, or that, “I’m going to make great theatre, just as good as Suzuki”. What that means is they don’t have a f*****g idea in their head (Kellaway interview 1994).

Kellaway saw training as encoding the desires of directors in micro-structural detail. As a performer who also directed his own and others works, Kellaway took up a similar position in relation to the kata and the tenets of theatricality he perceived as permeating all training methods. Kellaway implies that, in understanding how SMAT might be provocative for performance making, a practitioner needs to also have developed an autonomous vision about creating new theatre prior. Kellaway studied in Toga in 1984 alongside established directors from CIRT and other European theatres. It supports a view that SMAT’s catalytic effects in the local milieu were precipitated through encounters with mid-career artists beyond Suzuki’s enterprise. Mature performers need to be confident in and trust values embedded in microstructures of practice beyond conscious cognition before they open themselves to sustained immersion in training that is required for knowledge to be transmitted in
practice. If theatrical values were not so inscribed in training regimes they could not be reservoirs of agentive potential and creativity. If creativity was thought to reside solely in the conceptual domain, this kind of selectivity would not be prompted. It is as if Kellaway considers training regimes a channel by which these directors collaborate with later practitioners in practice.

He taught me things that I had always thought were possible but didn’t know how to do. He showed me that there was particular technique for doing the kind of things I wanted to do. I wasn’t interested in Suzuki’s work per se but rather the craft of the actor, and Suzuki had this set of exercises. I’d never seen such a simple set of exercises which seemed to teach the actor everything they need to know to walk on stage and to sustain themselves on stage. I discovered that the brain was a fairly flawed instrument and that the body was more reliable. It was total denial of head acting. We’d all seen this before but I had never seen a technique – it was a method, a codified method. It was a much more articulate method then even Grotowski’s. Grotowski had things but they were so vague – primarily because Grotowski was so strongly in the lineage of Stanislavski which you had to embrace as well. Suzuki’s work denied that school totally (Kellaway 1994a, 6).

Others in The Front considered their reception of Suzuki’s codifications filtered through “Nigel’s skeptical brain” (Baylis interview 1996). They also thought he had changed the kata and systematicity of the regime but he did not change the forms of the kata. They could have said with equal validity their stomping was filtered as much by Kellaway’s extensive dance skills and musicianship as by his cognitive attitude. By extension, they and I acknowledge each person’s reception retranslates systemic practices without referring to discourses of authenticity.

The desire to keep at arm’s length from the worldview of a director like Grotowski or Suzuki who designed a training regime is echoed in Baylis’s comments about the relation between his work as a theatre artist and theory:

Misunderstandings of theory ... can be useful ... I practice misunderstanding a lot. I’ve never had the master/pupil relationship like you two. Deb, you’ve been in the presence of Suzuki. Tess, you’ve been in the presence of Tanaka. Other friends have been with Pina Bausch. Mike Mullins was with Grotowski ... I’ve got everything second hand because I was scared such powerful master-figures would overwhelm me ... I’ve always avoided them because I like to get things second-hand and to misunderstand them a little bit so I don’t get this huge Philosophy of the World (Baylis in Eckersall 2001, 160).

After her experiences with a highly demanding auteurish director and trainer in KISS, Grant was clearly disinterested in having her work and training subsumed inside these kinds of relations. Chris Ryan, against his own eclectic background in physical performance techniques (Polish mime and Suzuki), subsequently located the problem as inherent in codifications of any training repertoire.
Now, I’m looking at any technique and trying to put it onto the body. While Feldenkrais isn’t the be all and end all, it does offer a way of experimenting with different parts of your body in terms of the whole. It allows flexibility after a while in terms of experimenting, whereas I think that techniques like Suzuki’s don’t. Suzuki doesn’t propose you find it. It goes, “Do it. Just do it and find out” (Ryan interview 2001).

Some artists in other ensembles framed engaging in new trainings as undertaking ‘physical research’ and sought unsuccessfully to gain funding to support mid-career artists to do so. Rachel Swain, a director with STALKER and MARRUGEKU was one who suggested training is not to be taken for granted but that encounters with regimes need to be examined. Undertaking training as research shifted positivistic assumptions of conditioning a person by fitting them out with techniques, ‘just skills’ and ‘know how’ through asserting knowledge is revealed through what bodies do and can do. ‘Know how’ is not seen as opposed to knowing why or knowing about something. The entrée phase when surrendering to the impacts of training vividly highlights differences between a performer’s current embodied knowledges, tacitly held values, beliefs, desires and perceptions inculcated in previous training and collaborative endeavours. Thus training practice can interrogate these horizons as well. As performer-makers adapt to the structures of novel regimes their current praxial paradigms are changed. The orders of the novel regimes also mutate as they are drawn into service of new artistic and cultural imperatives during devising, even in anticipating the goals of immanent devising. To reduce the eclecticism of training in the field as simply a manifestation of postmodern privilege of the ‘first world’ artists picking, like customers, any regime off a shelf is to misrecognise a process for a retailed product. In effect this perspective chooses to turn away from regimes as complex sets of cultural practices, and towards simplified stereotyping.

How the community of practice around training related symbiotically to innovative developments in contemporary performance has shifted. As signs of this shift, by 1997, regular training in SMAT was not available (CPW #8 was the last), the studios of ENTR’ACTE and THEATRE IS MOVING had closed, regular weekly or monthly workshops were not being hosted by either ONE EXTRA or The Performance Space. At the time of writing there are few open opportunities for performers, mid-career or emerging to train in Sydney beyond the academies.
A sample Suzuki Method of Actor Training (SMAT) session
This section describes a sample training session in the Suzuki Method taken from early documentation of my experiences in Toga and observation of three teachers in Sydney from circa 1991, the most active phase of the first wave of contemporary performance. This gives background to the analysis of its adaptation in devising by local artists charted in Chapters 5 and 6. I have interpolated published statements from noh practitioners where these captured tacit aspects of practice SMAT teachers did not explain.¹¹

The sides of a rectangular training stage are established on the floor of the space. These remain the parameters throughout training. One side is designated ‘The Front’. As in noh, training practice itself is performance. Having demonstrated the movements of each discipline at the start of the intensive, the teacher leads from The Front sitting amongst the half of the group who are spectators until their turn on the floor. Places where kata begin and end, where practitioners are and spacing in relation to each other are all proscribed. The kata repertoire repeated through out an intensive is relatively set with variations added to increase difficulty and a few new kata added later.¹² Like the spatial parameters, the recorded soundtracks used remained the same from session to session establishing their temporal equivalents. Socks of some description must be worn to facilitate sliding.¹³ Our morning sessions are two hours with a second session each afternoon. To give a sense of occasion, learning experience and recurring principles, I represent the repertoire of a session including the classic opening figure, nine walks, Statues, Slow Tentakaten and Sankyo. I’ve excluded detailed description of marching as most of the principles are embedded in the other kata and this is not a manual.¹⁴ Goto separating the disciplines into those directed towards control or strength but each kata demands both.

1. The basic stomp – Ashibumi
This is the fundamental walking action.¹⁵ The preparation position is feet parallel, both knees bent slightly tilted forward from the hips, arms held slightly away from the sides, with hands held in a loose open fist as if shaped around a staff. The gaze is held directly ahead with the eyes focussed as distant as the horizon. With this gaze that occurs in noh, actor Nomura Shirō comments “space is grasped as a whole” (Shirō in Sakaba-Berberich 1984: 209).¹⁶ The lifted foot is stomped firmly into the ground slightly ahead of the plum line of the centre of gravity. All weight transfers
instantly over this foot to allow the other knee to be lifted without adjustment disturbing the upper body held in stillness. The whole surface of the foot meets the ground to distribute the force. Each stomp is to be in precise unison with all others in the room. Early in training while lifting the knee, the stomp is interrupted and held. The teacher does this to reinforce that balance over the supporting bent leg can be sustained and stopped at any time. In Laban analysis terms, a high degree of control over the progression of movement is emphasised. Like all locomotion, the height of the pelvis from the floor is to remain constant. Each stomp is also a stop or stillness. The aim is to clearly articulate each stomp. The relation between moving and stillness is a noh principle articulated by Konparu.

The basis of noh dance relies in stopping each movement just at the moment when the muscles are tensed ... we must conclude here that the times of action in noh exist for the sake of the times of stillness (Konparu 1983, 216).

The performer seeks to keep any shuddering from each forceful stomp out of the upper body. “Chinden saseru” was Shirō’s term for this shock absorption (1984, 209). Suzuki acknowledged this was commensurate with the suppression of action, a holding back of desire or willed intent to move or tame or tameru in traditional practices of noh (Brandon 1978).

Each person has to discover how to negotiate this without coaching. The suddenness of the foot contact with the floor reminds and tests a body’s entire relationship with gravity each time. There are no usual walking features, no free flow of weight, sway or twisting to be visible. How a performer positions any inner imagery, if any at all, is up to them. Teachers do not discuss or offer guides for negotiating thought or emotion. This is also consistent with pedagogic relations and acting in noh.

At every level of training, teaching concentrates on form, even though the art of a performer is judged by his expressive intensity ... the young performer is expected to make it his own and fill it with meaning. This process is regarded as too personal, too individualised to teach overtly (Bethe and Brazell 1990, 174).

Equally ‘self-conscious manipulation’ of expressivity is frowned on in SMAT.

2. Three minute stomping with shakuhachi
This is the classic start to each session. Not framed as ‘warm up’, a performer is assumed ‘on’ from the start. Strident Japanese orchestral music sets the three-minute duration and pace. Gaze is ahead. Performers stomp along self-chosen linear

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pathways without fading in attack, clarity of form, concentration, keeping upper body still, contained but loose. This tests endurance. Along the upstage edge on the final note, all fall to the floor to lie in complete stillness. The heart pumps fast and hard. The impulse to relax is great but not to be succumbed to. As if drawn by the sound of shakuhachi flute from lying, performers rise at their own impulse, travel downstage to THE FRONT edge towards a distant focal point in a linear track smoothly in their own style while containing the energy built up, arriving in unison precisely on the last sound. In Toga it was suggested that, in the shakuhachi phase, we should seek not to disturb the molecules of air as we walked.

Learning walks
Half the training group performs all the walks while the other half watches. Crossing stage from stage right to left in a straight file, they keep equidistant from each other as they travel. Gaze is directly ahead and distant. All walks are performed in succession. Between each style of walking, people cross back upstage to travel from the same side. The music sets the pace. Each beat is understood to mark a discreet interval of time in between. Earlier in training, it is allegro moderato and walks are performed forwards. Later, faster music dictates shorter intervals, all walks are performed backwards and self-chosen. Variations demand more outward proprioceptive awareness to support group clarity and maintain pathways perpendicular to the walls. Going backwards demands more awareness of actors behind to maintain equidistance. You have to sense, as you cannot look.

3. With toes pointed inwards – Uchimata
The same basic starting position, posture, gaze and other conditions as in the basic stomp are used. Hands are together, backs resting on the back of the hips. Toes and knees turned in, the entire leg is swung, sliding in contact with the floor in an arc from behind the supporting leg directly to the front and stopped. Again the whole body weight transfers to THE FRONT foot instantaneously as it is stopped. Twisting or tilting the torso was in order to avoid the collision of knees is suppressed. Teachers in Toga referred to this as the classic onnagata walk of kabuki.

4. On the inside edges of the feet – Sotomata
Hands remain resting on the back of the hips and knees stay together. Weight is taken along the inside blade of each foot. The other foot swings vertically out high
enough to the side for the soles to be seen. This measures the height of the swing. Teachers referred to this walk as one used by kabuki actors.

5. On the outside edges of the foot – Waniashi
Arms return to the basic stomp posture. To balance on the outer blades of each foot parallel when weight is born in stillness, the knees splay outwards about 45 degrees from the centre line. In each step the feet describes an arc underneath the hips like peddling a bike.

6. On the balls of the feet – Tsumasaki
The centre of gravity is lifted as high as possible away from the floor with legs extended but not ‘locked’ – to absorb the jolt of each step so as not to disturb the upper body’s stillness or smooth progression. While there is a momentary stop on the ball of each foot for the performer, this one often looks more like gliding, when successful.

7. Walking sideways sliding the feet – Yokoaruki No. 1
Facing front to audience, in the preparation position, the leading left foot traces an arc on the floor sliding out sideways (feet parallel). The whole body weight is taken over the left foot as the lunge instantaneously stops, no wider than the trailing leg allows. The trailing leg reiterates the arc to bring the feet together. Like in all walks, the quicker the foot completes its passage, the longer and clearer the stillness. The intentionality to travel sideways is maintained. Shirō coached for noh, “If one is taking six steps, one should imagine taking ten steps”, a process described as kimochi o mae ni nuku or “projecting one’s mind and releasing it into space beyond you” (Shirō in Sakaba-Berberich 1984, 212). This matches my understanding of all SMAT locomotion.

8. Sideways stomp – Yokoaruki No. 2
The same preparation position is taken, stage right, facing the audience. Leading left foot is picked up to where the thigh is parallel to floor. The stomp is slightly diagonally forward to the side. The right footstomps parallel, slightly behind, close to the leading foot.
9. Sideways wide lunging stomp
Preparation has the trunk facing the audience with head turned over leading shoulder facing along line to be travelled. Feet and knees turned out from the hip, knees bent and heels together. Lifted leading left leg stomps into the floor and directly under where the pelvis has lunged, translating body weight sideways until trailing leg is straight, without dragging the foot. The trailing foot stomps close, feet turned out heels together.

10. Sliding walk – Suriashi
Facing across the stage a fast sliding walk without jolts is performed keeping the whole foot, except the toes, in contact with the floor. Weight translates continuously smoothly forward without torsions or swinging. This challenges upper body stillness as the forward momentum tends to relay twists up through the body. This is the classic sliding walk of noh and kabuki.19

11. Shikko or shuffling duckwalk
Starting in deep squat, each leg articulates from the hips tiny smooth steps slid on the balls of the feet. Hands held aloft ahead of the face, palms up as if carrying something that needs to remain steady. In these last two the torso weight is tilted forward with the legs working continuously to keep upper body still.20

After all walks are performed by the first group, the taped music is re-cued, and the audience group swap and become performers. Sometimes a performer may remain on the floor to repeat the sequence. This decision is silently assumed to be – and respected as a sign that this person is seeking to challenge the limits of their own endurance and tenacity. At the end of the second group’s walking when their breath, aerobic and anaerobic capacities are taxed they immediately go on to Standing Statues, not swapped with the other audience group. This is tacitly considered an opportunity to test your limits to sustain such intense performance.

12. Standing Statues
The following is Goto’s description from his training intensive experience, led mostly by Suzuki.

Actors pose like standing statues. Three basic positions are involved: rest, high and low. In the rest position, actors squat with the buttocks resting between the feet, the head down, and
the arms stretched ... The discipline starts with actors standing in a natural position with the feet apart. Suzuki commands in English, “High!” and strikes the floor. Actors immediately take standing-style statue poses, standing on the toes with the knees stretched and with any hand poses they wish. Actors remain still. “Ya!” yells Suzuki and thumps. Performers drop to the rest position. “Low!” is yelled and the floor struck. They quickly stand on the toes, taking various poses of low-standing statues. On the next command, they drop to the rest position. Suzuki’s tempo and order are irregular (except the rest position always follows each standing statue). Actors do not know what comes next. Quick reflexes are essential (Goto 1988, 212).

A teacher may call “Text!” any time during a Statue. Without disturbing the statue, performers speak, firmly with clear sharp articulation a short speech in precise unison, using three breaths.

(breath) Oh splendour of sunburst, breaking forth this day, whereon I lay my hands on Helen my wife (breath). And yet it is not some much as men think for the woman’s sake I came to Troy (breath), but against that guest, proved treacherous who, like a robber, carried that woman from my house (documentation of author’s training in Toga in 1991).

Singing in unison translated sentimental sixties Japanese pop songs could also be demanded. Harmonious pitching, tone or meaningful rendition is not prioritised. Singing strongly and in unison matters. At least 15 to 20 Statues are enacted each set. I was urged not to repeat a Statue, to experiment with placement of my centre of gravity in relation to my feet, not to pull faces, and to refocus my eyes each time. A highly structured improvisation takes place. Mental agility is as demanded of as physical placement. Each Statue was to be an entirely new ‘scene’, not one still sequence in a narrative. Shifting the whole body out of the squat while balancing on the balls of unshifting feet demands enormous ballistic strength. The force and volume of the irregularly timed thumps are designed to move the performer. I could feel the vibrations hit my skin and through the floor. Intentional preplanning is interrupted. Automatic patterns surface in awareness early available for scrutiny and change. A sequence of fast Statues without the ‘rest’ between was added after gaining some ability. Mental ‘leaps’ are further tested without the rests. The rest position is not a passive sink. Alert, slightly suspended a performer waits for the next ‘thwack’ sound. This preparedness is THE most frequent action in the entire regime. It is making oneself available for the break into instantaneous fiction.

Similar to walking, but in a different kinaesthetic pattern, Statues enacts the most extreme and pronounced ‘moving for the purpose of stillness’. Again stillness is enacted at the point of most exertion in each statue. Shiro indicates this is the key way bodily energy is negociated inside noh. Any trembling, tensions, and breath movement are highlighted against a background of held stillness, for both performers
and audiences. Seeking to still breathing motion by holding, does not support speaking. No breath or voice instruction is offered. Possessing at least a competitive athlete’s level of aerobic fitness is an effective fundamental condition for reducing breath crises in performance.

13. Sitting Statues

Sitting on the stage floor, balancing on the tail or hips becomes the base of support with the feet lifted off. Actors compose themselves on the basis of their sense of contact with the ground. Three symmetrical positions are taught: legs tucked into chest, legs straight forward and together and straight legs wide apart. This is also a phase of freestyle choices. All other temporal constraints and vocal demands are the same as in Standing Statues. Tensions and trembling are prompted due to engagement of abdominals for long periods, making it harder to keep shoulders, face and throat soft and free of excessive tension with windpipe open for speech. Feet return to the ground to rest.

14. Slow Tentakaten – slow walking

The name is onomatopoeic of Perez Prado’s jazz Voodoo Suite, slowed to half its original pace, that accompanies. Features of the music cue changes – at the beginning, midway turn around point and ending. Half the performing group stands along either edge of the stage facing across, aligned to pass between each other. As the music begins, each actor forms into a still pose. Sustaining this pose, performers walk smoothly and directly across the stage before turning 180° downstage at the precise point in the soundtrack. During the turn a new stillness is evolved from shifting the centre of gravity, then carried back to where you began, arriving precisely on cue. All accentuated beats, slight accelerations, decelerations and pauses are suppressed. Whatever distance the pelvis is from the floor at the start of each crossing is to be maintained. No style of walking is proscribed. No attention is to be drawn to the feet. Being familiar with this music, the given durations provide extended intervals for gauging and practicing ma, or “sensitivity to shifting temporal and spatial relationships” according to Carruthers (2004, 85).22 Eyes are focussed far away again. It is tacitly understood that whatever inner image is ‘seen’ is private business. Concentration is sustained until a teacher declares Tentakaten over. When a new pose evolves in the turn, it is dissociated – not a next step in a narrative. In Toga we were urged to cross as if the scenery or world was shifting while we were still.
This principle was applied to the turn – as if the audience were being turned, not us turning ourselves. Similarly to walks, but more pronounced, is the sense of opening individuals’ awareness to group inhabitation of a shared field of shifting spatiotemporal relations. The stillness translates as an internal resistance continuously applied. Practitioners call it ‘putting on the brakes’ after Suzuki’s own metaphor of actor as a 747 jet pointed down a runway, engine at full throttle with the brakes on. Temporally, Tentakaten is the opposite of instantaneous stops of Statues and stomping.

More advanced variations of Tentaketen, practiced both in Japan and Australia, involve travelling backwards, sideways, carrying objects, dragging another’s body weight and extending the distance and the duration – I’ve heard of this exercise taking as long as 17 minutes. A fusion of Statues and Tentaketen called ‘Moving Statues’ interpolates episodes of Statues into the progression across the stage. Out of the SMAI’s repertoire Statues and Slow Tentakaten were always included in Sydney sessions.

15. Sankyo-Echigo ... or fragments of marching disciplines
This is a short figure combining single stomps, slow deep squatting, unison ensemble singing, calling Japanese numbers and passages of spoken text, calibrated with sudden and then sustained actions. Often placed at the ends of other figures to provide another opportunity to cultivate endurance and power of voice. In the preparation posture, a knee is lifted and halted in the air (ichi), stomps in place (ni), then slides forward transferring weight into a forward lunge (san) and the other leg is stomped under the newly placed centre of gravity (shi) with feet turned out. On the teacher’s signal a slow descent into a full squat begins while speaking the known text. After an interval decided by the teacher the ensemble begins an ascent while singing a Japanese pop song or speak the text at full throttle in unison. Sometimes this is staged facing a partner in a competition to see how slowly unbroken the concentration of each was in the descent and synchronised in the sudden moves. A fierce competition reliant on mutual dependence makes this variation, called “Duelling” an ambiguous experience of pacing and competing with each other.

A formal greeting ends the session. A teacher might offer time for brief discussion with the group at the end. Individual students are not spoken to during training or
drawn aside afterwards. Individual feedback is either through manual adjustment during training or may be offered if an individual seeks it outside the session. Teachers traditionally avoid entering into extensive verbal feedback in public.

From the details of a training session, I will now outline the most common ways of organising devising in Sydney’s contemporary performance that distinguished the genre from other non-mainstream theatre innovations in other Australian capital cities. The way of organising ensemble performance making to create new works in Sydney was in contrast to Suzuki’s ways of initiating and controlling performance making that Suzuki deployed in his training regime in Japan in certain aspects. And yet echo aspects of the early Waseda Little Theatre’s mode of devising – the phase of Suzuki’s practice when the training regime was first articulated and consolidated.

**Collaborative dramaturgy in the Sydney scene**

The term ‘collaborative dramaturgy’ captures the dispersal of the authorial relations and reconstituted divisions of creative labour that arose amongst both those with theatrical backgrounds, and artists from diverse art forms, working in interdisciplinary clusters.²⁴

While many mainstage actors and directors desire to work in ensembles, the expense of maintaining an ongoing troupe can rarely be sustained in the Australian arts funding environment (Armfield and Rush 1999). This stands in contrast to the examples of long-standing American, European and British ensembles, such as The Wooster Group (USA), Kantor’s Crichot 2 (Poland). or more recently, Forced Entertainment (UK). – groups that have collaboratively worked for 20 years. Despite limited resources or prospects of sustaining their ventures, contemporary performance makers in Sydney sought to establish ensembles in the mid 1980s ²⁵. Their awareness of financial constraints inflected the nature of their collaborations. As one practitioner put it: “where people aren’t paid or not being paid much, they have got to have input. It is about keeping them there and keeping that commitment” (focus group discussion 1997).

In 1997 I brought together a focus group of local contemporary performance artists (only one of whom had a Suzukian background), to discuss their ensemble devising practices. The participants had a free ranging discussion about processes of
collaboration. I spoke only to seek clarification of repeated terms, priorities or references. I have not used their names, and told them I would not to encourage them to speak openly, especially about their appraisal of works by others in the local field. I brought their thoughts into dialogue with published reflections on dramaturgy from expert artist-commentators and my rehearsal observations.26

Making it on the floor
For the practitioners, the terms ‘working it out on the floor’, ‘making a work in the studio’, or ‘putting ideas onto the floor’ are how they described their collaborative ensemble devising methods. The term ‘on the floor’ literally referred to the floor of a shed, studio, hall or hut secured for rehearsal. These rooms were, for the most part, very similar in scale to performance venues (apart from those works performed outdoors): small venues, with audience capacity of around 120, ‘human’ in scale, and generally not requiring technological augmentation of voice or visual images. The material conditions of rehearsal, then, closely corresponded to those of performance venues. Collaborating artists could be confident that decisions made in rehearsal, on the basis of heightened and finely attuned kinesthetic senses of space and time, would be transferable to the time-space of public performance. This floor was the site of the semiotic labour of performance making and was where the dramaturgy was conducted, in both transitory and relatively stable ensembles, by the performer-makers themselves. For the makers, this working method distinguished their kind of theatre; for some, the final form of the work could only be as good as the collaborative process itself.

‘Working it out on the floor’ implied that the creation and structuring of a work relied on the performers as the main creative agents, using their own bodies and voices from the first moment of devising. Various staging systems – lighting, objects, costuming and sound – were introduced once performance making was underway. The capacity to put material into a proto-performance trial, and to then adapt, edit, cut or make judgements on their shared action on the floor was essential.

While groups of performer-makers became familiar with each other’s approaches – shared training played an important role in this – each project’s broad concerns were unique. Dramaturgy had to be worked out ‘on the floor’ each time: not only content and themes but, also aspects of rehearsal organization: how to ‘be’ on and use this
floor with each other was constructed at the same time. In the mid 1980s there was no established methodology or practical device for organising how participating artists worked together. Mira Rafalowicz, dramaturg with Joseph Chaikin and Gerardjan Rijnders, commented on new modes of dramaturgy evolving, around this time in Europe:

Dramaturgy, on its own, does not exist. What is a dramaturge without a production? Every performance, every project, is a new adventure without rules, never before experienced or lived through. The rules are thought up in the course of the working process (Rafalowicz 1994, 134).

While not supplanting the uniqueness of each project’s themes and goals, it became apparent in the focus group discussion (1997) that, as members of ensembles became accustomed to working with each other and as networks of collaborating artists overlapped, recurring production and societal conditions confronting participants prompted some practical regularities in how groups approached devising.

Two types of production relationships can be discerned in the local field history, both understood as collaborative. The key distinction involved the presence or otherwise of a director, although the permutations of working relations were diverse. Sometimes an artist was identified, inside a group, as a dramaturg, rather than a director, for a particular project. The Sydney Front, for example, did not have a designated individual who took on the full-time role of director, while SIDETRACK had a non-performer director for most projects, who brought broad concepts to the group as starting points. For All of Me (1993) – and still, six international tours later, in the company’s repertoire – members of LEGS ON THE WALL developed the core concept, based on their own interests, and then solicited a director and a writer to work with them. OPEN CITY’s core artists discussed their interests with clusters of diverse artists who they brought together, at various points, developing a work over a longer time frame. Keith Gallasch, of OPEN CITY, and John Baylis from The Sydney Front, both took on the designated title of dramaturg when working with other groups.

Created ‘on the floor’, these works did not rely on single whole texts as starting points. While spoken texts were regularly written by performers, sometimes in collaboration with writers, these were understood as just one set of materials
amongst others. The degree to which these works relied upon embodiment in devising is demonstrated in the 1999 publication of a range of texts derived from performances: it would be next to impossible to remount any of the performances using these texts alone (see Allen and Pearlman 1999).

All the artists in the focus group had experienced the tension and pains of unsuccessful collaborative processes, and were able to diagnose what had been missing or ill conceived. In turn, these experiences focussed their minds and were used to articulate what mattered and the essential principles for collaboration process. They observed that prior to the focus group experience, they had not explicitly shared such reflections with other artists.

In the next section, I will offer an overview of key processes in their collaborative dramaturgy, based upon discussions with the focus group, before using two case studies—SIDEHARROW and THE SYDNEY FRONT—to illustrate those aspects in the context of a devising/rehearsal process.

Starting points
A unifying sense of purpose, or shared ‘starting points to jump off from’, were understood to be essential to the success of any collaboration by all. Interestingly, an established meaning, perspective or ‘message’ as a goal for a final work was not considered essential. Each collaborative project, especially ones with a new group, were thought risky and required participants to gamble—to operate with ‘faith’ and a confidence in surrendering to mutual mediation of the differing skills, perspectives and investments that constituted their collectivity. With few complete working models available to guide the organisation of their actions, each accepted collaboration was intrinsically a matter of trial and error, testing peoples’ capacity to work together, as initial goals, themes or concepts were investigated in performative action. It was assumed that meaning(s). would emerge from the process, rather than the process ‘solving’ the problem of communicating an existing meaning. Expectations derived from experience in conventional theatre or film rehearsals about divisions of labour and assumptions about how live performance makes meaning provided limited guidance. Indeed, such expectations, when they did exist, were likely to lead to conflict. Further, the time constraints imposed by limited financial resources and the individual availability of artists could also lead to
conflict: the four to six weeks of rehearsal that was generally possible was not long enough for the successful negotiation of mismatched expectations and assumptions. Artist Z revealed:

People don’t know what their agendas are very often. Even when you articulate very clearly what you think your agenda is it changes in response to actually doing the work. The work itself makes people change their agendas. A classic example is on ‘LLLLL’. One of the writers wanted to write ‘physically’. They kept on coming up with all these monologues. We went ‘Well if we are going to write physically, let’s try it on the floor’. We tried all these different strategies but the writer kept needing to write film scripts and yet her agenda was to write a piece of physical performance (focus group transcription 1997).

The writer in question did not, apparently, understand that the aesthetic imperatives embedded in their own writing style and processes were incompatible with either her own desires or the overall aim of the project. Her habitual expectations about writing for one type of relation between actors and audiences remained invisible, preventing her recognising difficulties the corporeally-astute actors were having as they attempted to perform her writing on the floor. Z continues:

We asked her to write something and we didn’t know that she didn’t have the skills until she brought it back into rehearsal and thought that she had done it and she hadn’t … Ultimately it was not good for this writer and wasn’t good for the rest of us (ibid).

Z acknowledged that such a gap existed in her own practices as a writer/director.

If I have a desire to do something but don’t actually have the skill to fulfil it, I hope someone in the team has got that skill. And if they don’t, I have to dump that desire (ibid).

Z was open to not being the sole author shaping meanings, actively trusting in, while at the same time coolly evaluating the potential of the ensemble. Evidently, the experience of successful prior collaborations informed a willingness to make radical decisions and leaps, including those of abandoning goals.

Artist X gave a contrasting example of a high degree of unspoken synchronicity. He was brought in, as a director, to collaborate with a physical theatre performer who needed to step out of directing his/her own solo work. Without any prior discussion, a lighting artist created vivid and imaginative states.

Because we had worked together before and had a language he gave me something I hadn’t consciously thought about ‘til I saw it. This isn’t mystical or extra sensory. Because I hadn’t specified and left it up to him, he produced a beautiful image. And that’s about collaboration, about leaving space. If I had specified I would have got something completely different.
X inferred that his own decision would have been inferior to the exercise of the lighting artist’s aesthetic judgement and skill. Again the word ‘language’ denotes a tacit, shared understanding. That it remained tacit seemed a necessary condition for the unimpeded flow of the creative process: the assumed familiarity supported trust in each other’s decisions in response to the performer’s material to shape a dominant visual code for the whole mise en scène.

In both examples, the willingness to trust collaborators’ actions on the rehearsal floor – actions that may change the nature of a whole work – points to a need to reconceptualise relations between self and others. In particular, the relation between conscious pre-planning and on-the-floor rehearsal action contrasts with usual ways actions are understood to arise out individuals’ conscious goals. Conscious decision making alone, on this paradigm, cannot be considered the sole font of creative action. Instead, creativity involves an‘up-building’: a chain of decision-making around events on the floor that is, in essence, a profoundly social semiotic process.

Profusion, multiplicity and confusion
Drawing upon his experiences as a director of devised work, X raised ideas around time pressures in rehearsals, of confusions and tensions. He claimed that even in the face of a profusion of ideas and divergent trajectories on the floor, he avoided dictating solutions. His example sparked responses from others.

X: In me openly saying (to a performer – we (those directing) don’t know and we are trying things out. It is the opposite of being completely pedantic and rational. It is letting go and allowing solutions to arrive on the floor. Afterwards we go “I should have thought of that’’. Still it can be good to have someone in a decision-making role, even if it is co-direction. Especially when you have to deal with the lighting rig. The dialogue stops for a while.

Z: That there are too many opinions happening happens all the time.

Y: We need a starting point to jump off from but the practical thing is you don’t know what it is until you know what it looks like.

Z: You figure out what something is by doing the work. When I think of my own writing, when I try to figure out what the structure of the piece is going to be, it is a useless exercise most of the time because it is in the doing. Planning of the work needs to stop and the doing of the work needs to begin because you are not getting anywhere continuing with the planning.

X: Sometimes it is useless to hold on to that original plan. That becomes a flexible thing.

Z: Sometimes you convert it with that plan. There are lots of times in collaborative work where a group talks, talks and talks looking for the answer in the talk. It is actually in the doing that it is possible you’ll find an answer. More possible than in talking beyond a certain point (ibid).
Several principles about this kind of dramaturgy are reiterated: the necessity of tacking back and forth between conscious decisions and surrendering to what is revealed in action; that all participants are considered active artists rather than interpreters of any single other’s vision; that confusion is inevitable at some points; and that putting performance materials onto the floor facilitates growth and clarification of an ensemble’s shared vision.

Eugenio Barba (2000) summarises the value of embracing the turbulence of the inherent complexities and confusions in collaborative devising by offering an insight into the relation between conscious intent and immersing oneself in the aleotoric dimensions of creative development:

During rehearsals, the technique of disorientation consists in giving space to a multiplicity of trends, narratives and directions without bending them, right from the start, beneath the yoke of our choices and intentions. We must follow different tracks, diverging themes, and unconnected associations contemporaneously, and make sure that the stories pursued by the individual actors do not correspond to those of the director and the other actors.

It is an attitude that stimulates and generates a contiguity of material, prospects and proposals. It is a means of trying out a labyrinthine path between chaos and cosmos, with sudden swerves, paralyzing stops, and unexpected solutions. It is the growth of a profusion that for a long time appears to obscure the explanatory and narrative clarity in the course of the process (Barba 2000, 59; italics in original).

Barba’s practice diverged from that of the Sydney artists in several significant ways: he wished to create overarching narratives in his works, and enjoyed the luxury of extended rehearsal times; nor did the Sydney locals use the term ‘actor’ to describe themselves. However, his analysis resembles the processes of local artists ‘working it out on the floor’. The local artists, however, did not so much seek confusion by a ‘technique’ of disorientation; rather the inevitable multiplicity of perspectives in collaboration generated a disorienting flux. The local approach resembles more closely what Norman Frisch, dramaturg with the WOOSTER GROUP described as being

drawn to something which affirms the randomness, and seeks an organisation of the chaos rather than an organisation to replace it ... [in] ... creative processes of collaging material and of revealing the hidden internal structures which underlie the more overt structure and character of certain works of art or forms of cultural expression (Frisch 1994, 172-4).

The phases of confusion and multiple trajectories required that artists distanced themselves from material in order to further dramaturgical development of a work:
Taking the problems of devising personally seemed to be perceived as an obstacle to flow and progress.

Barba refers to experiencing a point in devising,

where a phenomenon occurs which seems strange when we speak of it, but is a sign that the work is on the right course. It is as though the work no longer belongs to us but starts to speak with its own autonomous voice and language, which we have to decipher (Barba 2000, 65).

This autonomous voice, or ‘language’ of a whole work, is the point where ideas, styles and codes of theatrical signification coalesce from the profusion of materials ‘found’ on the floor. Phases of ‘too many things are happening’ give way to glimpses of a lucidity that guides the continued collective devising. Local artists had little time and access to each other, but did speak of trusting in the impact of the multiplicity of contributions. The process of following ‘different tracks and divergent themes’ and apparently ‘unconnected associations’ was referred to in terms of ‘interrogating a theme’ or idea to reveal unexpected – and highly prized – perspectives.

Distancing themselves from an evolving work was understood by the artists as hastening the arrival of the point of revelation. The most frequent strategies involved were

(a) regularly creating opportunities for the collaborators to become audiences for sections of the work, including setting up opportunities to show work-in-progress to peers and audiences outside the working group; and

(b) performers objectifying their selves in relationship with the work they are creating.

These two are closely linked but not identical. Both strategies impel ways of performing in rehearsals and thus are decisive, not only during devising but also in the aesthetic of the final work. Creating opportunities for ‘giving audience’ within the ensemble brought with it the distanciation of seeing through another’s eyes. The coalescence of a work’s ‘autonomous voice’ was hastened by the judgement and selectivity exercised by the rest of the ensemble. This all helped to develop a sense of a future audience’s perspective. This was particularly important, given the local
artists' limited contact with audiences prior to performance. Where, for example, the Wooster Group often entered/enters a phase of open rehearsals for several months prior to the launch of a new work, and open rehearsals were scheduled into a number of UK and Dutch companies' development periods (for example, Forced Entertainment and Dogtroep). The local artists relied upon themselves within a devising context, and their peers to provide this kind of response to their work.

X: Coming through One Extra Dance Company and The Performance Space, initially I didn’t understand the value of [showing] works-in-progress. Why would you want to see a work-in-progress? But when I saw one, just the bare bones of ideas. Then you also have the need that everyone working on the project has to coalesce at that point and that becomes the gel or sticking plaster for the next part of the process. You want audiences of people who are critical of the work (focus group transcription 1997).

In order to 'objectify themselves' individuals would also 'step back', deliberately staying quiet, listening and watching a group's efforts. Another strategy to gain collective distanciation was to rely upon shared working languages and unspoken performing devices amongst collaborators who had trained or previously worked together: collectively 'owned' exercises were preferred to individual, improvisatory exploration.

With experience of the self-organising turbulence of collaborative dramaturgy, launched from specific starting points, shared themes, resources and references, participants trusted a project would 'throw up' its own working languages, both spoken and corporeal. This collectively generated lexicon could then be used to label actions or unanticipated images, thereby turning them into devices or recursive elements in the evolving aesthetic product.

"All collaborations are hell"
Phases of confusion and profusion of ideas were described as having the potential to provoke pain, frustration, conflict, and to threaten individual artists with a loss of vision. Artist Y recalled a collaborator, who had guided her understanding of the process, saying "This guy once said that democracy leads to conflict and then to the creation of work" (focus group transcription 1997).

Once the clarity of an evolving work became apparent, a point arrives where material must be cut. This can be one of the most difficult tasks confronting an ensemble in collaborative dramaturgy. The point is not always clearly recognised, and can be
hard to decipher amidst the complexities of the process. Z spoke of several projects where this point was not recognised:

I worked on a project and the work-in-progress was so exciting. Everyone who saw it was so excited. But when they came to see the finished work they were so disappointed. It was such an interesting experience because what we had done was clutter it up. We had lost a whole lot of those special moments. We cluttered them up with stupid lighting – lost the complete bareness that was an aesthetic that made them work. That happened on two consecutive shows. It made me question what it was about. About people getting attached to particular things that were lost by the time it opened. It is also about the layering and cluttering. Sometimes it is about the simplicity. Simplicity is what can work ... You've done so much layering and everything is lost. I reckon that happens often (ibid).

This example suggests that constant maintenance of distanciation could clear space for an ensemble to appraise the overall shape of proceedings. Z elaborated, with reference to his experience working with writers:

Z: I keep coming back to writers because that is my most recent experience. A first draft can't become a second draft unless some of the first is chopped out. What keeps on happening is that people are so attached to their ideas they often bring in all their ideas. The work doesn't get developed. They just get longer. Sometimes that happens in a collaborative process – you keep bringing all these ideas.

W: You can have ten fantastic ideas and six of them work better together than all ten of them.

Y: My experience is that the batting average is lower. Maybe one or two of them works together [Z enthusiastically agrees: two out of ten]

X: If someone is so precious about an idea and it doesn't seem to fit, maybe it is another show. That can be totally offensive to some people but it is an idea and can be executed.

Y: Then out of ten you have five shows.

W: Given there aren't going to be five shows at that moment, how do you balance contributors' satisfaction with making a work coherent?

X: It depends on whether you want to make a work with a singular style or set of ideas. You can look at strategies for taking ideas outside the area you are working and construct a place for that, whether it is a pre-show ramble or you deliberately stop [i.e. interrupt the flow] and something 'other' happens. But that again depends on a shared aesthetic (ibid).

Again difficulties with attachment – or 'preciousness' – speak to the value of a practice of distanciation and a willingness to surrender to the judgment of others. The focus group agreed that disagreement and critique were intrinsic to making discoveries about starting points, topics and their realisation in performance. Struggles were seen as a kind of interrogation of ideas, linked to uncovering new ways of seeing and representing a theme:

Y: I don't think you are going get answers from collaboration. What you get is compromises and that's ok. I don't believe in win-win situations. I think that is just psychobabble-human resources-American speak. You are going to come up with a solution to your problem; the problem of conflict, be it the terms of the way you speak about performance or the content
and the themes you are wanting to explore. But essentially you are going to come up with conflicting ideas because the ideas you agree are possibly boring anyway.

W: If I agree with someone it is probably going to be on something that is like “the sky is blue”.

Y: Each of the collaborators will find ideas in the compromise or disagreements—things that pull chords and will question “Why?” Ultimately it’s a compromise and that’s fine. Compromise only ever happens in a structure anyway. Otherwise you have nothing to compromise and you don’t know what it is you have to compromise anyway. If you have an underpinning [i.e. a shared point of departure], if you are looking for a solution then you have posed a question. That is when you are going to have compromise.

X: [Without disagreement] you risk ending up with mushy sentimental theatre, like ‘δδδδδδ’ which was a mishmash of genres – just an obsession with ‘my’ bourgeois interior world that gets knocked around a bit. It is much easier to hone in on my own feelings as performer rather than go, “I’ve got an outside world to deal with as well”. It felt so indulgent to the point I felt, “I don’t want to watch this shit. It is not doing the performers any good. Not doing anyone any good.” Theatre is a world of ideas. Emotions are of use value in terms of ideas. When I see codes of representation about feeling things, soap opera do that. You had to sit there. There was no room to think.

W: That was emotion without ideas.

Z: [In ‘δδδδδδ’] everything that was in the spoken word was illustrated. It was like a series of illustrations played out. That were excruciating.

X: Expositions of things that were already set up.

Under the pressure of meeting performance deadlines, it is as if the struggles and debates that occur in social life are concentrated within these groups. An overarching group ethos of accepting contestation, a correlative suspension of the everyday social mores of polite encouragement and manners – in fact being tough on each other – can facilitate this genre of devising. The focus group considered wrestling with ideas led to innovative ways of understanding social matters depended on compromises arrived at through conflict about aesthetics of presentation and content, rather than making recourse to artist’s emotional engagement in starting points. This exchange also shows how artists in the contemporary performance field learnt through watching the finished works of other local artists. We can discern a desire on the part of the focus group members in their capacities as audiences to their peers’ works, to value the surprising and unexpected as key aesthetic values.

Training together in ways that cultivated a commitment to collective creation, an openness in handling compromise, a tenacity with the difficulties of dealing proliferating ideas and the intra-ensemble tensions and a sense of distastation to perceive the emergent meanings and forms in devising could play a vital role in collaborative dramaturgy.
Case study: SIDETRACK's director-guided model

This section will identify the themes, methods, working methods, goals and experiences of four performers — Regina Heilmann, Jai McHenry, Rolando Ramos and Même Thorne — working with director Don Mamouney at SIDETRACK between 1990 and 1996.

Mamouney guided the collaborations, drawing on materials created by the group of performers to form full-length theatre works. Works by the 1990-96 ensemble were created and mostly performed in their small black box studio theatre in Marrickville. Throughout the life of this particular ensemble the theatre had no fixed seating, something that significantly contributed to the emerging dramaturgy. 30

The starting points for SIDETRACK's work were themes of migration, changes in industrial technologies, relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians and the global history of imperial colonisation. SIDETRACK's earlier works, including Addios Cha Cha (1986) were developed with Brechtian approaches (Burvill 1994, 185-86). In 2001, Mamouney spoke of his desire to condense large stretches of historical time, and changes in social perspective, into the short actual period of a theatre work.

Mamouney claimed that "the ensemble was very much equal partners [with me]" in finding the means to realise this ideal. Devising would start with Mamouney, proposing a broad theme or question, and key theatrical images that he visualised for the public performance. These visual clues and suggestions were to spark performers' imaginations. Performers would 'research' however they wished these broad themes outside of rehearsals. Through the process of embodying those themes, the performers would develop intimate and special purchases on those themes, which they would then 'talk back' to him.

There was a point in each project where they took control of the piece and I had trouble giving them notes. They'd be talking back to me about what the piece was about (Mamouney interview 1998).

To initiate the actual generation of material, Mamouney translated his perspective on the starting points into tasks with which the performer-makers created the actual
performance material that would become the final work. Called ‘projects’, a topic
was given to individual performers to realise over a couple of days or, at most, a
week, then shown on the rehearsal floor to the rest of the troupe. Heilmann described
the ‘projects’ procedure in terms of choosing from amongst proffered starting points,
and then preparing performance away from the rehearsal floor.

You talk about what the piece was about – what we agreed the piece was trying to achieve or
what it is overall. You usually know what it is and I would interpret that. I would use my own
ways of understanding that, making that real or making that lived. I’d use whatever method I
needed to do that whether it meant a physical thing or thinking about the Suzuki focus or about
what am I doing or what is my emotional trigger – I am thinking about what is my goal. I
really think (intensely) about those things (interview 1998).

The personal creative resources brought to bear were rarely discussed between the
participants, just as they did not discuss personal experiences of their Suzuki
training. Mamouney then worked to combine the individual offerings. Heilmann
spoke of various elements being “transposed” from a performance by one individual
to another; for example, a text she had written might be shifted into another
performer’s physical work. Heilmann understood this as part of the desire to function
as a democratic ensemble of devisers: “trying to share things like, what we say—
some of us more than others”. Her description sounds a note of caution about being
too idealistic. When discussing SIDETRACK’s work as a kind of physical theatre,
Heilmann explained that no distinctions were drawn between types of performing in
‘projects’: contributions of text, dancing, moving or choreography were equally
valid. Movement sequences were generated and chosen as frequently as any other
contributions; rather than being understood as the means to express content,
choreographed work was considered content: “it was making a statement, very much
so.” Heilmann enjoyed the sense of performers engaged in ‘real time’ actions, as
distinct from acting, which she understood as the reproduction of past decisions.

I find it fascinating to watch people really having to struggle with objects, grabbing a thing,
really dealing with physical objects in space. Or Deborah Leiser and me in “room with no
air” dealing with a table in space. I mean, labouring or carrying potatoes or whatever then
you have to do it really. You can’t pretend to do it (ibid.).

While one ensemble member was not as ‘physically inclined’ as Heilmann described
herself as being, and preferred to respond to Mamouney’s tasks verbally, Heilmann
preferred to show her work on the floor.
I thought it was really good to have a chance to have your work seen, be given a chance to actually develop an idea and put it out there and go, “Well, this is my response to your ideas. What do you think? I didn’t really say, “What do you think?” I just put it out there (ibid).

About her response to director’s feedback she stated.

Sometimes you wouldn’t get any and sometimes you did … The projects required a lot of trust; trust in that you’re probably given the right thing to work on. For a long time earlier, he gave me stuff and I went, “Yeah,” I would just do it because I believed in what he was doing. As time went on, I was less inclined to just accept and more inclined to question and challenge (ibid).

Mamouney used an array of analogies to describe his directorial role; as a ‘writer’ but not necessarily of words; as an editor in film production; in painterly and sculptural terms, with a concern with the visual look of the work. He spoke of a desire to “cut”, “polish” and “sculpt” materials. All infer he was an arranger of parts, of the experiences of time and space with the performers and other non-performing artists in each work. He described ‘on the floor’ work as “throwing it all up”, and then sorting, sifting and clarifying; manipulating the performers’ material “taking a bit of them and redoing them” and “setting them in place”. His highly visual, plastic approach to theatre making is tied to his view of the relation between spectators and theatre as “simply the hot metaphorical leap off point to wherever”. In this formulation theatre does not restage, represent or refer to ‘real’ social life, but operates via metaphorical links.

When asked whether he would align his direction with making visual arts types of installation and traditions of gallery visitation, he responded ”absolutely,"

When you say it like that it sounds as though I’m just using actors to directly realise my vision. That’s what I bring to the project. I never try to say I’m not going to bring that to the project. I recognise that I can’t do it unless the people I’m working with meet me with it, unless they enter into a contract with me to give me their work (Mamouney interview 1997).

Mamouney acknowledges the interdependency in these divisions of creative labour. His use of the term ‘choreography’ aligns SIDETRACK’s devising with the ongoing hybridization of the genre in the local field. In the symbiosis of the roles of performer-makers and director, Mamouney wanted everyone to know exactly what they are doing.

I try to take them with me … even though they might not fully – I want to leave the actual creating open to subjective pacings, which is why I don’t want to sit there and design it in a separate room. I want to do it on the floor, with my feelings, with my subjectivity fully
engaged with the process. I want it to be subject to scrutiny. And I’m making it to be subject to scrutiny of the ensemble and the audience ideally (ibid).

Mamouney acknowledged his reliance on performers bringing their resources to bear in order for him to realise his role, that of ‘writing’ performance as a director.

It’s like the actor has to enter into the game of it, play with the idea and contribute what the actor does, or what the performer does, or what the dancer does, in order to make it work. And the advantage of it for me is, (the reason I suppose that I have some pleasure or joy in doing it). if I am left to do it I can do it beautifully for the audience; create this sensual, spatial thing, where I loan or give my subjectivity over as their subjectivity, which is an old, not a new thing. It’s an old technique directors say they do. They are the ideal audience. So as the writer, I ask the actors to write the work with me. Unlike the writer working in the garret, whether playwright or novel writer, I’m asking them to contribute to the process. And sometimes they contribute more or less (ibid).

Taking up the position of a future audience was definitive of Mamouney’s art as a director responding to the performers’ devised ‘projects’. Each collaborator needed to crystallise material for themselves and develop their own judgement by testing it with an audience, even if that audience was Mamouney and the rest of the ensemble. Performing ‘projects’ set up relations with others’ material, positioning it to become part of their weaving together. In the process the overarching shape of the work was clarified for all who witnessed on the floor. Showings influenced subsequent sets of ‘projects’, others’ devising efforts and trial arrangements of material. That ensemble members could commit to their provisional material with an unreserved, performance-like intensity and clarity was critical, as Heilmann observed:

If the director doesn’t see anything in it, then he won’t use it ... You’ve got to convince him that there’s something in there that he wants to see (ibid).

When the material on the floor did not excite, further progress towards a fully realised work halted. This was demanding for all concerned. Heilmann observed “Don was always constantly frustrated by it, always wanting more and always frustrated by the fact that we weren’t generating enough” (ibid). Mamouney was a demanding audience; his process demanded a constant flow of material from his collaborators. The performers recognised that in order to maintain this flow, they needed their own methods and devices.

In 1990, the company began regular daily Suzuki training led by a performer, Mémé Thorne, who had trained in Toga in Suzuki’s intensives in 1990, and in the 1991
Teachers’ Masterclass. Mamouney had always appreciated that performers continued regular training during rehearsal periods. The kind of detachment and spatiotemporal exactitude practiced in their Suzuki training, plus the group’s practice of giving critiques about precision, personal habits and intensity of how each performed Suzukian kata were commensurate with their devising processes. The training grounded SIDETRACK’s process, led by Mamouney, of constantly manipulating the material each performer contributed into new contexts and configurations during devising. The rigour of the kata facilitated, for each individual, the maintenance of the material’s vitality as it was moved further and further from its origins in individual experimentation.

Additionally, the emergent style – identified by Burvill in terms of a “postmodern aesthetics of repetition” (1994, 189) demanded high levels of physical endurance. Heilmann referred to a segment of The Drunken Boat (1991):

> Sometimes it was really hard and I felt very angry ... because it hurt or it was extreme or at times, it might even feel unwarranted ... But generally, we were prepared for that ... I think also that it is my choice to go “Well, this is coming from me and I allow you now to do what you want to do with my body, my work. This is what I have to give you. You can do with that what you will” ... Or I don’t give him anything and he has nothing to work with ... Having directed a few things I know I am much more likely to explain, nurture and encourage what’s going on ... But then maybe he’ll get something that I would never get. Because I think my response might be “Well fuck you. I’ll show you” and go down that path just as a response to his aggression (ibid).

The ensemble’s final project under Mamouney’s direction was in Heaven (1994). and relations between the original collaborators were stalling. All the forces involved in the ensemble’s dissolution were not clear, but included tensions around Mamouney’s auteurish disposition, and the collaborative inclinations of the performers that were conflated with administrative and industrial decision making in the company. Some of the problems around devising arose because the inherent familiarity between all the parties had formed expectations that, as Heilmann explained, had, while they made the working model possible, “boxed in” each of the performers. This SIDETRACK ensemble ceased work in 1996.

**THE SYDNEY FRONT in collaborative rehearsals; a summary**

When THE SYDNEY FRONT (THE FRONT) formed, in 1986 its members – Andrea Aloise, John Baylis, Clare Grant, Nigel Kellaway and Chris Ryan – had not previously all worked together as an ensemble. The core group embraced the
diverse artistic and training backgrounds. Indeed, as Kerrie Schaeffer observes, THE FRONT foregrounded, in rehearsal, the struggle to make meaning. Unlike avant-garde theatre collectives of the seventies, the group emphasised the

values of difference, dissensus and the incommensurability of knowledges and experiences. THE SYDNEY FRONT collective (was) premised on the presence of at least seven different performers, each making contradictory and conflicting meanings and interpretations at any moment in and across the performance making processes (Schaeffer 2001: 94-95).

The group briefed Schaeffer prior to her embarking on the documentation of the devising and rehearsal of Don Juan in 1991 to expect “awkward frustrations and uncomfortable tensions” (93).

THE FRONT never had a non-performing director. Nor did they start with any written texts. Each member of the troupe took responsibility for the company’s works though offering their different capacities into a joint creative enterprise described here by Chris Ryan:

We would often have a meeting and decide how we were going, what the next production line would be. We were always ahead of ourselves ... The only way that we worked was, we knew when the next show was coming up. And for some reason – and I don’t know how it happened – those people working on the gig decided to make THE FRONT number one. It was never discussed, it just happened. And that’s probably what kept the group together (interview 2001).

In addition to contributing their creative and production labour, the company members raised funds towards their early works. For example, the company painted the Performance Space to cover the rental costs for the season of Pornography of Performance in 1988, then prepared street performances, travelled to Brisbane for six months of daily parades at Expo ’88 to raise funds for international touring. When it did gain government funding, unlike SIDETRACK, which received company funding, THE FRONT did so on a project-by-project basis.

Rehearsal processes of one FRONT production Don Juan (1991), the fifth whole work the core group made together were documented by Karen Martin and Kerrie Schaeffer. By this time the troupe (including opera singer Annette Tesoriero) had clearly developed some regularities in their working methods. Schaeffer’s and Martin’s accounts clearly evidence the group ‘working it out on the floor’ under their own collective scrutiny. While reading materials and videos were arrayed and circulated around the project and amongst the members – videos of Pina Bausch’s

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company and DV8, feminist commentaries on opera and the Don Juan legend – the focal site of the creating was physically on the floor, with occasional references to these other materials (Schaeffer 2001, 157). For The Front ‘working it out on the floor’ involved an address to the materiality and facticity of the forthcoming performance event itself.

We would always try to place our themes as a theatrical problem. Our work was always set on the stage with an audience that was its setting, not set in a country house somewhere. It was set precisely where it was … so whatever thematic material we were working through, we tried to think it through in terms of what does this mean in terms of the relationship between someone onstage and someone looking. So hence those themes were often about seduction, masochism, sadism and exhibitionism (Baylis interview 1996).

Other members of the group shared these concerns and, in different ways, explained that their performances were made with an awareness “that we and the audience are the same flesh and blood, that we’re dealing with one of the most basic social interactions – community interaction” (Martin 1992, 7).34

In Sydney, The Front performed in The Performance Space’s open hall theatre, with a capacity of between 150 and 200. The Front did not build in a stage set, rather they worked within the visible architectural constraints occasionally altering the layout by a single bold feature that was transformed during the performance – such as building a wall of cartons and dropping a room length curtain (First and Last Warning 1992). Nor did they collaborate with an external stage designer or visual artist at the conception stage. Their works played out on the wooden floor of the hall, and over the length of their career, the troupe experimented with the location of the audience and of their performances within the hall.

Group members brought in proposals for a staging of some sections of a work. Schaeffer identified these in Don Juan as “conceptual scenes” (Schaeffer 2001, 104-5). As an example, she cites the proposed opening where the troupe became the ‘audience’, seated behind barbed wire, coolly assessing spectators as they entered. However, while this concept for the opening was brought into rehearsals by two performers as a preconceived concept it was – like all other materials – developed, explored and tested with each other on the rehearsal floor. Conceptual proposals were not directorial visions for the whole production, but for chunks or discreet ‘scenes’. These elements accreted through the process, constituting a trajectory the group broadly shared, even if individuals maintained their different perspectives.
While this process advanced, Raffaele Marcellino periodically attended rehearsals and talked with the group, in order to compose music for the piece. Each morning the troupe trained before devising. When THE FRONT formed, Kellaway had recently returned from studying with Suzuki in Japan. With THE FRONT, Kellaway led what the group called ‘stomping’ during rehearsals and devising periods and Andrea Aloise led some Iyengar yoga.

In addition to embodied explorations of concepts as recounted above, THE FRONT generated material for the performance mostly in improvisations or explicit choreography of dances. Both Martin (1992) and Schaeffer (2001) give substantial accounts of how this improvisational process manifested in the Don Juan rehearsals. Schaeffer cites an extract of rehearsal talk from early in the process.

AA: So, what shall we do?

NK: Improvise and get as much material as possible with not much talking.

JB: Improvise themes. Don’t intellectualise. We’ll write the themes down and put them in a hat then pick one out and just do it. We’ll have lots of different themes. They can be as tangential as you like. Don’t feel you have to justify them (Schaeffer 2001, 97).

Martin described THE FRONT’s’ improvisation: “ideas flow as the body moves, as well as the embodiment of ideas” (1992, 21). If not ignored or discarded early, actions constituting a segment, based on these ‘out of the hat’ ideas, became consolidated through repeated runs in a single session. The segment would then be tagged with a simple title like “Chris’s suicide”, “Fuck me”, and “Cunt face” (Martin 1992, 21-22 and Schaeffer 2001, 99-103).

The final shape of each segment was developed in response to directions from the rest of the group. Those watching framed critiques, dissatisfactions and suggestions for change always in terms of audience reception, anticipating potential spectatorial interpretations of the chunks of material. Later in the process, after a range of segments had been formed, these effects were considered in the context of the whole work’s order. This order was viewed as provisional, until finally collectively affirmed later in the process. Their improvisation process emphasised their abilities to physically enact, control their corporeal and vocal qualities and engage in fierce editing of each other’s action images (Martin 1992,10-25). Directorial interventions
came early and frequently. "Our improvising was always very structured", Baylis recalled:

Very rarely would someone get up on the floor with an improvisational idea and improvise for 10 or 15 minutes. Someone would have an idea, they would go on and get 10 secs into it and go "well that's the idea" then some one else would say "How 'bout you add this to it?". There were always two or three people improvising with two or three others as puppeteers outside, "Why don't you do that with that". So the people on the floor were very pushed around (Baylis interview 1996).

Directions were couched in terms of movement, bodies and action. For example, in Martin's account of creating Don Juan's first segment, the eight trialling runs documented are permeated with comments about timing, spatiality, the forcefulness of action or energy, and the flow or progression of movement. Despite substantial investment, in the final run, dissatisfaction with results prompted suggestions to abandon the section. It was not abandoned but they were willing to do so if required (Martin 1992, 14).

When members took turns sitting out to watch a segment they understood that they stood in for future spectators, albeit a 'knowing insider' audience. It was not in the ethos of their rehearsals to discuss the private or individual meaningfulness of what they 'performed'. Rather, they trusted that their shared language and kinaesthetic sense was palpable enough to register, and take effect, in the almost instantaneous modification of physicalised expression with reference to an assumed repertoire of potential meanings without interrupting or arresting the flow of the work. Baylis described how the capacity to control for the finest details of embodied action was not only assumed but also tied to their joint mutual direction. The process yielded specific shared terms for 'directing', or, as they put it, 'editing' each other's efforts:

In our rehearsal process, especially when polishing something we were all actors and directors monitoring each other and giving each other notes. One of the terms we would use would be the term 'muddy'. 'Muddiness' was bad. It meant something indistinct, the outline wasn't there in one person's action or the scene or an interaction. They were too many signifiers there. It could be action. You would have to pull back, drop a few things, clean up the outline - focus on what precisely is the main point or thing of this image (Baylis interview 1996).

Rehearsals involved rapid evolutions and shifts of ideas with a high rate of attrition, as analysed by Martin. The FRONT's improvisations depended on discipline in the embodied knowledges of the performers; embodied knowledges that became increasingly grounded in the daily SMAT training, as Clare Grant explained:
The first time I was aware of the value of very tight set forms [like SMAT] as a medium for releasing unset improvisation was commedia del arte. The *lazzi* are very tight, very physical. The nature of the way each character moves is very set. It is highly disciplined and framed. The *lazzi* are set patterns. Someone described it as a rope with knots on it and you got to each knot along the way. But between each knot there is huge scope for the individual play. It is obviously formal but it is improvisational in performance. It can be totally different every time. That was years ago. I enjoyed that as a performer (interview 1995).

Dana Reitz, internationally known as a dancer who improvises in public performance, describes this interdependency in the moment of improvisation itself.

That moment can't be repeated, but it's a trained moment, it's prepared for, and comes out of everything that's happened before. It cannot be like you are not even there. It goes right through you (Reitz in Steinman 1986, 85).

Despite Baylis's declared dislike of demanding physical regimes, he acknowledged the structuring role of training, once substantial experience has been gained.

Any kind of training sits with you all the way even when you seem to be doing things that are the obverse of the training, if it has sunk into your body deep enough (Baylis interview 1996).

For Schaeffer (2001, 150-51) and Martin (1992, 17), The Front's work in performance communicated by means of a montage aesthetic, a principle of joining segments or chunks of the material generated by the ensemble. Jumps between contrasting embodied states, and a high degree of segmentation were a recurring feature of their works. This placed emphasis for the ensemble as a whole on the joins, or transitioning processes, and for each individual tracking their own trajectory through a night, getting, as it were, from one knot to another in a repeatable and reliable way.

The Front's collaborative dramaturgy, then, was exercised through intense attention to each other's embodiment in rehearsals on the floor. To deal with the pressures of this type of group process without 'taking it personally', like the focus group and Sidetrack members, they recognised the need to detach any personal investment from the rapid turnover of material from which they were weaving together their work. SMAT contributed to this rigour. Additionally, the troupe used Suzuki training as an ensemble-building technique in order to create an attunement to each other, allowing them to devise together without a director, as well as preparing as performers themselves. As mentioned earlier this was without any practice of Bogart's Viewpoints as these did not begin to be practiced in Sydney until around 2005. Undertaking training together offered the group shared points of reference in
their future collaborations. By aligning their diverse backgrounds, SMAT mediated their existing embodied knowledges in relation both to each other and to the goals of each project.

4.3 Writing and texts in Sydney contemporary performance

Over the course of three decades of experimentation outside of the mainstage practice the artists turned attention to relationships between language and bodies in performance. It is as if there was a question hovering around their practices of how can words and bodies relate that was being answered in their studio practice and works. In the selection of works in their anthology, *performing the unNameable*, Allen and Pearlman (1999) collected texts that surrounded and were spoken by performers. These represent a variety of tactics for using language in performance that all share, in various permutations, kinds of montage in their dramaturgy. The interdependence and interpenetration of embodiment, spatial setting and language in the conceiving of a performance’s *mise en scène* means that none of these documents are re-stageable like a play’s script. They defy substantial remounting from these published sources. This points to the centrality of visuality and corporeality in the works. The anthology documents a series of modes aligned with Stalker’s Rachel Swain’s 1999 call at the 2nd National Physical Theatre and Circus Conference for a “defiance of the master-slave relation”\(^3^6\). She was referring to the models of production in playscript-based theatre where relations between the various artists’ roles as designers, directors and actors are guided and plotted out by a play text during all creative development phases.

No contemporary performance theatre of the 1980s and 1990s staged a pre-existing written play’s script in toto. Segments of found written texts from any source, not necessarily written for live rendition, might be incorporated about subjects that bore on the starting points of a devising.\(^3^7\) Additionally, short texts might be written by writer-associates or by the performers during the rehearsal periods. With performances in the Sydney scene not being fully conceptualised or adumbratively mapped by written scripts, conventional first day readings or ‘table talk’ about texts did not launch devising. Which texts, the quantity and how it might be delivered or spoken was also a creative problem to be resolved after matters got underway.
Virginia Baxter, as chair of Playworks in 1995, introduced four Sydney contemporary writer-performers who presented solo works at the Playing with Time conference. Baxter, a practitioner herself, offered a clarification of the role of writing and written scripts in the genre.

The work of such writers is mostly produced outside mainstage venues and is often inappropriately categorised as "non-text based" or "physically-based" and therefore somehow "not writing". However, many do use language in very inventive ways and those who don’t still write highly structured scenarios for performance (Baxter 1996, 2).

These scenarios might be sketched out scenarios of performance events but not *fabula*. However a number did not write any more than sketchy notes of a structural concept. While those performers, presenting at works at the conference, might all have written structured scenarios most groups did not even use text writing for this purpose prior to devising. She described the orientation of Playworks, an organisation that provided practical support for the development of women’s writing for performance, under the directorship of Clare Grant (ex-SYDNEY FRONT) during this period as having

an expansive approach to writing and performance: acknowledging that these new forms offer freedoms outside the structures of playwriting and (are) attracting more and more women writers (*ibid*).

Baxter’s identification of their performance practice hinges on the venues, the places that these four artists performed. This is a central feature of the work of the majority of contemporary performance practitioners. Playworks played a decisive role in mentoring artists working in non-traditional areas of performance, through dramaturgical support at the embryonic stages of new work: offering a forum for discussion new dramaturgies, of the role of language and in new works of live performance and critical responses to work. As a non-commercial artist-initiated network, Playworks also embodied a model of mutual assistance that echoed a similar ethos in the contemporary performance field at large in Sydney. This goal was captured under the rubric of ‘writing for performance’ to expand the notion of writing itself in Grant’s and Baxter’s performed conversation *Talking Back* in 1994.

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CG Allowing as it does for collective writing.

VB Writing transformed by improvisation, writing that emerges from improvisation.

CG Different kinds of language
VB Spoken word
CG The language of the body
VB The way they're linked
CG Performance without text.
VB Writing for Performance does not necessarily rely on the single authority of the writer and the director.
CG Though the form has its auteurs
VB It is more often created by writer-performers, director-writers, dancer-writers and other hybrids.
CG It allows a great range of languages because it can share in the language of performance poetry, songwriting ...
VB It can deal with theoretical concepts without having to disguise itself in character and plot. Its text is not sub, it is on the surface, spoken and signaled by the performers who invariably play themselves, their 'what if?' selves, their own personae (Baxter and Grant 1994, 20).

Allen and Pearlman, through their selection and discussions with artists, broadly agree with Baxter and Grant's notions of the role of writing in the genre. They stress that each text is specific to each context of creation as none could be said to be the SOLE 'text' of the performance:

A text in performance is the writing which is required by that work - its form is defined by the needs and processes of a given work, not literary convention or tradition. Each selection in this book was created on a different platform - the processes, skills, and inventions of each deviser spawned a different method of writing or problem to be responded to in writing (Allen and Pearlman 1999, xii).

In articulating what was shared by the artists about the role of text and writing in the works of the anthology, they made recourse to the dramaturgical processes of their development rather than recurrence of themes or content.

By far the most common attribute of these writings is that they were developed during the process of creating performance and not before it. This often means that the performers and/or director 'write' the texts themselves (They may not actually write but improvise words and actions/images which are later written down to become the 'script' or 'score'). A variation to this scenario involves writers attending rehearsals as part of the devising process, writing words in response to activity in the creative process, or as stimulus to the creative process, or in some cases writing for specific sections of a work- adding text in the way a designer might add colour. Another variation involves using found texts, which might be cut up and arranged into the performance (ibid).

While Allen and Pearlman do not claim their anthology as an encyclopedic survey of works in Australian contemporary performance, of the seventeen works included, eight were created by ensembles of artists working in Sydney (ENT’ACTE, LEGS ON
THE WALL, OPEN CITY, SIDETRACK, THE SYDNEY FRONT, PARTYLINE, ALL OUT ENSEMBLE. The editors acknowledge, that by virtue of their emphasis on writing, that a range of artists working in performance in the Sydney scene whose work did not involve language in their performance were excluded – thus the substantial body of work of artists arising from within dance (e.g. Kohler and Crisp), including those arising around a butoh oriented training base (Heywood, De Quincey, Lynch, Schacher and GRAVITY FEED) and visual arts performance art (e.g. Campbell, Mullins, Sone and Sabiel). Site-specific works were also excluded from the anthology as all the included works were indoors.

The editors also point out that performance is equally characterised by attention to structural innovations, which may relate to the internal building of a work, or to our expectations of the structure of a live theatrical event ... Re-arrangement of the audience-performer relationship from functional, participatory or topographical points of view is something playwrights rarely attempt, while performance often requires it (Allen and Pearlman 1999, xiii).

The specific work they use as an exemplar of this is THE SYDNEY FRONT’s First and Last Warning (1992).

Allen and Pearlman’s firm commitment to foregrounding language and text in their five year search for works highlights how inextricable the consideration of the embodiment of performers was to the creation and staging of contemporary performance works.

In the place of a script or text, groups began with a theme or a concept, as a cluster of ideas, questions, desires about social dynamics that surrounded their performance events were better understood as starting points that could be tested out in live staging. These were not understood as single entities like a thesis or messages to be played out live. Pollard’s example of a single concept for the total mise en scène of staging in Panopticon in Tasmania is one such example (see Chapter Three). These operate as a meta-textual concept to gather in and hold materials generated in devising. Performer-makers’ knowledge beyond a putative conceptual theme simply stated was often limited prior to rehearsals. The onset of the imperatives of devising with each other inflected and deepened their understanding through their research.
‘on the floor’. Thus starting points could be substantially altered by the practice of devising itself.\(^4\)

In the next chapter, I take a close look at the synergies between themes of SMAT practices and particular artists’ and groups’ devising and performance practice in the production sequence from training through to performing in the Sydney scene.


\(^2\) This is unlike the pattern of working relations in the Queensland groups who trained in SMAT a little latter. In these groups, Zen Zen Zo and Frank Productions those who led training also directed, chose repertoire of scripts and cast the groups works.

\(^3\) Julie-Anne Long, dancer/choreographer, recalls the profound affect that the permanent studio had on ONE EXTRA and the way in which a permanent studio contributed the development and maintenance of a sense of community in Sydney in the 1980s. Having continuous access shared with the community through open classes and other artists who used the space to develop new works when the company didn’t need it consolidated the close bonds amongst a community of artists.

\(^4\) A shed is an enduring icon of suburban Australian architecture, often of flimsy, lightweight construction. It carries connotations of a retreat from domestic life where people tinker, repair things and invent with the tools and materials to hand.

\(^5\) ‘Tyranny of projects’ was a dynamic identified by Fiona Winning, director of TPS (2001-) in a forum about individuals developing their autonomous practice that included representatives of three generations of local contemporary performance (in private conversation with Winning 2005).

\(^6\) Butoh was also identified as similarly oppositional but was not disseminated in the local scene until the 1990s.

\(^7\) Similarly, Suzuki used intensives in Toga as audition processes.


\(^9\) Kellaway did suggest cheekily that a joke should be inserted at the end of each session, though to me in interview.

\(^10\) Kellaway described his early performance trainings as piano, ballet and that “Dogs breakfast” which was London Contemporary Dance via Kai Tai Chan in ONE EXTRA. Kellaway was also a youth actor in commercial theatre – memorably playing the Artful Dodger in Oliver Twist in the 1960s.

\(^11\) More extensive descriptions and discussions of each kata, including those I’ve not mentioned can be found in Goto (1988), Allain (2002) and Carruthers and Takahashi (2004).

\(^12\) The complexity of coordinative demand remains simple by comparison with many theatrical dance, mime or acrobatic curricula for example.

\(^13\) Concrete floors are never used. The floor surface of painted panels, like masonite was smooth in the old village gym we used in Toga.

\(^14\) A detailed description of marches can be found in Goto 1988, Chapter 9.
13 It recurs inside the phrases of the marching figures and, as a single step, in those called Sankyo and Kanjincho. Kanjincho was considered a more advanced manoeuvre within the Suzuki Method. Brandon (1978) cites the roppu exits moves of the lead actor in the traditional kabuki play Kanjincho (The Subscription List) as the source of this figure. For a full description of this figure which is no longer included in SMAT, see Goto (1988) and Carruthers (2004: 94-95).

16 All citations from Nomura Shiro are from Sakaba Berberich’s documentation of his leading a workshop with students at the University of Hawaii. Shiro has become one of the adopted members of the noh family Kanze. Suzuki’s collaborator Kanze Hisao and his later collaborator, Kanze Hideo were member of the founding branch of this noh family.

17 First recorded by Brandon in 1976 at WLT.

18 The Japanese names of walks are cited from Goto (1988). My teachers used the direction and surface of foot contact with the floor to identify each. The part of the foot that takes the weight varies in each style.

19 Kanze Hideo, noh performer, emphasises stability in describing the origins and function of this in noh.

Wearing a mask makes it very difficult to see and walk. You lose your sense of space, and it’s difficult to keep your body well balanced. That’s why they invented Noh’s special way of walking, where you don’t raise your feet off the ground but sort of shuffle (Kanze 1970, 10).

20 After the Masterclass in 1991, broken-down versions of the basic, side stamp and Sankyo, were called Basics 1,2 and 3 and taught to aid beginners’ reinforce focus on shifting the centre of gravity well over their feet, raise and lower it. Carruthers has a thorough descriptions of these three basics (82-84). Marching figures reiterate the fundamental forms of the basic and walks, with even more stress on still moments. In this chapter Carruthers has charted the varied kata repertoire of Suzuki’s method since 1976. He links these to changes in productions as well.

21 All learning of texts occurs outside sessions and is not coached. We also learnt texts and lyrics in Japanese as well as English and alternated.

22 While ma is rather elusive as a term or concept to translate it has widespread and diverse connotations for Japanese culture bearers. Most discussions are about the term used in architecture denote a sense of place marked out by columns with reference in particular to sources in religious architecture. It also refers to the notion of interval of time and or space between things and this seems to be its most common connotation. The kanji for ma shows a kind of gate like pictogram with space in its middle. For a full discussion of the traditions that inform understanding of ma in a Japanese context, see Pilgrim (1986). It is important to noh and refers also to acts of dancing in noh. Konparu’s discussion emphasises both necessary skill in manipulation ma both spatially and temporally (1983, 116, 126, 189, 192). At other times, ma is a term for being sensitive and empathetic to the world around. It is also referred to, on occasion, as a core ingredient in notions of what characteristics make up a distinctive Japanese national consciousness and in this way is a ubiquitous vehicle for neo-nationalist sentiment, depending on its context of use, of course.

23 Kanze Hideo refers to the relation between turning and the linear:

What is most distinctly different about the Noh dance is that movements are always linear. Ordinarily, a dancer’s movements are a series of connected points, but this not the case in Noh. The best Noh dance is an uninterrupted line. Uninterrupted linear movement gives the feeling of infinite distance. The Noh stage is a square, with four wooden pillars at the corners. Space is therefore extremely limited. The limited space of the stage is cut up by the linear movement of the actor’s body. Facing the audience, let’s suppose I move from stage left to right and turn up stage. I feel as if I am forcing the vector of my outwardly directed, linear movement inward. That way even a turn remains linear (Kanze 1970, 9).

24 Some European commentators have used the terms ‘project dramaturgy’ and ‘production dramaturgy’ to signal the absence of whole and stable written texts as the major authorial ‘voice’ in making theatre (Knowles 2004). However, these do not capture the commitment to collective authorship that was the mark of the Sydney ensembles.
This said, there is no evidence from any of my artist correspondents that any local artists modelled themselves on these groups as at the time of their formation, nothing was locally known about how these groups functioned as they briefly visited for festival performances. CRICHOST 2 did five performances in Adelaide in 1982, WOOSTER GROUP with LSD... just the high points did a season at the Adelaide Festival in 1986 and in 2004, The Hairy Ape at the Melbourne Festival. FORCED ENTERTAINMENT did not visit a festival in Australia until 2004 (Adelaide - One Thousandth Night), and 2005 (Melbourne – Bloody Mess). This field condition is unlike those referred to by Heddon and Milling (2006), as there was no proximity to these groups rehearsals, residencies or touring seasons. Ettchell’s Certain Fragments was not published until 2001. This study concludes around 1997. CRICHOST 2 and the WOOSTERS were referred to as offering like small confirmations of possibilities on aesthetics in their performances. See Appendix G.

Several of the focus group artists have read this section and confirmed the veracity of my interpretations of their discussion.

Periodically, what are called ‘preview’ performances of an up coming work will appear on the WOOSTER GROUP’s website months ahead of touring. Australian director, Sam Harlen, and WOOSTER GROUP intern in 2005, described the periodic opening up of rehearsals to audiences over say a year’s development of a work.

Conversations with FORCED ENTERTAINMENT’s Kathy Naden, March 2004 at the Adelaide Festival and with ex-DOGTOEP artist director, Threes Anna, July 2005 during inter-disciplinary arts laboratory residency, Time_Place_Space #4, Adelaide.

The degree of acceptance of difficulties arising from collaborators diverse backgrounds varied amongst the post 1986 ensembles. At SIDETRACK, and in THE SYDNEY FRONT, intense, demanding, conflicting and at times volatile working intra-group interactions were broadly embraced. On the other hand, OPEN CITY artists said that they experienced very few tensions between collaborators.

In The Drunken Boat (1992), for example, spectators and performers shifted around on the studio floor, with the performance emerging amongst the spectators. In The Refugee (1990), Idol (directed by Kellaway in 1991, 1992 and 1993) and Heaven (at the Performance Space 1994 and 1995), the performances were similarly close to and shared the available space with spectators.

Room with No Air was the title of a work Leiser and Heilmann devised and performed together at the Performance Space and the Magdalena Festival in New Zealand in 1998, built around attempts to reconcile the inherited distrusts and fears between second generation children of Jewish/Polish and German migrant parents triggered by the uncertainty about roles in the Holocaust.

Other artists who collaborated with THE FRONT up to its closing in 1993 included, the writer Mickey Furuya, Elise Ahannos, Ross Hervey, Elizabeth Burke and Pierre Thibadeau from ENTR'ACTE, Sue-ellen Kohler, Joel Markham, Victoria Spence and Annette Tesoriero as performers; Simon Wise in lighting; Sarah de Jong, Andree Greenwell, Richard Vella, Raffaele Marcellino and Peter Wells as composers/sound; Yuji Sone, John Gillies with projections and Edith King, Herb Robertson; Geoff Cobham and Heidrun Lohr in photography.

Ryan recalls THE FRONT made AU$700 out of the season of Pornography of Performance.

For Clare Grant, “Questions about fiction and reality bounce back and forth in a good piece of theatre” (Grant interview 1994). See also her account of using accepted social interpretations of her self-presentation in Chapter Six. See Ryan and Kellaway in Audience Orientation section of Chapter five of this thesis.

Kellaway had also spent time with Min Tanaka in 1984. However, none of the artists who spoke with me referred to the imagistic processes of Body Weather were brought into THE FRONT’s training during their rehearsals.

Author’s notes on conference presentation – Rachel Swain is artistic director of STALKER and a director in MARRUGEKU whose members devise large scale outdoor works for festivals. STALKER was formed early in the formation phase of the contemporary performance scene in Sydney. Key founding artists had migrated from New Zealand to work in Sydney (See chronology in Appendix A and discussion of communities of training practices in Chapter Four).
One of the second wave groups, KANTANKA, has taken whole non-performing written texts then envisaged them as being staged in a particular pre-existing outdoor or non-theatre setting as their point of departure. KANTANKA’s core artists edited them with their ensemble for that project. They did not adapt these writings in an effort to ostend these texts so much as freely draw on them. For example, in 1998 they created images from Japanese folk tale, The Earless Monk rewritten by 19th century traveller Lafcadio Hearn in the Chinese Water Gardens at Sydney’s Darling Harbour as spectators were guided from site to site. Thus they were decidedly site specific.

Three of the four artists she was introducing – Andrea Aloise, Deborah Pollard, Victoria Spence and Nikki Heywood had had substantial Suzuki training experience. All were active in the second wave.


Grant offered an example in the creation of SYDNEY FRONT’S Waltz (1987) that “started out as a piece about women and war and turned into a piece about the Diva” (Baxter and Grant 1994:18).
CHAPTER FIVE

Time, space and place in SMAT: Devising and performance in Sydney contemporary performance

5.1 An introduction to themes of SMAT practice

In SMAT there is no consideration of the concepts of character, narrative or given circumstances that structure and underpin dominant forms of actor training. Rather, Suzuki’s regime is coordinated by its spatiotemporal structures, rather than other conceptions—such as ‘character’ or ‘emotion’—that are usually assumed to structure actor training in Australia.

The second half of this thesis identifies four dominant threads, or themes, of practice particular to Sydney’s contemporary performance context. These are, in the first instance, spatiotemporal structures, which I will break, somewhat artificially, but for the sake of my analysis, into themes of temporal practice and spatial and placial themes. In addition, I identify two further related themes in Chapter six—those of, first, confronting limitations and difficulty, and second, concepts of selfhood or practices of the self in performance.

Beginning with the reception of individual local artists, I trace through a close study how their shared ‘performance language’ precipitated in their experiences of Suzuki training. The following chapters will maintain a multi-focal orientation to relations in rehearsal dynamics and to relations within the field. The chapter will unfold through accounts and explanations of practice offered by the practitioners themselves, and upon my own observations, themselves inflected by those accounts. My intention is to produce an account that is faithful to not only the intertextuality inherent in any training practice, as participants exchange talk and understandings, but the interpraxial; that is, through the enacted, embodied exchange of habit, practice and kinaesthetic experience. Susan Melrose calls this kind of exchange an ‘interpraxiologue’ (Melrose 1994).

In the course of this interpraxiologue local practitioners became very adept at performing and devising in ways not legible in then-current genre classifications of dance, physical theatre or acting. The umbrella term of ‘sense of ensemble’ or
shared language for devising and communicating with audiences acquired through training, is unpacked, in the course of this close study to reveal how it was made up of very material and powerful virtuosi in handling time, space, limitations and self, rather than assume a generalised notion of an *esprit* or group *élan*.

So while they did not reproduce Suzuki’s *kata* or performance style in their onstage works I argue this interpraxialogue disclosed possibilities for performance-making through extending their powers as writer-director-performers in the dramaturgy of their own works and that transformed notions of what constituted acting, writing and direction *per se*. Through this detailed study we can see how SMAT was intimately imbricated in the cultural capital that defined what it was to practice in the Sydney field of contemporary performance.

Given that artists’ perceptions of time, space/place, difficulty, and selfhood are re-inscribed and re-embodied along a continuum of practice, my account will move in and out of individual practices, drawing upon descriptions, recollections and analysis. I broadly sustain the chronology of the production process in this examination, returning to how each theme in practice became distinctive in the reception of individuals in training. Then I trace that theme through collaborative devising, rehearsal and performance in particular examples and several case studies. In this cycling through the continuum (that occurs four times in the following chapter), I build up a picture of their adaptations of and ‘dialogue’ with SMAT in practice. To do so, I draw upon their articulations of their experiences to evidence the pervasive impact of SMAT and analyse their discourse to reveal the matters of significance to the local field. I periodically use cases of their absence or dissonance to point to how their unproblematic synergy with rehearsals came to be relied upon. Practice preceded discourse or is at the very least simultaneous to discourse. The artists during interviews effectively ‘spoke into existence’ dynamics that for the large part had, hitherto, remained unspoken. The general ‘unspokeness’ of these dynamics in the immediate context of experience is not surprising: Bourdieu (1990), Leder (1990), Polanyi (1958), Sutton (2006) et al remind us that such contexts are precisely the moments discourse about has to be put aside in order for the practice to have its effects (see Chapter One).
To understand the unfolding of the Suzukian themes in practice, then, I have paid attention to the training biographies of the individual practitioners, in order to understand the terms—discursive and praxial—with and through which the Suzukian themes were negotiated. While categories such as time and space might be abstracted in a universal applicability, they cannot, as is often the case in post-modern artistic discourses and academic analyses, be divorced in lived experience without doing symbolic violence to the livedness of experience. From the complexity of experience, I draw on terms such as ‘time’ and ‘space’ as used by these artists to articulate distinctive manifestations in their experiences of SMAT. My use, and development of these terms must be understood as an elaboration upon the insider language and discourse of the scene. The distinctions I make between temporal and spatial themes in the following is done to render embodied knowledges legible in written discourse. The local artist-interlocutors that you will continue to ‘hear’ from are (in alphabetical order) - John Baylis, Tanya Gerstle, Clare Grant, Regina Heilmann, Deborah Leiser-Moore, Nigel Kellaway, Don Mamounay, Katia Molino, Deborah Pollard, Chris Ryan, Olivier Sidore and Mémé Thorne (see Appendix P).

The impact of The Sydney Front in setting a tone for the take up of Suzukian practices in Sydney was undeniable. Their early exemplar, to draw on a post-colonial typology, was influential in the cycles of adoption, adaptation and adeptness of SMAT in the first wave. Their reception thus figures prominently in the following. Before they came together and after disbanding, The Front were artists with individual trajectories and histories. Their very diversity insisted that, despite their joint efforts, each could not be reduced to having a single ensemble position on these matters. Rather I felt duty bound to locate what might be shared for the period while preserving their distinct perspectives in this writing. Ensembles of performers, ongoing or transitory, who collaborate, forge a chemistry, and works are made literally out of the embodied knowledge each contributes.

I draw firstly on the temporal themes of stillness, suddenness, lengthening duration and extremes of pace to show how SMAT underwrote their most common way of structuring and composing performance works through montage. How spatial themes of SMAT practice were received and became pertinent constitutes the second theme.
of practice. The foregrounding of gaze and haptic sensing of voluminosity of space in training brought forth vivid and meaningful relationships with the facticity of particular theatre spaces and occasions. Intertwined with these spatial practices, the proxemic configurations of performers and spectators in the actual room during training underwrote how the placial/spatial relations in rehearsals and performances were meaningfully organised.

5.2 Temporal practices in training, devising, rehearsal and performing

Stillness, shortening and lengthening time practices in training

This section focuses on the themes of temporality in SMAT. SMAT practitioners described their capacity to deal with stillness as perhaps the most distinctive attribute gained in Suzuki training; stillness is the most frequently reported practice thematising experiences of time. Katia Molino explained, “What Corporeal Mime gave me was access to different qualities of movement. What Suzuki gave me was access to different qualities of stillness” (interview 2001). This stillness involved a heightened awareness of time passing, enhanced senses of space, energetics, and a control of their corporeality, involving relations between conscious thinking and corporeality. Importantly, stillness was not viewed as explicit representation of specific human images. John Baylis explains the connections between stillness, performance state and signification in their work.

That idea of suppressed energy – just having the authority, but also voluntarily having this power that could be accessed at any moment. Somehow conveying to an audience that I am not still because I’m ‘asleep’. I’m still because any moment I could scream the roof off (interview 1996).

Stillness here is a state of potential future action; practicing stillness was polyvalent, opening out to possibilities, rather than being a slave to mimesis.

Stillness was practiced in all kata in diverse ways; as instantaneous moments with a sense of completeness, or sustained over very long periods. While multiple tempi are also practiced inside some kata, one body part was always held still; in Statues, for example, text is spoken rapidly in precise unison while performers remain as still as possible. Stillness is practiced as intervals of duration, structured by specific sound cues or spatial constraints of the training stage space. Over time, practicing stillness
develops a complex capacity that brings timing of, and in, performing to the fore for both practitioners and their audiences in training. As stage action in its own right, stillness enabled performers to examine their own performance state.

The shortest durations of stillness demand fast, accelerated, and then instantly arrested, movements. At the other extreme Slow Tentakaten demands smooth slow movement, with an unbroken sense of time. Control of smooth and unbroken passages of time over three to even seventeen minutes is repeatedly practiced. Awareness of extremes in the pacing of action is cultivated. Perceptual differentiations of speed during all slow moving become nuanced for performers with immediate, short and longer-term influences on their approaches to performance.

For Kellaway stillness was the most important thing Suzuki taught him, leading him to reassess his own performance process.

I go back to standing still on stage and think of all the different ways, when I was working with Suzuki that I stood still. I think of 'stomping' where, from the waist up, I am still. And of Statues and doing lines. Through constant repetition, after doing these things for years and years so many times and in so many different ways ... I've experienced [stillness] now in a way other techniques would never have asked me to think about or experience. I would've just continued to stand onstage without ever asking, "how can I make this more effective?" Firstly, it introduced me to so many different ways of thinking about standing still. Now, standing still is an extremely potent, interesting and complex essential part of me as an actor.

It also made me think about the difference between stillness and slow[ness]. Slow Tentakaten is not a statue, it is moving. There is a moment when the body transforms from being a statue to moving. This is very difficult for students to discern. I just tell them "go faster". I see people walking slowly up and down and across stage so many times, I get bored with it, so I say "hurry up" ... I'm very aware of the moment when 'slow' becomes something still. It is no longer a walk but a shifting statue (interview 1994).

SMAT's varieties of stillness involve awareness of extremes in the duration of instantaneous, short and sudden changes. Heightened awareness of the discrete nature of certain moments discloses preceding or ensuing streams of uninterrupted time in performance. Heightened awareness is also experienced as rupture in the stream of performance time. Dozens of discreet, abrupt changes or ruptures in performance time and several extended periods of smooth slowness are practiced each session.

Regina Heilmann, who trained with Thorne in SIDETRACK (1991-96), placed her
legacy in the context of a room with no air (their lower case), devised with Deborah Leiser-Moore in 1997.

From doing Suzuki I gained the sense of stillness and the sense of being, even more, hyperaware and just being able to be in that space and not impose anything on it, [to] just allow whatever is happening to work on me and for me to take that up (Heilmann interview 1998).

Heilmann contrasted this receptive, hyperaware state in stillness, with an earlier stage in her career, which she described as action-dependent, wherein explicit intentional activity defined good acting.¹ From SMAT Leiser-Moore gained a constant awareness of each moment: “every moment” she explained, “has to be taken for that moment there” (interview 1992). Pollard said her body felt “more real” in Slow Tentakaten: stillness thematised her balancing, and thus her total body organisation and sensorium (interview 2001).

For Thorne, the control of time meant that large movements were not needed to communicate powerfully to an audience. Thorne offered a hypothetical performance scenario:

You have a single body – we are not working with music or words – like the shakuhachi exercise, a prone body laying on stage. Nothing moves but suddenly the head comes up. If nothing else is moving and just the head comes up, to me that creates enormous tension. You are an audience watching for 45 seconds and suddenly the head comes up (interview 1993).

The energetic muscle tonus of a whole body is poised and braced in readiness for movement, or in anticipation of bringing stillness to a stop. This state of ‘active stillness’ was understood as a containment of an actor’s energies through the suppression of motion. To explain the impact of practicing these stops, Thorne talks about “chords of tension emanating from an actor’s body” (interview 1993). The image suggests a palpable link between performers and the bodies of spectators that creates a highly energised bond and shared ‘zone’. Indeed, practicing varieties of stillness contributed to sensing the material place where they trained, a place where the most significant features attended to are the others who occupy it. This becomes the ‘zone’ in performance, where spectators register the heightened ‘presence’ of the actor.

Using a different image, Baylis linked awareness of moments and stillness to exciting audiences’ attention.
Suzuki (training) seemed to give control of your presence onstage, emphasised the difference between stillness and movement. We became very conscious of holding a moment onstage, how to hold drawing focus. It fitted into our [the Front’s] aesthetic which was very much about how the performer relates to the audience; manipulates the audience’s gaze attention and shifting it between them ... being interesting without doing very much (interview 1996).

This generation of interest was, in Baylis’s judgment,

best done by bodies doing very little. It was as if they have a vacuum around them that sucks attention rather than busy bodies on stage, which most actor training tends to concentrate on – actors being very busy with twitches, mannerisms and funny voices, all trying to fill the void. We were searching for not filling the void but trying to open it up and sucking the audience in (ibid).

Baylis invokes stillness to position The Front’s mode of performing by contrast to established genres of acting and theatre. Baylis’s and Thorne’s comments reveal how practicing stillness cultivated a taste for a minimalism in the visually perceived surface of actor bodies.

**Sudden and fast stopping: “Talking about moving to stop, let’s do Statues”**
(Deborah Leiser-Moore teaching).

As a teacher Leiser-Moore linked instantaneous stillness with an awareness of the present.

The point is not to get across the space but to stay ‘in’ each moment. While doing walks think about each moment stopping. Movement – stop – movement – stop. Don’t race across the stage area. Think about ‘stop’, ‘stop’ each moment. You have to be here [in this present time and place]. The stop enhances this feeling. Being-in-the moment every time we stop (author’s transcription of talk during the training session in 1994).

This typical account emphasises an alert awareness of being present in the place of the stage, rather than an anticipation of the action that may follow. Practitioners incorporated these temporal patterns in the rhythms, speeds and durations of the regime. Emblematically, practice inculcates a taste for the a-rhythmic, in that the lilt of a regular pulse that usually carries forward momentum in action is arrested.

Pollard recalled the guidance of her teacher in Toga, Katoh Masaharu.

When you stomp think about going a quarter of an inch below the floor. Do not get caught up in the rhythm. Each stomp must be independent of the rhythm. This is to increase your concentration, increase your stamina (interview 2001).

The notion of moving for the purposes of stopping is the reverse of the expressive
paradigm that underpins dominant forms of actor training methods derived from Stanislavskian principles. Temporal practices in SMAT contradicted paradigms of expressivity that insist on whole body relaxation and free flow between actions, one central to dominant Australian acting paradigms. It is in stark contrast, too, to the flow of quotidian movement. Nothing about walking, in SMAT, can be taken-for-granted. The stop is demanding, unusual and can tire a novice very quickly. The suddenness of forming a statue can be interrogative for a performer. Grant negotiated contrasting notions of acting in Statues:

Standing Statues is one example of where a different kind of letting go happens because you have to respond so fast and can’t engage the mind, which, I think inhibits you. I know it inhibits me. I start constructing all these things I’m supposed to be and the brain’s doing it. You can think a lot about your character, if that’s what you are doing, [and] what is the next state of mind and you can get very caught up in that. That exercise, where you have to respond so fast without engaging the mind, enables you grasp and ride along on something else – whatever it is (interview 1994).

Like Heilmann, Grant distanced herself from acting that pivots around a concept of character, with the attendant, post-Stanislavskian structuring of stage action through conscious decisions, ascribing transitive verb phrases in chains of imagined character intentions into a through-line of narrative.

Bourdieu suggests something akin to an immersion in novel bodily experience for those wishing to consciously change their bodily gestalt to ‘reset’ the complicity between habitus and field.

Agents become something like “subjects” only to the extent that they consciously master the relation they entertain with their dispositions. They can deliberately let them ‘act’ or they can on the contrary inhibit them by virtue of consciousness – (or as) Leibniz argued that one cannot fight passion with reason, as Descartes claimed, but only with “slanted wills” (volantes obliques) i.e. with the help of other passions (1998: 136).

To create a different state of performing, Grant used Statues to bring to consciousness the temporal patterning of her embodied knowledge from an earlier mode of acting. SMAT’s temporal structures became Grant’s volantes obliques, to set vestiges of previous acting technique aside in her own embodiment.

In dramaturgical terms, stillnesses are most commonly understood as ’pauses’ or gaps, defined in relation to a continuous flow of action. Gaps in narrative-based theatres are seen as interruptions to the momentum of the fabula (Ubersfeld 1999:
They commonly carry connotations of ‘time out’, or as ends or pauses that frame the more important action that occurs between pauses. The energy required to create and sustain stillness in SMAT frames stillness as action itself, reversing this conventional understanding. The ‘time out’ connotation, however, is not totally eclipsed. Even nanoseconds of stillness allow performers to consciously grasp and reflect upon their performance, to negotiate excessive tension, balance, directionality, commitment of concentration and focus. This contributes to their sense of awareness of expression. As Grant observes of her state of stillness in Statues,

It is a sense of being right open. I think in my mind. And if I find I am not steady, I’ve got to quickly engage my brain and find out why I’m not steady and then let it go again really fast so I’m ready for the next sound – quickly bringing it in and bringing it out (interview 1994).

Both Heilmann and Grant describe their performing state in stillness as entailing a receptive regard for their embodiment. Grant’s “sense of being right open” suggests that in these periods, bounded by cues beyond the volition of the individual constructing actorly representations, they are curious and sensitive to influences inflecting their state as performers. Once familiar, SMAT’s temporal structures facilitate an energetic receptivity to the surrounding environment, as well as to interior impulses and histories, producing a state of availability wherein corporeality can mediate the topics, attitudes, themes and goals arising from the diverse forces immanent in collaborative devising. Their rehearsal environments included readings, discussions, debates and contemplations in preparing a new work with their collaborators. This receptive state is one of intrinsic curiosity, a quick ‘wait and see’ attitude, potentially interrogative of how their embodiment mediates prompts from within and around.

Performing-in-training is practiced in chunks, segments of duration. Each kata has a marked start (for which there is no preparatory Meyerholdian oktas, or recoil) and endpoint. In several of the kata, emphatic marked sudden changes or ruptures occur. This is difficult practice, demanding (and enhancing) mental agility and tenacity. Performing or acting is practiced as either occurring or not, in two discreet time phases. One instantly enters into a performance state, and leaves it, repeatedly in every session. The duration of any imaginal associations provoked are thus also distinctly marked as either ‘on’ or ‘off’.
For Kellaway the practice of moving slowly in an unbroken way also frames the artifice of performance:

The attraction was the total removal of naturalism, more than the strong psychologically-motivated performances of Bausch. This Japanese contemporary work denied that entirely. It was such a simple thing. It took me by surprise as it did everybody.

It became intelligent. It acknowledged its theatricality in a different way to the way Wuppertal Tanztheater did, and the main stage does in Australia. It came from a source so utterly apart from the mainstage, from naturalistic theatre. It's different from Pina, who comes from the whole growth of German expressionism in dance (interview 1994).

In smooth, long, slow kata, a single attitude can be held ‘alive’ in suspension for extended periods of time, defying everyday kinesthesial expectations.

Stillness, then, was prized and linked to heightened awareness of embodiment, and to the present moment of performance. Some used the temporal practices to complement aspects of conventional concepts of acting, while others sought to totally subvert these traces. All interview accounts emphasised a focus on their performance state during training; a state they carried into rehearsals. The imperatives of devising catalysed these temporal sensibilities, the effects of which I analyse in the next section.

5.3 Themes of temporal practice in creational rehearsal processes in the Sydney scene

The impact of SMAT’s temporal themes was salient and decisive at particular junctures and phases of creational rehearsals. The relationship was one of resonance between the embodied knowledge of performers gained in training, and the demands of rehearsal in this field, not of cause and effect. Training together, or at other times in commensurate practices, developed a shared ‘feel for the game’ – a habitus – evoked by the demands of devising. This synchrony unfolded in relations between performers’ temporal sensibilities and a series of issues, demands or problems that arose during devising. These include: devices for creating and composing segments of stage action; relations with orderliness of creative development through reducing the chaos of procedures by calling on shared understandings about how to handle time; shared points of departure in ways of seeing, feeling and judgment of other performers’, and their own work inside segments of material, especially ways of
refining material that crops up quickly and confidence in handling chunks or sections, including a willingness to instantly abandon material. This ‘feel for the game’ allowed work to proceed relatively quickly in the context of short funded rehearsal periods.2

“Theatre,” explained Kellaway

for me is about time. That is the main building block that I am aware of working with in theatre: – how do I manipulate a space in time? If I have an allotted time, one and a half hours, how am I to divide that, how am I going to manipulate the audience’s perception of that time, how am I going to push that tolerance level of time just that little bit further to make an audience work, to challenge an audience. The processes of making theatre are about certain dynamic levels are highly compositional: loud bits and soft bits, fast and slow bits. They are building blocks of theatre, much more so than a character, than a certain personality on stage. The manipulation of time is the essential theatre form (1994a, 8).

Deborah Pollard summed up SMAT’s value for her conception and creation of performance:

as a performer, time and space matter because they are the two basic elements we use to create work from, the essence of how we are operating in the space, our relationship to audience, our relations to the site, our relation to the time we place within performance (interview 2001).

There was a widespread investment in devising strategies that created and then assembled segments of performance material, so that a work’s meaning derived from a spatiotemporal montage unfolding over a performance’s duration. The mise en scène was fuelled and constrained by performers’ embodied knowledges and their active participation in devising.

Tanya Gerstle, directorial collaborator with Deborah Leiser-Moore for her solo show Hungry (1996), came to her role with a background as a physical theatre performer and actor in commercial theatre.3 Leiser-Moore and Gerstle structured Hungry’s montage loosely around the chronology of the five rites in the observance of Yom Kippur, cutting between four distinct performance languages, ranging from naturalistic to abstract vocal and physical expression. Gerstle’s interests lay in what she called the ‘formal’ aspects of this work in a compositional role analogous to that of a musical arranger. She described Leiser-Moore’s SMAT background as contributing a keen use of space and varied used tempi.
I wanted to create something that involved all the elements and fine seamless transitions – to use text, body, image, music. We talked about different stylistic applications – I was always interested in elucidating formally what she [Leiser-Moore] wanted to say because it was not my story. I tried to remain detached from the content (Gerstle interview 1997).

Similarly, director Don Mamouney at SIDETRACK reached out to SMAT to make theatre where the meaning lay more in the form than in the ostensible content, or topics represented on stage. For Mamouney, his directorial role resided in the temporal arrangement and editing of actor-devised performance materials. When asked what this involved in practice, Mamouney explained:

> Timing in particular. I rarely alter substantially the ‘choreography.’ My ideal is that the performer does the choreography and I edit it. I go “further here. Pull back here. Keep it on that line.” You have to get all the ingredients and then put it together (interview 2001).

This was Heilmann’s experience: Mamouney edited fragments of what she devised as a response to his ‘germs of visual image ideas’, ‘giving’ movements from her segment to another performer as a score to perform either in unison or contrapuntally, while she spoke parts of a monologue she wrote (see Chapter Four).

**Devices for composing in rehearsals – Transitions and ways of sensing temporal flow**

Chunks of stage action collectively devised in rehearsal need to be ordered and joined. Sometimes this is a very conscious process and at others transitions appear to arise spontaneously when performers’ embodied knowledges ‘intuitively’ come into play. Baylis described the pressures that segment composition placed on THE FRONT’s performer-makers in terms of quantity and how embodied knowledges were banked on to deal with these problems.

> Things would be stuck together arbitrarily; there would be no internal process. It would only be once we shaped the show - usually in the last few days of rehearsal in starting to do runs when we would take off our directors’ hats put on our performers’ hats—to find some kind of through line through the whole thing so it would have a bit of flow to it. So it would not be a stop start where you could see the glue.

Sometimes the glue would show. There was one show, John Laws/Sade [1987] where we came up with lots and lots of scenes and how we would transish [a shorthand for a transition’s effect] from one scene to another. Transitions were always a huge issue in our work. Often what would happen is the transitions would prove more interesting than the scenes themselves. We were then left with transitions, which we then had to find transitions between. We would be dumping the scenes all along the line. You couldn’t be precious about your contribution to the show (Baylis interview 1996).

A typical end to a FRONT segment was a quick cut or shift into a more quotidian
performance mode. Clare Grant cited a spectator’s description of another common 
Front transition as “a quick cut and go from one huge emotional state to another.” 
Such juxtapositions were echoed in later works by Sydney post-Suzukians. Another 
Front member, Chris Ryan, explained how embodied knowledge engendered in 
stomping was spontaneously recruited to handle these transitional pressures in 
composing montaged performance.

Take Statues. It is not the position that is important. It is getting from one position to another 
– the process of getting there which is important. And for me that’s a metaphor for transition, 
sudden or slow transition. You can take the slow walk as a transition. You can take being on 
your haunches, in a squat then into a position as a sudden transition. And getting out of it is a 
transition. Whether you drop it or gradually move from one segment to another, it is a 
transition. What is important in Standing Statues is how you got there. When you talk about 
segmentation, what becomes important is how you get from that bit to this bit. If you look at 
people’s work, whether it’s Mémé [Thorne] or others you can see this (Ryan interview 
2001).

Ryan recognised the abrupt and lengthy transitioning devices in pieces by all other 
Suzuki trained performance makers in the contemporary performance field in 
Sydney. Alternation of tempi and duration characterised the structural segmentation 
of Thorne’s solo work, Burying Mother (1996) on which I conducted detailed 
performance analysis. Elsewhere, I have described at length how the different types 
of acting, personae and ways of being with spectators were emphatically juxtaposed 
within this one work (Taylor 1998).

In devising Hungry numerous motifs and short sequences of the work resembled 
SMAT’s training repertoire. Nevertheless, they were not conceived of as staging 
Suzukian training. For example, take the devising of a segment with the working title 
‘Yetta’ which sought to capture the need to exorcise the memories of a fictional aunt 
Yetta hunted by Nazis in Poland. The director, Gerstle, suggested that Leiser-Moore 
draw on experiences of a panic attack in response to the claustrophobic given 
circumstances of a family dinner. Leiser-Moore did not identify with this stimulus. A 
spontaneous abrupt switch from Leiser-Moore playing Aunt Yetta saying, “Deborah, 
you have my sister’s eyes” to playing herself, gathered up Deborah’s deeply 
embedded capacity for ruptures. Her virtuosic capacity to break from one discrete 
physical state and persona to another, abruptly and repeatedly, in a non-naturalistic 
arhythmic sequence consolidated how changes of styles meshed with the segment’s 
story. Leiser-Moore’s adeptness and extensive practice in creating sudden poses in 
the Statues kata was incited and unconsciously recruited to the task. I recognised the
adaptation of the ‘quick changes’ in the standing and sitting Statues kata. There was no talk from either Leiser-Moore or the collaborating director about these movements. Leiser-Moore’s capacity to totally and suddenly change from stillness to stillness clearly attracted the director. The abrupt stillnesses encapsulated the spasms of a state of terror at the prospect of carry something in her body from a dead relative, an aunt’s eyes looked into by yet another relative. The transformation was into a possession-like state, with the ruptures that followed like attempts to exorcise this alien presence. A continuing sequence of abrupt changes transformed their meaningfulness through many repetitions into Leiser-Moore blowing out ritual menorah candles with the same punctuation.

Kellaway, Baylis and Ryan’s accounts of rehearsal and training, and my own account of the devising of Hungry and performance of Burying Mother reveal three important consequences for the shaping of transitions. One is that transitions qua transitions readily become vehicles of significant meaning in their own right for performers, even though they arise serendipitously to solve problems. Second, spectators do not necessarily draw distinctions in a physicalized work between transitions and other segments. Third is the centrality of transitions in setting the tenor of total event by establishing particular rhythmic registers inducing distinct temporal states viscerally for spectators, when they affect shifts in rates of attention switching, heart and pulse rate. This depends on provoking some kind of ‘enchanted’ state in which audiences are caught up in the event.

The confidence that members of the ensembles assumed about each other’s performance capacities to deal with transitions clearly contributed to the speed of devising in the limited amount of rehearsal time. Collaborative devising can become extremely turbulent, as chunks of embodied performance material proliferate, and fine details of each are attended to. As well as offering devices, SMAT contributed to wrestling, out of the turbulence, a degree of implicit organization in the devising process itself giving confidence that an intrinsic ordering of material would arise to speak back to performer-makers, as Barba would say, with its own autonomous voice (Barba 2000: 65). Distinct feelings for the flow of time constituted a performance making language that permeated the details of the daily conduct of devising.
The directions members of The Sydney Front gave each other during devising of Don Juan, as scribed by rehearsal observer, Karen Martin, are densely peppered with instructions about and concerns with the timing of individual and group actions as they performed with each other (1994, 13-25). In transcripts of early formative sessions, intra-troupe timing notes were given as they engaged in trials of segments and improvisations. These concern nuances of slowness, the fashioning and ‘holding’ of moments, composing combinations of lengthening periods and slow motion broken with suddenness, micro transitions within scenes, group unison and transitioning into and out of temporally adjacent scenes. To quote actor X, “it’s really like a puzzle, trying to fit them (actions) together” (Martin 1994, 13).

The participating actors referred to timing to create and shape action images and trial solutions to perceived creative problems. They gave each other timing notes rather than referring to performers’ emotions or thoughts. They assumed these terms made sense to all, that immediate responses could be executed on the rehearsal ‘stage’ and were within their capacities and interests. These constituted the discourse of rehearsals.

Bayliss retrospectively acknowledged that the group had developed a shared attunement of temporal capacities that underscored their resources for their performance.

[Stomping] is a control mechanism, how you can control your body’s language and you as a group can choreograph your body’s languages, have a sense of each other and getting into synch. Any kind of training sits with you all the way even when you seem to be doing things that are the obverse of the training if it has sunk into your body deep enough.

It was always a problem when an outsider joined the company because they would be bouncing around and [would] not concentrate. I would never know what to tell such a person. The others would move with a sense of coordination without having to say [anything] ... this other presence would be like a puppy dog running around on stage in its own world. Busy or still, it was a sense of “I’m in my own space”. That [thought] just brought home the fact that those who had been together for that length of time had got a choral sense between us and many things did not have to be spelled out or spoken. We could even improvise in synch. So I don’t think the training would hurt, that in fact would help that kind of thing (interview 1996).

Shared training was especially important for a group which actively resisted talking and reduced its role in rehearsals, as The Front did (Schaeffer 2001, 97). A picture emerges of the troupe’s reliance on its shared feel for the temporal structuring of action. Practices of stillness contributed to dealing with the clutter – what they called
the ‘muddiness’ of stage imagery they generated. “The minute you’d see something you’d grab that bit and get rid of the rubbish” explains Baylis. “You couldn’t be precious about your improvisation“ (interview 1996). Stillness in training created a heightened awareness of every movement. “It made me conscious in that way. You become very aware so you cut down extraneous movement” (ibid). Transposed into devising, for Baylis, SMAT’s use value was in clarifying the quantity of action through its reduction. “Whatever the rush into an improvisation is, by the time you enter into performance you have cut away a great deal” (ibid). An aesthetic of visual minimalism was cultivated.

Kellaway, Thorne and Molino echoed this concern with visual minimalism in corporeal action of individual actors and groups. Thorne emphasised the visuality of performers’ work.

Frequently, I see actors onstage and it seems that most actors seem to feel the need to move on stage all the time or to speak all the time. There is no room of silences. I’m not just speaking of vocal silences, but of physical ‘silence’ as well. Standing still and not saying anything can speak volumes and I think the Suzuki method helps you to become aware of how potent silence can be and teaches you a way to possibly use it. But you can’t do that until you know your body and become aware of how you use your muscles, how you use your head (interview 1991).

In her stressing silence, Thorne’s comments point to a belief that stillness onstage replaces the need to speak thus also can replace the need for a written script. Indeed, the cover of Thorne’s publicity brochure for a training cycle bore, in bold letters, its title The Art of Silence.

In the final devising phase of Hungry, Gerstle’s background as a physical performer familiar with SMAT informed how she gave feedback, synchronising with Leiser-Moore’s way of devising.

As a physical practitioner, it is in the use of space and the use of tempo – so you’ll do something very fast then there’ll be stillness; or you’re fast then you’re going slow. So you’re always using those elements. So that’s why often I would talk to Deborah in terms of that physical [understanding] and say “now, can you translate that to the vocal, because it’s exactly the same”. And when working with text improvisationally you have to have that inbuilt technique to make improvisation work (Gerstle interview 1997).

Gerstle sought to mobilise Leiser-Moore’s SMAT experience by referring to specific temporal structures in the storytelling or naturalistic sections. Gerstle called these “technical notes” and at times “musical terms”, a metaphor that emphasised their
temporal consequences.

I found that when I spoke to Deborah through image or spoke to her through the emotion or what is being said and "how do you feel about what is being said?" from a psychological perspective that didn't process (ibid).

Notes about time and space are, in Gerstle's estimation, not the kind she would usually give actors schooled in Stanislavskian methodologies. Giving notes about temporal form in sections that dealt directly with Jewish cultural and religious matters allowed Leiser-Moore to negotiate this content without Gerstle, a non-believer, having to mediate Judaic values. Struggles about interpretation around religious beliefs were avoided and remained Leiser-Moore's domain of responsibility. During the last stage of devising, Gerstle drew actively on Leiser-Moore's Suzukian habitus to develop segments they called "abstract physical" style (Leiser-Moore interview 1996) or "theatrical language", coupled with a poetic use of language (author's rehearsal documentation of Hungry).

The role of shared understandings about SMAT as a generative force at SIDETRACK is echoed in Heilmann's recollection of collaborating with director Mamouney.

He knows what the method is, knows what it is that we do, so he can ask certain things that come from the method, like the stillness. I remember this [sequence] we did in The Drunken Boat, where we had to walk really slowly, almost a moving statue. That's what we were and our mouths opened slowly over a period of - I don't know how many minutes - I feel like I've got permanent jaw damage as a result. Holding this position was excruciating but because of our training method, we understood what was required. We understood the need to be still. We understood the need to have tension, to be centred, to be focussed. All those things that came from our training but were there interpreted in Drunken Boat in certain scenes like that. Because I had repeated those things for so many years, they all became quite within my body - almost automatic sort of things. And they were easy, therefore, for the director to manipulate because he wouldn't have to demand that we focus, or explain or dispute what he was after because we all knew the language (Heilmann interview 1998).

Again the term 'language' has connotations of a visual code for staging images, of 'writing' images through banking on performers' embodied knowledges. The performers' SMAT-engendered capacities coalesced with Mamouney's interests in editing the temporal composition of performer-generated material.

The capacity of SIDETRACK and SYDNEY FRONT performers to handle discreet chunks of performance material in transposable sections, to devise instantaneous transitions and jump quickly in and out of trials of material very suddenly in collaborative devising facilitated how direction itself was conducted. Mamouney describes his
working relation with the 1991-96 ensemble:

If I stepped into the middle of it and stopped it and reset it in another direction and – I can’t remember [resistance] … [The previous ensemble] would take what I was suggesting and trust me enough to know that if I wasn’t getting the right feeling from it, that something else would need to be tried. And that was ok – when you work this way you have to make a lot of mistakes. You have to throw a lot of stuff up – And then you have to sort it out. You have to sift it and clarify it – The old group would be like – you know, if you were writing a poem or something or painting a picture, you need to be able to put the little bits in and then rub it out or whatever (interview 1998).

Baylis recalled SYDNEY FRONT members needing, from their earliest works, to change gear very quickly (Olb and Miller1989, 16 -17). Kellaway thought of training as being about having “our material so physically grounded in the body that we are able to make quick mental leaps in a performance“ (ibid). This equally applied to performance inside rehearsals as in public.

The capacity to make quick mental leaps in devising montage has, for Ryan, evolved into an enduring approach with groups as a freelance director after THE FRONT disbanded. Here he is explaining an exercise he had devised, drawn from his experience of SMAT:

All of a sudden you’ve got an action out of context. You are in a position of playing with these separate elements that depending on how you put them together can be incredibly tragic or funny. But the elements are separate and thus become choices. The choice that you make to put them together make totally different meanings. That exercise came from my engagement with Suzuki technique because that is about things out of context and creating new contexts by how you are putting things together (Ryan interview 2001).

Continued devising was then informed by the meanings arising out of the juxtaposition of ‘chunks’ to form syntax in montaged compositions. This echoes Suzuki’s method of dépaysement to which I referred to in Chapter Two. In The Sum of Interior Angles Suzuki used the metaphor of refraction of light bounced off the internal angled planes of a prism as it passes through the glass medium to describe how unexpected juxtapositions produced surprising perspectives on realities (Suzuki 1973, paraphrased by Goto 1988, 132). Yet local performers had not read this article, nor did the discourse around montaged composition accompany the training. None of the artists interviewed referenced seeing Suzuki’s performances as influential or triggering their practice of juxtaposing chunks in their own devising.4

Ryan went onto to describe how his discourse about performance translated into
framing of direction for actors.

I am asking people to disconnect from content and deliver content without engaging with it and you can choose to change your negotiation with it very quickly. And that each of those elements can be totally truthful in the time they are delivered [i.e. performed]. You don't have to find a psychological engagement. You can do one action then do another. That is what happens in play texts, too, but written texts tend to give us a psychological engagement. There is chunking down and chunking up – If you are training then you go to work with the chunking of the training that's already there (interview 2001).

The “chunking of the training” is Ryan’s description of what Bourdieu calls the 'structuring structures' of habitus. Clearly these structures no longer remained invisible or unconscious to Ryan in his role as director or collaborator in ensemble, as Bourdieu would have it. They were, however, thematised through his training experiences. Ryan’s commentary reveals how compositional affordances are transmitted through SMAT praxis qua praxis. It would seem that Suzuki’s intentions in making theatre constituted a salient ‘constraint initially set on invention’ embedded in SMAT’s kata that offered possibilities to the Sydneysiders to revivify montage strategies in devising: strategies that through the evolutions of continual application cultivated distinct skills in dramaturgy, the effect of which I discuss in the following section.

5.4 Performance segmentation: Structuring performance time

McAuley suggests that the history of the concern with performance segmentation in fine detail emerged during the course of the twentieth century in contrast to notions of

acts and scenes [that] have been in existence for hundreds of years and are part of the dramaturgical structure provided by the writer. It is indeed only since the advent of the director that anyone has bothered to describe the production process or to theorize about it, and of course the process itself has evolved significantly due to the work of the director. If, as is claimed here, segmentation is an important part of the creation and communication of meaning, then it is important to know who does the segmenting and when and how. This is part of the constantly evolving question of authorial responsibility in the theatre (McAuley 1999, 140).

As McAuley notes, this attention to performance segmentation has arisen since the advent of the importance of the director in the authorial function of the mise en scène. When performers' embodied knowledges, consciously and unconsciously exercised during devising, are decisive in segmentation they can also be understood to facilitate and extend performers' directorial agency. Practicing highly pronounced intervals of duration in SMAT fits with, and offered possibilities for, performance
segmentation in compositional processes ‘worked out on the floor’. The power of the highly marked segmentation will be more decisive in the production of meanings for producers and spectators where segmentation is attended to without goals to propel character trajectories in an overarching narrative. The power to generate spectators’ syntagmatic curiosity resides in the ruptures and juxtapositions. The body of works of the two Sydney ensembles, The Sydney Front and Sidetrack, and, Leiser-Moore’s, Pollard’s and Thorne’s solos are vivid examples. The fragmentation of segments in works by first and second wave artists was more decisively more pronounced and frequent than was evident in the only Suzukian performance several of the interviewed artists cite, Trojan Women.5

The decisive part played by abrupt and frequent segmentation required investment by all creative agents. When a taste for highly marked intervals of time synchronises with an ensemble’s shared investment in shaping temporal flow, the power of segmentation is enhanced. It can be traced both in rehearsal talk, directing notes, performers’ accounts and in witnessing the quantity and ways performance material is generated and organises itself in creational rehearsal periods. The relation is a complex mix of both conscious goal setting (i.e. we aim to create a montage) and unconscious triggering of dispositions.

Without pre-existing patterns of whole performances suggested in written texts, rehearsals did not involve breaking down a suggested performance score into smaller and smaller sections, through cognitive analysis, as is the paradigm of Stanislavskian actor processes. Corridor notice boards in academies, where script-based shows are created, regularly carry rehearsal schedules broken down into numbered ‘beats’ by directors to organise rehearsal calls. Nothing like this applied in the SMAT context. All performers were involved from the outset, building up a whole event, by piecing together and arranging smaller corporeal and limited amounts of textual materials, of varying durations without scripted reference points or structural plans. Gerstle alluded to the contrast between these two paradigms in dealing with particular discrete sections of material in devising Hungry.

I was all the time very conscious of “What is this segment really? What does this say to me when you put it all in one go?” Because you can’t do that when you make in segments. Although all the time you’re trying to anticipate how this segment will be read – before and after. But that’s the chaotic nature of the developing process, isn’t it? And there are so many
places where you can go wrong – Then you see it in the whole and then you go “oh, all right, now if I had a blah, blah”, but of course by that point it is too late (interview 1997).

Projective in outlook, Gerstle tacked between parts and the anticipated whole work. Stanislavskian-derived work methods could not be relied upon or give performers confidence to organise these types of rehearsals. The starting points of contemporary performance devising in Sydney were less stable and consolidated. The are of their intentions, articulated in starting points, was frequently speculative and interrogative in nature. Whether or not an exciting work with its own autonomy emerged was risky. So any training methods needed to contribute to courage, faith and confidence and aid composition. How chunks of material were arranged, as a whole theatre work, in future spectator experience was at stake and all participated in this challenge. The performance-makers in the Sydney scene wagered on the efficacy of their embodied knowledges to realise a whole composition.

What meanings may ‘body forth’ from the material they devised immanently arose in the juxtapositions and ordering. Clusters of sections were trialled in different orders as early as possible to test out immanent meanings. Substantial reordering could always bring about a shift of adjacent juxtapositions and thus meanings much later in rehearsals, even very close to an opening night. Keith Gallasch of Open City, an experienced dramaturg in script-based, physical theatre and contemporary performance called this the ‘reverse dramaturgy’ of going back into a whole work to reorder the chronology in light of what was discovered by all concerned on the rehearsal floor (personal communication, 2001). When handling scripted action, the freedom to reorder is the prerogative of a writer. Performers needed capabilities to ‘chunk’ material and perform segments independent of the order that sustained the original spatiotemporal qualities and intensities. Heilmann explains:

You’ve got structure that can be repeated or some sort of some format, almost tangible. Otherwise you feel like you might lose them. In performance it’s important to be able to recreate the performance every night. So [one has] to know the power to get back to that place every night (interview 1998).

This confidence is equally vital to devising. Groups relied on reiterations of performance segments to create their montages. Barba, from his vantage point as a director, insists on performers’ capacities to shift their action ‘amphibiously’ from context to context in the turbulence of dramaturgical processes unfolding ‘on the
The actions of the actors should possess coherence independent of their context and their "meaning." They should appear credible on a sensorial level and be present on a pre-expressive one. The granite foundations are their quality of credibility, their ability to stimulate the attention of the spectator and to be rooted in the body-mind of the actor. They should be based on their own particular independent logic. Why then do I insist so strongly on the importance of precision in fixing and knowing how to repeat the precise pattern of the actions; on the value of one’s independence from the intentions of the director and the writer; on the coherence of one’s score and subscore? Because the autonomous coherence of the actions (independently of the significance that they assume in the context of the performance) bestows a particular and precious gift on the material which the actor has assembled: it becomes amphibious, capable of passing from one context to another without withering away, and able to mutate without losing the roots that keep it alive (Barba 2000, 60).

The high level of imbrication of performer sensibilities for handling intervals of time, extremes in tempo and sudden changes engendered in SMAT extend their authorial role during devising. From actors working to realise a writer or director, they worked from their positions as actors forming the mise en scène alongside each other. Next I return to individual experiences of training to identify distinctive spatial themes then trace how these, too, were adapted in their evolving dramaturgy.

5.5 Themes of space and place in training, performance and devising in the practice of the post-Suzukians in the Sydney scene

The development of heightened and distinctive spatial perceptions is a core part of SMAT. Once a practitioner has learnt the regular spatial forms of stillness, refining spatial perception – rather than learning more movement vocabulary – is central to subsequent development. Artists learn to develop a sense of their body’s present relationship to space, and, perforce, to other bodies, including those in an audience. Despite further progress relying on cultivating this capacity, teachers rarely explicitly valorize spatial awareness as a global aim. As Kellaway describes this, there are ‘no facts’ this learning is experiential. Teachers may give detailed corrections, but do not indicate what kinds of sensations practitioners can expect. Freelance Sydney actor Susan Kennedy, who trained in Toga in 1990, summarized this as meaning the body is disciplined but the mind is free (personal communication 1993).

Line of gaze

Where a performer focuses their eyes matters in all kata. For the experienced, it becomes ubiquitous. Early in my own training, teachers offered strict instruction
about, literally, where my eyes looked, the distance of this gaze and its duration. The term my teachers in Toga used was ‘far focus’ as a coaching pointer to focus our eyes on a point at the maximum possible depth from our bodies. The expression ‘far focus’ was often accompanied by the term ‘cool face’, a rejoinder to release facial tension prompted by the exertion of maintaining stillness throughout a body, including the eyes.

Freelance performer Katia Molino summarised the distinctive quality of this focussing.

To do the training with Suzuki you have a sharp focus. If you reduced a performer to a pure energy it would be very sharp, like a laser with Suzuki. Whereas if you did the same thing with butoh it would be diffuse light radiating all around (interview 2001).

While teaching students at the UWS Nepean, Leiser-Moore constantly referred to “eye gaze”. What follows are samples of her feedback on their execution of three kata. To clarify a student enquiry about Statues:

Each different statue has its own point of focus. You quickly see exactly where it is and direct your energy to that point of focus each time (author’s transcription of talk during the training session in 1994).

After one half of the group performed Slow Tentakaten, she urged them to gain

a stronger sense of the point of focus out there. [She points to a place far away ahead across the stage and past the wall] I, as audience, want to see that. It is like you’ve got no choice. You have to move to that point of focus. I want this energy from everybody. That energy has got to come from the centre of gravity. It starts here [she indicates a point low in her solar plexus region] (ibid).

Just prior to Three-minute Stomping Leiser-Moore offered the following guidance:

In focussing forward you must be very clear where the point of focus is, even though you may not be facing directly to it with your trunk as you travel downstage, your whole orientation and centre must be directed to that focus. You must know your relationship - between you and your point of focus and you must know why you are moving forward. Otherwise it is just people doing an exercise because I set it (ibid).

The ‘here’ placement is felt connected to the maximum depth of a human gaze. A body becomes a place, a ‘here’ sensed in relation to a ‘there’. Heilmann referred to the practice of this skill.

The sense was that the focus was outside the self. It wasn’t about losing yourself in yourself.
It was about being drawn by some greater force than yourself, pulled through the space by some greater force. There was always this, this tendency for me to want to lose myself in myself and not actually go out to this other place. So the eyes were often inward looking rather than outward looking. So it was continual notes of, "Keep the eyes alive. Make sure you’re seeing where you are going" (interview 2001).

Heilmann summarised experiences of confidently locating herself gained through the awareness of her pelvis and feet in stomping.

If you are strong and have a sense of your centre being in the solar plexus or hip area, you have a really strong connection with the ground and are well placed in space. The idea is that can look after itself and the rest [all performer action, vocal, linguistic, corporeal and imaginal] has a strong foundation (ibid).

Chris Ryan valued this too:

It gave me a very quick way into centring myself ... connecting to the ground. If you have nerves, it pulls you off the ground. Slow Tentakaten gave me an immediate sense of being ... Thumping your feet into the ground and aligning your pelvis into the ground does it very quickly (interview 2001).

Stomping, for Ryan, is a metaphor for what goes on onstage and gave him a sense of control in "negotiating the outside environment":

That’s got psychological implications. Like comfortableness in knowing what you’re doing on stage, rather than running with what’s happening at the moment. I know the time frame. And it is about a weight and connection to the ground, whereas inexperience disconnects you (ibid).

Phases of inexperience recur when encountering new images or demands in each new project. The line of a gaze with firm placement into the ground became a locative reference for organising his mental and physical state. This gaze organizes a performer’s body, elicits spatial thematisation for performers and cultivates heightened spatial awareness as a skill. It was drawn forth tacitly rather than through rehearsal discourse about ‘space’ as an explicit goal in its own right. For Kellaway,

it wasn’t something we ever talked about or said "we should do this spatially because of this, this, and this." This was not the working method of THE SYDNEY FRONT (interview 1994).

This sustained focus to a particular point is held much longer than in the kinesthetial flow of everyday life. The easy switching of eye focus from place to place is constant in everyday perception. For scholar of the psychology of visual perception, J.J Gibson, this unnoticed ‘saccadic’ eye movement is intrinsic locating ourselves within each place we inhabit by scanning the ‘visual ambient array’ by generating a feeling
of stability of the surrounding environment (Gibson 1978, 209-216). By contrast, once holding the gaze for extended periods becomes a skill it opens up a heightened awareness of the voluminosity of space surrounding a performer’s body. Phenomenologist Leder goes further.

In addition to the synergic cooperation of organs, bodily intentionality rests upon continuities asserted across time. If my perceptual apparatus were transforming at every moment, I could not know if perceived changes lay in the world or in myself. Only structural stability of my body allows it to be an assumed basis from which I respond to an eventful world (1990, 88).

If a steadied body with a stilled gaze amplifies structural stability, then changes in the world of the performance are more keenly perceived. The reach of this steadied far gaze encompasses a sensing of audience members’ presence.

For Ed Casey the distinction between “scope” and “hold” are parametrical actions of the ‘lived body’ in the interplay between depth and place:

‘Scope’ is closely related to what I have called the “horizontal arc” – the horizon is the outer boundary of the body’s gesticular ambit while ‘hold’ reflects the way the near and far are grasped together within the compass of any given horizon. Scope has to do with range, hold with reach (1993, 68).

Far-focussing eyes in stillness thematised performers’ hold, or grasp, of relations between what is near and far. Spectators, other performers, objects and architectural features within the range of the far focus are ‘held’ within its reach. Spectators are ‘caught’ even if they are not aware of how this has been achieved. Baylis infers this in his earlier metaphor of SMAT-engendered bodily presence as a ‘spotlight’ that ‘threw attention’. Alongside my own observations of FRONT performances, this points to confident use of this gaze for deictic functions in their performances.

Focussing on a distant horizon while training indoors is, first and foremost, an act of imagination. The propensity for the gaze to attach to the visible architectural features must be transcended. This is difficult. For Pollard far-focusing organized the balance of her whole body.

Again it depended on the directions Katoh was giving at the time. Yes, my focus was probably inward. But if he was saying, ‘make your gaze go to eternity’, that would be another challenge given to me. And then my focus would go off the shakes and into the gaze. He said, “The horizon is very very far away. It is beyond the building” (interview 2001).
This reveals how this distance focus interacts with exhaustion and lack of balance—what Pollard describes as the ‘shakes’—that pulled her gaze directly in ‘to’ her body. Leder identifies a pain-induced spatiotemporal constriction that disrupts openness to the world.

The expanse of the distance senses is replaced by the oppressive nearness of coenaesthesia. We are no longer dispersed out there in the world, but suddenly congeal right here. Our attention is drawn back not only to our own bodies but also often to a particular body part (Leder 1990, 70).

Pollard’s ‘shakes’ made the scope of her spatial sense close, small and confined. To counterbalance this, the greatest possible depth of gaze is recruited to dissipate trembling, rather than risk abandoning the movement that triggered it. Kellaway also discussed this relation between gaze and pain:

It was all about finding certain things to concentrate upon—Let’s say you are in Statues ... You’re in a mess ... Suzuki taught me that the way to do it was to forget your body is falling to pieces, concentrate on what is important, which what the audience is watching and listening to ... because the body will look after itself ... your body functions quite well without your brain working in it, concentrating on it (interview 1994).

Kellaway slipped unproblematically between using words for focussing eyes and concentration to directing attention away from his body, the better to organise his performance state. This is a paradoxical intertwining of the fictional and palpably real. Performing artists in the local scene embraced this tension in devising, in representations of identities as well as in relations with spectators. Suzuki encapsulated this paradox in his reasons for designing a method.

These techniques should be mastered, studied, until they serve as an “operational hypothesis”, so that the actors may truly feel themselves “fictional” on stage (Suzuki 1991, 242).

“Truly” feel “fictional” carries the palpable clarity of feeling in the stilled, steady bond between the ‘there’ of eye focus and ‘here’ of the emphatic foot placement. Striving to master the impossibility of seeing through walls has the potential to activate for spectators, imaginatively, a much larger sense of place in which performance occurs. Performers’ imaginative efforts are not, in training, directed towards characterisation: what is not at continually at stake is ‘acting’ a ‘realistic’ set of eye behaviours of a fictional character. Rather, time and space become the materials for devising, rather than valued for their potential for mimetic
representation (see Pollard in 5.2 on temporality). This gaze’s very difficulty thematised nuances of depth and direction making performers accountable for acts of looking, as gesture, rather than as an unthematized part of their being ‘from’ which they act. Looking becomes choice, thus performers are freed from its automatism and can play artfully with the capacity.

When speaking side by side, the most frequent point addressed on SMAT’s proscenium-like training stage is the horizon point behind the audience. This proxemic configuration most closely resembles direct address to spectators in ‘conventional’ staging. Kellaway describes how this worked for THE SYDNEY FRONT:

We used a certain format for a large part of our work, but we broke away from it on notable occasions. Our work was a series of monologues … five or six performers onstage out there ignoring each other. There was always this joke we had that we never ever looked at each other onstage. That was one of the ‘rules’ of performing. We never spoke to each other, and never, on any account, actually address anyone else onstage. You’d be ignored anyway because everyone was out there going for their life. It is consistent with Suzuki’s trilogy of Greek plays (interview 1994).

Baylis recalled this frequent pattern of relating on stage in FRONT works as an ‘outward gesture’.

There was another similarity between our work and Suzukian performance (though I don’t think we got it from Suzuki performance unless it trickled in via Nigel). Most of our work was straight out to the audience. We often commented amongst ourselves that onstage we spent very little time interacting with each other. When we were interacting with each other it was physical reaction. We rarely looked at each other onstage. Everything was an outward gesture to the audience. So there wasn’t any need to create an internal psychological life to anything in any interaction. When we ever did interact on stage then you do automatically set up psychologies. Suddenly you are in dialogue and [have] created drama, some little dramatic structure. That was rarely what we wanted. So usually those moments got edited out. In the beginning things might stay for a while in rehearsal but in the end, when we improvised, we knew we wanted to go in this other direction (interview 1996).

This monologic line of eye gaze was THE FRONT’s most common adaptation of SMAT’s spatial structures. This contrasted with the mainstream theatre of the period, where outward address was the exception, marked out as an aside that diverged from the narrative line and fictional universe. Its recurrence in FRONT pieces supported desires to reconfigure practices of acting and how they positioned themselves in relation to the larger field of theatrical practice in Australia.

Aware of his adaptation of this gaze in his solo works, Kellaway referred to being
able to go much, much further by reassessing and improving through Suzuki training.

his

ability to confront an audience, to actually look directly at them, to engage them. Previously, I’d never analysed it in the way Suzuki did or enabled me to do so. Suzuki’s actors never look straight out; they don’t do that sort of thing. Whereas, I had been, and closely confronted audiences, but not to the degree that I did after I’d been with Suzuki (interview 1994).

Kellaway spoke of a gap between spectator understanding and his own around this intensely focussed gaze in an intimate solo scene in *This Most Wicked Body* (1994).

I could be using that ability, holding the audience at that moment because I’m absolutely still, having cutback everything. I held this moment, not by doing all the naturalistically seductive sort of things that I would do, with eyebrows and so on, but that I’m frozen and it is merely the voice that is playing, going totally contrary to what the body is doing most strongly.

It is a combination of elements, of these things that suddenly becomes riveting in a moment to the audience. The audience is unsettled, as there seems to be certain lies going on. Everything is slightly out of kilter; “This man is holding this moment by a combination of devices which are unusual.” They are held there, not sure whether it’s dangerous, friendly or seductive (ibid).

It is not “merely the voice that is playing”. The focussed gaze is implied in this description of the suppression of his habitual facial gestures of seduction. Spectators’ inability to spot this device which held them in thrall locates it as one of THE FRONT’s ‘tricks’ banked on to maintain their control of events. Other local artists trained by Kellaway and Suzuki recognised the possibilities proffered in THE FRONT’s adaptation. Second wave artist Pollard considered directness-to-spectators an identifiable stylistic mark of all post-Suzukian contemporary performance. The solo that brought Pollard to attention as a performer-maker, *Mother Tongue Interference* (1994), adopted and adapted this pattern. She described it as

a static piece and a monologue held in a position of complete tension in my body, which is so Suzuki. In the monologue, I’m not using the Suzuki voice but it is delivered straight forward and mixed completely with this Australian hysterical characterization (Pollard interview 2001).

Sydney’s post-Suzukians performed numerous self-devised short and full-length solo works between 1985 and 1997. I did not see one that did not use this spatial relationship with spectators as a prominent, if not paradigmatic pattern. The singular far-focus in training resounded with their interaction with audiences, always evident, even if adapted. The practice participated in doxa about not needing a ‘fourth wall’
and distinguishing between ‘performing’ on the one hand and conventional ‘acting’ on the other. In the next section I return to experiences of training to examine how the steadied focused gaze disclosed and heightened performers’ sense of emplacement during performance.

**Feeling-knowing stage space**

As far as bodily space is concerned, it is clear that there is a knowledge of place which is reducible to a sort of co-existence with that place, and which is not simply nothing, even though it cannot be conveyed by a description or even by the mute reference to a gesture (Merleau-Ponty 1992, 105).

A heightened awareness of peripheral vision, expanded to its maximum scope by concentration on distant points, thematised the voluminosity of space surrounding performers, between them and the performance place as a whole. Thus space became a positive substance – “not simply nothing” – available to be shaped, sculpted by performers’ movement and proxemic relations in devising. Yet, for the most part, this was not discussed by artists until they spoke about it with me.

Above, I quoted Kellaway speaking of becoming aware of the moment slow becomes ‘something still’. Asked whether, in this moment, he referred to space-awareness becoming prominent, he continued

> yes, of which a starting student is not aware. It takes a long time to be aware. I think Suzuki’s technique teaches this awareness [emphatically]. It’s the only method I’ve found that actually does that. It is a technique that has to be learned into the body. You don’t walk in day one and you learn this – eventually, a year later, it suddenly might dawn what these differences are. Initially, I was unaware but it was there in the technique (Kellaway interview 1994).

He paralleled this with the notion of ‘negative space’ – a term I introduced, drawn from my readings and from experiences of contemporary dance training, and which Kellaway picked up on straight away:

> [It is] common, too, to a lot of eastern cultures, but uncommon in Western theatre, especially since the development of the proscenium arch, where the parameters of the stage space are hidden from the audience with wings, tabs and the arch itself, and in the thoroughly westernised kabuki stage. On the noh stage – it’s a defined stage you are working on. It’s a square or a rectangle. You see the edges, the entire stage, and every corner, with the noh stage. So the actor, from the very first day of training, walks onto that stage which has remained the same dimensions for centuries. You experience that also in the main theatre at Toga. It is a defined space. You work on it every day and you learn that space (ibid).

This matched the convention for SMAT teachers to mark out the boundaries of the
training stage.

There is something distinctive about the actor who knows exactly how many steps it is from one side of the stage to the other, never has to think about it, so naturally built into their body. If you take the noh actor to perform on a large proscenium arch stage, they risk being totally lost. The audience thinks, “What is this? It doesn’t make sense?” The person disappears onstage because they’ve been removed from that all-important context which is their space (ibid).

While this may seem to run counter to Suzuki’s rapture at seeing the brilliance of Kanze Hisao perform a noh scene in Paris, the stage platform at Barrault’s international festival was a small free standing platform within the large traditional European theatre with spectators clustered very close. 9 Kellaway observes that a stage becomes ‘built into’ performers’ sensing through familiarity with defined parameters of particular places. Kellaway adapted this to performing in what he described as

an extremely amorphous space because I’m always shifting the audience around and they can’t position themselves at all. I’ve only done that since working in Japan. I became much more aware of this thing ‘space’, and so I started playing with that (ibid).

While The FRONT eschewed proscenium arch staging, Kellaway points to an alternative spatial order built into The FRONT’s bodies in training, evoking Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the “measurant”. Merleau-Ponty insists that, rather than locative sensing deriving from recourse to scientific measurement or metaphors arising from these apparatus, the lived body is the ground of measurement:

‘Measurants’ are bodily and comparable to ‘dimensions’: we have with our body, our senses, our look, our power to understand speech and to speak, measurants for Being, dimensions to which we can refer it, but not a relation of adequation or of immanence.” Merleau-Ponty argues that the lived body is the “measurant” of the things around it (Merleau-Ponty in Casey 1993, 337).

Kellaway indicates that this finely honed haptic locative skill supported his experiments in early solo works such as Give Me A Rose (1986) and Nuremberg Recital (1988). A salient pedagogical SMAT image crystallised Kellaway’s awareness.

The most potent image Suzuki gave me was in the Slow Tentakaten, of threads and cottons attached to the body and keeping them taut because it was so f******g hard. It throws your whole image. In your mind’s eye, you are taking photos of your hips/pelvis as you go. To concentrate on all of these threads, you’re constantly taking three-dimensional photographs of yourself as you are traveling, which you really need to do when you first start doing these exercises. It becomes easier, and then you don’t have to think those things (interview 1994).
Threads connected his proprioception in the transference of weight from foot to foot to the edges of the room. Feeling the vibrations in imagined threads in concentrated effort, it is as if Kellaway’s skin reaches to the walls, confirming his emplacement here as a relation to the whole room. As he became more fluent, the ‘there’ to which he was attached could equally be – and was – other people and objects.

Clare Grant described her sense of being with others in the place of the stage:

Even from the beginning, we always knew where other performers would be and I trusted them as people. FRONT performances were always difficult work and sometimes dangerous. I felt that I knew they’d be there. If something broke down, someone would come in and fill up the gap, both in time and space. I don’t know whether it was the kind of training or the fact we trained together. I think it’s the kind. Because it allowed you to let go and even if not a split group (i.e. having an audience in training), you are working at the same time. You are observing each other, knowing they are doing the same exercise. Through your peripheral vision you are watching other people as they were performing.

I always felt extremely confident about that with the other members of this particular performing group. And partly it was because you had made the piece together you knew all the variables – it’s not just the physicality of training because it is a form of training where the mind is not engaged. Discipline is involved but your intellectual capacity, conscious thinking is not. [It is] another part of the mind – you are observing other bodies and reacting in your own body on a non-verbal level. So that makes it possible to have more non-verbal communication with others (interview 1994).

For Casey, this taken-for-granted apprehension of the thickness of depth perception in daily experience as a voluminosity of depth is a primary sense (1993, 67-68).
Rather than remaining taken-for-granted, however, for Grant the thematised spatial medium offered players a web of supportive relations.

Baylis, wary of having the troupe’s aesthetics hijacked by a theatrical guru like Suzuki, nonetheless acknowledged a shared spatial feeling amongst the group:

I never experienced that kind of thing before. So I don’t know how much to attribute to any training. [Stomping] did seem to enhance the spatial sense because part of the training is you’re here all by yourself while everyone’s around you doing very similar things already. It gives you that sense of yourself amongst others and very heightened. I think we, as a company would be very aware of each other’s movements onstage. It was always a problem when an outsider joined the company because they would be bouncing around and not concentrate (interview 1996).

The built-in sense of place is equally spatiotemporal attunement with others. For Ryan, the extension of this felt spatial sense to encompass others in the troupe enlarged the scale of an individual performer’s apparent presence for the spectators.
It's a paradox, and I think that's probably what Suzuki technique's all about. You're working in an ensemble and to get a review that says the ensemble of six people feels like 60 on stage, that's the paradox. And that's for me what the technique does. I'm working at the edge of my own personal investment in my body – in my energy but inside a group – within the constraint of an ensemble (interview 2001).

Sensing voluminosity enabled a collective sculpting of an intercorpooreal zone with spectators that supported a concomitant magnification in audience perception of each individual's presence. Ryan recalled choreographer Kai Tai Chan criticizing his performance just prior to The Front's formation.

I had to simply do a slow walk downstage towards my mother. I had these flowers and the theme of her death. Kai Tai said "oh, Chris, you're all front. When you're walking, all I see is your front. You're just here." And I went away, thought about it and he was right. My whole awareness was in the front of myself -- So how do I become a 360-degree person? That was one of those moments that changed how I perform. Now I was thinking about total presentation. He made me think about how can you remain in your body, fully aware while you walk. That was a very simple great point. It made sense because I was constructing performance around how I was being seen, rather than include what I was doing. If my awareness is on my front, then it's a very two-dimensional thing that I'm doing (ibid).

Chan's critique provoked a desire to change Ryan's spatial relationship with a stage.

You're in a three-dimensional space being lit three-dimensionally. Maybe your audience is in front of you but it's about fullness and roundness, being in space, and you are three-dimensional. Culturally we are all about front -- that the face is the most dominant way of presenting one's self. But once you start looking at yourself as more than just a front surface, then you're read differently. How small that is, but interesting for me. You can't quantify it, but you know when you see a performer not fully engaged in an action. Or trying to be engaged but not quite there (ibid).

Appropriating this sense of being with others, (as he registered above) he found that repeated stomping enabled him to work 'from' this awareness, rather than seeking 'to' achieve this state as the conscious goal. Being displaced, trying to be, but not quite (t)here in action is the obverse of a performer having a built-in sense.

Thorne referred to physics and traditional Chinese healing to understand a highly energised medium surrounding bodies in performance that SMAT gave her.

The ions of the air are being charged – It depends on how well that body onstage is charging the ions around it – Unless your motor is being charged within the body, the body itself will look lifeless. The motor is the physical and emotional energy within the actor. I believe you can project that. I'm not being mystical or anything. [It is] like the healing of hands that flows through the hands of Chinese healers and in Tai Chi. You can project the chi, the flow of energy in your body. You can make someone feel your chi, if you direct it. It's a thought process within the body that creates a chemical explosion.
This method is all about containment of energy. That's why the hands are held as though you've got spears then the thumbs are closed over. The energy goes so far then comes back in. It doesn't get dissipated. As soon as you extend your arm, you are shooting rays beyond your body. With the Suzuki method, the energy in the body (through) struggling allows it to come out. It actually does extend beyond the body and to the audience in a different way to a dancer's energy, which is directly placed (interview 1993).

Like Kellaway's 'threads', Thorne's internal state is bound to a medium surrounding her. Like Leiser-Moore, but unlike The Front and Pollard, Thorne synthesised this haptic spatiality with representations of fictive characters. Thorne described Sidetrack's adaptation using the term 'playing an action', derived from psychological realistic acting techniques, a synonym for projected character intentions within imagined circumstances.¹⁰

I need to know what response I want to get from you. In order to get that response I need to do something to you. That action - and I can name it in different ways - I need to play that action to get that response. You can use that in theatre where there is a dialogue on stage, which you want to be as 'real' as possible or I can do that physically. I can reach out to you or look at you. I can still play an action, even if you were 20 metres away. I don't need to physically touch you in order to touch. It is the way I direct my energy to you or whether or not my desire is clear to the audience and the other actor (ibid).

The penetrating power of a more-distant-than-quotidian focus charged the voluminosity that connected Thorne with others. Her metaphor of 'touching' shows the entanglement of the real with the imaginal.

By contrast, Leiser-Moore did not initially refer to this voluminosity in our interviews. She wrestled with finding apt words. Later she phoned to describe a physics professor's account of current conceptions of matter. Between all particles, she explained, there was space, no matter how decidedly solid things appeared. For Leiser-Moore the 'space between' - not space as an absence - captured the core relational spatial principles of SMAT that guided her as a theatre maker. An inner-outer connectedness ingredient in Kellaway's and Thorne's accounts also resonated with Leiser-Moore's recurring insistence on the centrality of what she called her "internal world". Struggling to transform her tendencies to make impressive body shapes in Statues reformed her practical logic of illustrative pictorial shape making decisively shifted her onto-valuation of stillness (See section 6.1).

Katia Molino referred to counterintuitive goals offered by teachers that demanded extension of her spatial sensing.
At times it was about "your energy in this exercise should be going in this direction". Energy things or presence things and spatial things like "I want you take up the whole room" or "I want you to exude yourself going around in a circle". For example, there is one where you do Standing Statues from a crouch then they would get you to maintain that shape and turn 360-degrees really smoothly. It is easy to understand when you are in a standing statue to emit your energy forwards, because people are used to projecting through their face and eyes. But turning around was not only about turning smoothly but controlling your energy so that when your three quarter back was to the audience it was exuding as much energy as when your eyes and your face were at the front. So the interesting thing is about the manipulation of the non-physical things about a performer, as much as the physical. In fact the non-physical things are more important like the energy and the quality of your energy. The 'presence' is probably a better word because it is less scientific sounding (interview 2001).

Thematisation of spatial awareness was heightened by the added complication of rotating. Molino's 'manipulation of the non-physical things' points to the desire of local performers to apply transposable attributes rather than to reproduce SMAT's kata vocabulary. As a second wave freelance performer, Molino has collaborated in a number of groups with divergent creative goals and styles within any one year. Molino took the spatial acuity in her "non-physical" "presence things" into devising outdoors, realising the imaginal staging possibilities in site-specific ways with Stalker, Kantanka, and Victoria's Not Yet it's Difficult and into transitory collaborations she formed.

Heilmann recalled Kellaway visiting a Suzuki session at Sidetrack two years into her training.

We were furiously stomping like we were going to kill the next person we came across. It just had this amazing ire and aggro. And Nigel would just say, "It's not about tension in space. It's about placing your hand in space [she spoke quietly]. There's air around there. It's like you're just placing your hand. It's much gentler. It's not about gripping but about being aware, conscious and just allowing the air to surround you." (interview 2000).

Kellaway's feedback nuanced her emplacement. Naming the medium 'air'
imagistically reinscribed a lighter and gentler tactility of being held by a surrounding medium connecting the inside and outer world via the skin. That interpretation of this voluminosity became a topic of debate illustrates that it was at stake amongst the community of local practitioners.

As a practical logic, this haptic spatial sensing informs and is interrogative, as it mediates performers' relations with theatres and studios for devising and performing. Barba attributes this type of catalysing power to a single exercise:

A good exercise is a paradigm of dramaturgy, i.e. a model for the actor. The dramaturgy of
the actor [as a term] refers to one of the levels of organisation of the performance or one aspect of the dramaturgical interweaving. Exercises are small labyrinths that the actor's body-minds can trace and retrace in order to incorporate a paradoxical way of thinking, thereby distancing themselves from their own daily behaviour and entering the domain of the stage's extra-daily behaviour. Exercises are like amulets, which the actor carries around, not to show them off, but to draw from them certain qualities of energy out of which a second nervous system slowly develops (1997, 128).

With an internally coherent regime of very similar exercises, the power of this haptic emplacement is magnified exponentially. Confident attunement to particular sheds, halls and theatres, similar in scale to Suzuki’s first atelier theatres in Waseda and Toga theatre, amplified the resonance between SMAT and the Sydneysiders’ devising. Only one troupe, SIDETRACK, was the sole occupants of a studio theatre in Marrickville’s Addison Road Community Centre precinct. THE SYDNEY FRONT rehearsed and trained regularly in a hut there over several years. Early on, together with ENTR’ACTE, they rehearsed at the Sydney Dance Company studios and later at D’arc Swan’s studio in Balmain. Leiser-Moore’s Hungry (1996) was devised in an Addison Rd hut, as was her short work, For me (1993). Many solo works, including Molino’s and those for the annual CPW were staged in SIDETRACK’s theatre, at that time without any fixed seating. Pollard ran SMAT for several years in St Stephen’s Hall, Newtown. Ferkal devised with Chris Murphy with Regina Heilman performing was staged in this hall. Everyone performed in the Performance Space, which Kellaway referred to as the closest to Suzuki’s notion of a ‘sacred space’ or performance home for him (Suzuki 1986, 91-92; Schaeffer 2001). When Kellaway returned to solo performance in 1994, he actually moved into the venue, eating, sleeping, practising ballet and nightly performing This Most Wicked Body for twenty-eight days, taking the logic of emplacement within a particular theatre to its extreme realisation. The post-Suzukians’ stomps, walks and gaze literally measured out these studios. Their trained bodies became tacit measurants of these performing places, as the specific dimensions of both the actual and paradigmatic training stage became incorporated in their sensorium.

Once acquired, this distinctive spatial awareness can unlock novel aspects of the world. A performer feels through the distinctive spatial awareness to the place it discloses during devising and performing. As habitus it anticipates what might be disclosed even in the conceptualisation phases of projects and devising. Spatial-placial possibilities became constituents of a performer-maker’s intentional arc thus a project’s goals. Extended SMAT-engendered capacities stand in a dialectical
relation to the actual places of training, rehearsal and performance. Its *kata* transform their bodies, as performers’ bodies begin to activate these places in devising.

When *The Sydney Front* arrived at a new venue during international tours, they would first ask about the performance area, “Where’s Stella?” This was an orientation point forward and to the left of performers, facing a wall. Stella was a human figure within a mural in the back room of Hut 24 of the Addison Road, painted by a community member, Stella. The question was not “which side is front?” or “Where’s the audience?” but a singular feature deemed as equivalent and shared. Locating “Stella” avoided reinscribing spatial relations that resembled a ‘fourth wall’. With extensive memories training and devising in this hut, one point was enough to trigger their shared locative attunement.

Just as a Stanislavski-trained actor might practice exercises in emotional and sensory memory, these Suzukian trained performers practiced particular ‘places’ together. A Stanislavskian builds capacities to recall without reference to a particular stage, in an a-placial way. By contrast, the Suzukian performers relied on their spatial sense for meaningful relations with places and others. Through practicing particular places through SMAT training, these became like a second skin. That Sydney scene artists ignored Stanislavskianism is no surprise. Some, like *The Front*, rejected it as obstructive to their project (Olbe and Miller, 1989; Kellaway 1994a). Baylis described SMAT as having the “right bells and whistles” for their endeavours (interview 1996). The broadly a-placial orientation of Stanislavskian actor training would not have been as decisive as SMAT in enabling innovative and diverse relations with Sydney’s places of performance. This spatial acuity underpinned their adaptation of these capacities to devising new works in diverse creational contexts, including their embrace of inter-disciplinary collaborations, with visual and dance artists, and in site specific projects as many local contemporary performers have.11

**A rehearsal example**

Leiser-Moore pinpointed a problem scene called ‘Mikveh’ during *Hungry*’s rehearsal as an instance of her haptic sense of the actual stage and outward address to spectators being decisive. The scene involved a three-by-three metre sculpture of a
huge torah made from an iconic rural Australian cross-sectioned corrugated iron water tank. Two early versions depicting husband and wife arguments in the cross-sectioned water tank as an imaginary bathroom were abandoned. The solution came through Leiser-Moore engaging with the surface of the tank. She virtually levitated up the inner wall to the top like a freestyle mountain climber ascending with their back to the surface climbed. The climb evoked the panic and fury in a renunciation of women’s ritual cleansing obligations and sexual abstinence in the Judaic culture.

It is like a Shakespearean monologue where you are having a discussion with yourself and struggling with an idea. But it was my real body that had to negotiate the climb. I didn’t want to look so I had to feel. I did it by intuition because I had to put my foot exactly there – just there (i.e. referring to the small corrugated iron ridges). It was an illusion beyond the audience’s ability, which transcended what their everyday body can do (Leiser-Moore interview 1996).

In her skilled sensing and concentration on the place, Leiser-Moore suppressed traces of the effort required in the swift ascent generating a magic-like effect. Trusting to the in-built locative effects of training enabled Leiser-Moore to create another anti-gravitational floating effect in image of an ‘Angel flying under God’s wings’ for different reasons. A three-metre high ladder horizontally joined the top of the two cross-sections of the water tank. Leiser-Moore’s chronic fear of heights threatened all exploration of the high region of the sculptural set she commissioned, thus her intention to perform within commissioned projections of another collaborator and her desire to share an ecstatic fantasy of flying as an angel. In the public season in slow motion she uncurled hanging upside down from her knees suspended for five minutes in a flying-like sequence. It was like a slowly twisting inverted Statues kata; her knees were the grounded point rather than her feet on the ground.

Hanging was made possible because of my discipline in training and that state of mind it puts me in to – Just do it – don’t let those barriers of fear come in. It gave me a direct link to reach that state of mind of ‘just doing’ … It gave me the tool to immediately put the fear aside. I wouldn’t have even started doing it unless I had access to that so quickly.

I can go back to working with ENTR’ACTE. I was at Toga Festival doing The Memory Room [1990]. The skeletal framework of the ‘room’ was three metres in height and I had to be perched on a corner! I look down and see myself falling a feeling of disorientation. I remember being on the outdoor stage; dim lighting. You don’t have a back on that theatre. There’s a lake behind you. I was frightened – totally disorientated there hanging upside down. I got down and then I’d go “Wait a minute. Where’s the front? Where’s the audience?” (ibid).

Oriented by the discipline of the training Leiser-Moore was able to
trust I can put away my fear. That’s about the intensity of the internal world of the actor—about the difference with the personal Deborah and the performer Deborah. There is no way I’d hang upside down in a playground. You must be joking (ibid).

Leiser-Moore’s SMAT-engendered state as a surrogate for her quotidian state, reliably structured her relations with the stage. She trusted to this to expand her senses and uncover possibilities afforded in stage architecture. The agony of panic severely shrunk the scope of her spatiotemporal awareness. “Just do it”, signalled her surrender to this ‘second nervous system’ to draw on resources her ‘first nature’ could not muster. No reassurance from collaborators substituted for sensing her own reliably ordered spatial sense for the climb and ‘flying’ upside down. The constraints of corrugated iron tank and high joining ladder demanded responses that echo the demands made by SMAT’s unaccommodating kata and marked out stage. Once outward-oriented spatial sensing is established it’s as if places speak back to performers through their perceived affordances. The state of mutual engagement with ‘things’ accelerated the generation of highly visual stage images in extremely short devising periods. Leiser-Moore’s comments echo Grant’s reliance on acute spatiotemporal attunement underpinning performance of the ‘difficult work and sometimes dangerous’ actions in THE SYDNEY FRONT (Grant interview 1994). Where chaos, fear, panic and wildness of state are embraced, or inevitable, within a process, a spatially ordered habitus facilitates the progress of devising.

**Applications in SIDETRACK’s performances**

In contrast to THE FRONT, SIDETRACK used created stage images that represented fictive relations between people. As Mémé Thorne explained,

> I adapt the method to suit our purposes and in our theatre we do play with one another and with the audience, but not all the time. We can do without (interview 1993).

Thorne described an example of application from an early work The Refugee (1990). Thorne played an armed militia.

> In the final scene without words it is the contact when I’m working from a long way away from the other actor. When we are doing that well, I think the threat and the danger is palpable. Now that all comes from our training in the Suzuki method, the confidence in the way you move your body and the grounding (ibid).

In this scene Heilmann thought,

> The focus was very important. It wasn’t just in the blocking – it was actual. Mémé is my
combatant and there is this pull between us, this wire [like] connection. This feels tangible—which I think is very, very, Suzuki. It's very much like that first one [Stomping and Shakuhachi], like you're moving together in a sense. You both are inhabiting time (Heilmann interview, 2000).

The spatial blocking was an adaptation of several kata. While sustaining a single point of intense focus from a distance on Regina and Jai (refugees), Mémé (militia) circumnavigated the stage space in an unbroken arc and deep lunge, not varying height or speed. While The Refugee was staged in the round, Thorne, like THE FRONT, did not change the frontal proscenium presentation of SMAT's kata during training because of the haptic spatially engendered.

It doesn’t matter what you do in Suzuki method, you are always aware of your back and of your sides. In that final scene I am walking around the two people in the centre. I don’t believe the tension I create is only between the two people and me. It is behind me as well because I’m working with my whole body. I’m using them as an apex. My back is a focal point. The spectator directly behind me, temporarily, doesn’t get a lesser sense of threat because my back is to them. But if I were to let my thought process momentarily snap and break that tension chord between those two actors, and myself then the audience is going to feel nothing. That tension chord has to remain strong between these two points, the actors on stage, and we work like that all the time (Thorne interview 1993).

Mamouney explained how these skills turned a place into a theatre through acknowledging spectators. In our interview, Mamouney role-played an actor pointing to a cup on the table, aware I was watching him and the cup in a triangulated relationship he calls depth.

An actor on the stage of the Sydney Theatre Company only relates to the cup in relation to the character. They don’t see the cup’s significance in relation to the space. When I look at that cup, I know that you’re [as spectator] looking at that cup, and the sense we have that there’s three of us present – The line between my action and your gaze – this is the depth. What I like about Suzuki is the discipline and clarity of line that you can get from the intention and intensity he demands of a performer's body in relation to its space ... we share a recognition of the stage as being a space that is repeated in the mind of the performer and in the mind of the audience. When you look at the stage, you see more than the stage. The stage works in the same way as a poem to excite the imagination into areas of your sensual, historical, emotional, psychological [realms]. It requires absolute attention to the detail of the space and relationship between one another.

If you distil Stanislavsky, the strong aspect is action, psychological but also physical action [that] cut space and created tensions ... That hasn’t been emphasised but you look at pictures of Stanislavsky acting and you see ferocious concentration ... really clear lines of intention. This is what is common in those trainings and the way they work. That is the connection from Stanislavski to Brecht to Suzuki to Don Mamouney. There’s no real difference in that desire for the spatiality of things to be cut, felt, shaped in relation to the audience by the creation of tensions (interview 1998).

The efficacy of SMAT’s spatial sensibilities was not confined to private performer experience but intrinsic to the materiality of devising. Mamouney’s terms “cutting” and “tension” show how the ensemble’s SMAT-engendered spatial acuity amplified
concerns in an interpraxialogue with other traditions in his directorial praxis. Drawing together how gaze practices and haptic spatially sensing were harnessed in devising the next section unpacks their adaptations in the most popular format of ensemble staging.

5.6 Negotiating proximity in performances – the open fieldscapes of the Sydney scene

For the duration of their collaboratively created events, Sydney’s performer-makers used their bodily energies to transform spectator’s responses to the places in which they performed. Their animation of small theatres was most pronounced in their ‘open fieldscapes’. There were numerous examples, that while resembling visual arts installations for some spectators were thought theatrical by their makers. Examples include The Sydney Front’s Waltz (1987), John Laws/Sade (1987), The Pornography of Performance (1988), Don Juan (1991), First and Last Warning (1992) and Passion (1993), Kellaway’s Nuremberg Recital (1988), Grant’s Woman in the Wall (1990), SIDETRACK’s Whispers in the Heart (1988), Idol (1991), The Drunken Boat (1991), Heaven (1994), The Measure (1994), OPEN CITY’s The Girl with a Stone in her Shoe (1990), Museum of Accidents (1991) and Sense (1992), the work of the POSTARRIVALISTS (1992 and 1993) and Stages of Terror (Miller et al. 1993). Artists with substantial Suzuki backgrounds created fifteen of these eighteen full-length works.

‘Open fieldscapes’ is a term I coined. It is derived from Bonnie Marranca’s 1996 discussion of theatre as landscape:

A landscape is made up of things and people viewed in relation to each other. It doesn’t have to come to you; you must discover for yourself what is there. This pictorial composition replaces dramatic action, emphasizing frontality and the frame, flatness and absence of perspective. The play is just there. It has no center. Whatever you find in it depend on your own way of looking (Marranca 1996, 7).

The frontality, frame and flatness of separating landscape from viewer were eschewed in the open fieldscapes. Spectators occupied the same floor space as performers. The focal events of performance moved within this room around, beside, behind and with spectators. Performers and, at times, spectators became the landscape. Rather than the absence of perspective and lack of centre, described by Marranca, the open fieldscapes substituted shifting perspectives and mobility of

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centre, as all inhabited a shared spatiotemporal scape. Spectators, without narratives as indices, were corporeally thrust into making their own discoveries. While meta-concepts such as ‘museum’ or ‘restaurant’ framed some of these events, the earliest by THE SYDNEY FRONT in 1987/88, were not, were very mobile and ambiguous. Spectators were rarely cued by changes in area lighting, as was the mode in mainstage theatres.

On the dissolution of THE FRONT, Kellaway and Baylis re-asserted their positions as theatre practitioners as distinct from visual artists or mainstage theatre actors.

Kellaway:

> What we do is negotiate the audience. We don’t let go of our roots. It is an exploration of the process of theatre.” Baylis agreed: “Sometimes actors go off into ‘Actorland’, where the performer doesn’t acknowledge the audience, we use their proximity to form a relationship.” (Kellaway and Baylis in Broun 1994, 29).

The themes of exhibitionism, seduction, masochism and sadism were broadly themes of social power. THE FRONT did not perform representations of seductive or sadistic relations in imaginary circumstances. Rather they created homologous relations with spectators out of the material sociality of theatrical conventions. Their ‘bigger’ themes arose from and were conceived within a heightened alertness to the real time-space vectors in performance. THE FRONT set aside Suzuki’s designation of discreet regions for audiences and performers, but sustained this pattern during training.

Kellaway explained his rationale:

> Though never spoken or consciously thought about, just like there was a reaction against many other precepts in our work, certain aspects of our work developed in reaction against Suzuki, as far as space is concerned. Also knowing that you can only breakdown forms if you have command over those forms. It is the only way to do it intelligently. Otherwise you get lost. What do you hang on to? How do you ‘talk’ intelligently to an audience about these things? Our spatial configurations in performance, even as actors to each other, could be chaotic, fairly wild, and seemed to defy any accepted codes of spatial arrangement. Having that technique enabled us to play to the extent we did (interview 1994).

Possibilities inherent in contingent and plastic spatial relations between all staging elements, human and architectural become foregrounded in SMAT, regardless of its frontal spatial configuration. Sensing voluminosity is a discernment of intervals ‘between’, homologous with the temporal intervals in kara. This embodied knowledge underwrote THE FRONT’s strategy setting all their pieces precisely where they materially were – on a shared ‘stage’ floor. The themes of FRONT works all
revolved around who was looking at who and what they were seeing. Their works depended on performers having precise command of the kinesics and proxemics of looking (see Baylis in Collaborative dramaturgy in Chapter Four).

De Certeau distinguishes between space (espace) created by human action for actual and imaginal impacts compared to the stability of the built architectural place (lieu) in articulating everyday spatial practices in given urban terrains. In short, space is a practiced place (1988:117). This is analogous with performers who temporarily occupy theatres and public sites during performances in ways not anticipated by audiences. In De Certeau’s schema, space is

actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it. Temporalize it. And make function a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities (ibid).

In this view, in relation to place, space is like a spoken word: “a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts” (ibid). For De Certeau, place defines the stable limits of a geographical, topographical location.

The law of the “proper” rules in the place. The elements are beside one another, each situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place) (ibid).

De Certeau contrasts maps of places and the lived experience of tours of places by those who inhabit a place. He designates the map as a totalising stage, “a tableau of a state”: where all heterogeneous regions are projected onto a single plane “implying stability” and pushing the temporal aspect of the history of tour descriptions “into the wings” (ibid). Like his notion of place, as diagrammatic spatial arrays, maps elide inhabitation over time: a theatre building when there is no performance occurring. A tour is a temporalised itinerary analogous to an episodic performance montage. During performance, to extend de Certeau’s spatial metaphors, contemporary performers are tour guides. His malleable space and tours correlate with these performers’ transformative uses of space as tactical interactions with the stability of place. Performers, in open fieldscapes, oscillated between presenting themselves as objects or ‘things’ being in the place and transforming that place through their bodies as indices manipulating the variables to bring into effect new and transitory contractual proximities.
As McAuley states in her discussion of space in performance:

It is through the body and the person of the actor that all the contributing systems of meaning (visual, vocal, spatial, fictional) are activated, and the actor/performer is without doubt the most important agent in all the signifying processes involved in the performance event (1999, 90).

While all theatre centralises these ‘tour guides’, the open fieldscapes relied almost exclusively on performers as embodied, rather than just deliverers of text, activators of the entire place of performance, including the spectators and their affective responses. Minimal bodily cues, and, in particular, performers’ eye gaze actuated audience attention in the context of performer responsiveness to audience proximity.

De Certeau points out the paradox of a border as being a “point of differentiation between two bodies” that is “also a meeting point” (1988, 126-127). If neither party has authority over the border, it becomes a region where power over the frontier is continually negotiated in meeting and differentiation. Here he identifies the transitive possibilities of invention and ‘making do’: brief improvisational tactics in ‘border negotiation.’ This analysis captures the spatialized tactics of performer-makers in the open fieldscapes. Unlike conventional theatres with spectators confined to a fixed territory in seats bolted to the floor, in the open fieldscapes the focal regions were malleable borders between performers and audiences. While borders were not stable, rarely did spectators doubt where they were to stand, sit, look or travel next for long. The spectators’ mobility compelled them to scan their environment to locate action and gain a vantage point – a very tangible problem for those (like me) of small stature. The simplest tactics for renegotiating borders during FRONT works involved performers requesting audience members to move. At other junctures performers galvanised audience attention by their forceful, still, presence, guiding by subtle but precise deictic cues through their gaze or highly focussed gradual travelling.

A vivid example of playing with borders appeared, in Don Juan (1991), as a rapid and multiple cross cutting between a segment called ‘Pavan’ and a controversial scene called ‘Fuck Me’ (see Martin 1999, 31-33; Schaeffer 2001, 103-104). The power in these transactions with spectators remained with the performers, who carried out a specific and ordered score of action they had devised. Ryan explained
how the necessary corporeal presence of performers' haptic spatiality was central to these border negotiations.

Because our imaginations are devoid of our bodies by the very nature of our culture (Our culture is conceptual) we often think in terms of movies. Now movies are mechanical reproductions, little pictures that have been played with. You cannot do that onstage. You have a body and a given amount of time and that is it. And if you are going to jump from [imaginary] place to place, it is a conceptual understanding of producing different spaces. You still have to do that with a body (interview 2001).

When asked how a body produces different spaces in an open fieldscape, Ryan unpacked The Front's skilful use of depth and direction of their gaze worked in the 'Pavan'/'Fuck Me' intercut.

You can just turn around, a change of direction or orientation. It's done with the body. The concept has to be embodied. If you were looking at the audience, my internal dialogue was "Let's get together" and if my gaze was on Andrea it was "Let's NOT get together." If you were dancing the Pavan while looking at the audience, it was like "oh, you are cute. Let's do it". Then you had the space of the dance, which was looking forward out further; it was not at a specific audience member. Because when you were looking at Andrea it was "Excuse me what are you doing? You are breaking the rules of the dance. You are not doing the proper thing". You had three gazes (ibid).

The power of the fine use of the gaze between audience and performers was established in the opening of Don Juan. Spectators entered the Performance Space's studio theatre to find themselves perused as if they were themselves performing. The Front performers, already seated in the only rostra, literally 'eyed over' the spectators as they stood on the open floor. Individual spectators became objects of attention by performers. One spectator - dubbed 'the pleasure victim' - was selected by eye contact, drawn out and interviewed about the current state of their love life while the performer flirted with them. Audience were thus attuned to small signs and learnt they were to respond even if they did not know where this 'grammar of looking' was headed. The transition that ended this opening had all but one performer heading towards some distant spectacle, gliding through the crowd as if ecstatically entranced. To pull attention away from the 'abduction' exit of the 'pleasure victim' spectator by a performer, and to reorient the audience to the next episode, this manoeuvre required performers to energetically absorb themselves on a point of far focus and to suppress the shudders of walking The frontier between performer and spectator was bridged via the performers' intense ways of looking, standing and shifting around on the same floor space as spectators. A performer's remote far focus authorised spectators to scrutinize, with ease, their skin, body and
action, performing extreme acts at very close range in an intimate spectacle. Far-
focusing circumscribed the outer frontier within which both spectators and performer
are encompassed. Proximities within its compass were gauged kinaesthetically,
rather than calculated, by the performers. In sudden shifts to a direct eye-to-eye gaze
with specific ‘safely close’ spectators, the border was breached. Spectators became
subjects in an interpersonal transaction. Instantaneously a spectator became a
performer, when what they were looking at and how they looked was exposed to
other audience members who scrutinised their reactions to this border breach trick.
This switching of gaze created different kinds of contractual proximities. In
switching between contractual proximities, performers toyed with spectatorial
framing of their performer identities as fictional and simultaneously ‘real’ by
changes in the depth of their gaze and the tenor of their energies. Ryan explains
audiences’ reactions:

One of the frequent and fantastic reactions was “you are so fucking scary onstage. But then
you talk to us and you are really nice”. That’s focus. You’ve just dropped your focus from
“I’m seducing you” to “will you just move over here?” So what you are doing is going
through a series of strategies. There is something in how you deal with an audience that is
reflective of how you deal people in other public (crowd) situations. The two things align
themselves. I’ve seen really bad site-specific work where the performers will be aggressive
in character trying to move a resistant audience around and say, “You’ve got to move over
there. NOW!!” My reaction is “fuck off. What gives you the right to order me around?”
Whereas if you drop that and go “Look what we need you to do is move over there because
we are going to do a performance here in a minute.” And hit them on a level, which is not
bullshit. You have reduced your focal length and are actually dealing with the person on a
personal level and that is the focal point. When someone walks up to you as a character, you
don’t know whether they mean it. Whereas, if you drop it and talk to them as a person, you
are disarming them in a very nice way (ibid).

In a tactic De Certeau would call the creating of “transportable limits” (1988, 129)
performers placed themselves as still figures and in shifting groups of statuesque
stillness, as mobile borders, carving out temporary regions within the arena of
performance. These required energetically committed acts of unyielding stillness as they
shifted across the floor. This body use is a direct corollary of SMAT kata
Statues and Slow Tentakaten.13

A finely tuned use of the gaze in seduction is a major recurring kinesic motif in Don
Juan mythology and was in The Front’s show. The choice of Don Juan and the
thematic of seduction as starting points for devising could equally have arisen out of
the troupe’s reflexive relation with their already developed capacities for reshaping
audience-performer relations by their own gaze, focus and presence. The synergy
stands out retrospectively. Yet Ryan explains how readily the two interpenetrate. In the final aspect of spatial themes that follows, I return to what is arguably the phenomenological bedrock of Suzuki training then trace its adaptation in devising before appraising its place in two rehearsal case studies.

5.7 Giving and receiving audience in SMAT and devising in the Sydney scene
To the question, “What kind of place or occasion is it that practitioners are training in?” SMAT’s pedagogical image of the ‘Eye of God’ indicates that it is a place defined by the presence of spectators thus theatrical presentation.

When Suzuki would give an image, he’d say, “this is a useful image to use for an actor”. For instance, ‘the eye of the god’, he related to Greek theatre. He was speaking from the point of view of an atheist here, not saying that an actor was performing for God, but that it was an extremely useful image because it’s an imaginative exercise. He was teaching actors certain imaginative tools. One doesn’t have to believe in them or a god. It is not a religious exercise (Kellaway interview 1994).

When asking, “What was the kineme or smallest unit of movement recognised as meaningful by participants?” no single movement was thought meaningful on its own: SMAT did not recognise any ‘kineme’ in this sense. The first level of meaningfulness does not arrive until there is a spectator, imagined or real. The overarching image of the ‘Eye of God’ holistically focuses trainees on the finest detail of their kata execution being perceived by an ever-present audience.

Negotiating and making contact with the presence of this ‘Eye’ environs and reinforces all thematised practice. This image and the practice and discourses about performance that issue from it coordinate the organization of training. There are no private practices that trainees are directed to undertake relevant to preparing him or herself for progress or performance undertaken beyond this gaze. By comparison, private and individual contemporary dance, yoga and acting practices are considered fecund. Thus the method carries within it, by comparison with all other performer preparatory regimes in Australia, including mainstream ones, an extremely high degree of orientation towards audiences.

Training is framed as performance itself. Dividing the training group inside every session creates an explicit condition of performance affording performers a platform to attend to and enquire, in practice, into relations between performer and audience
from both positions as they are swapped.

Même Thorne internalised a sense of being seen by spectators as a discrete skill and knowledge:

It might seem simplistic but I have more focus in my work than before as an actor. I know now how to channel and direct my emotional energy. I wasn’t able to do what I believe the Suzuki method is all about, which is for an actor to be able to play a dual role spontaneously on stage. Firstly to able to judge, to know what it is you are projecting i.e. the actual presence of your body onstage – what that is to you and simultaneously how it is being perceived by an audience member. That dual role happens simultaneously. That was nowhere in my vocabulary when I first started performing. I played a two dimensional role, not a three or four-dimensional one (Thorne interview 1993).

Kellaway’s taking three dimensional photos of himself performing a slow walk across ‘stage’ involved simultaneously perceiving himself as an spectator might.

[SMAT] enabled me to look at myself as perhaps an audience does. It repositioned myself. It had always been a struggle. I was able to remove myself from my body onstage entirely to get out there and have a look. I was brought up as a pianist. It’s the same problem; it’s difficult to hear yourself when playing piano. I’d always been acutely aware of the need from an early age, to step outside to listen or to look at your own performance (interview 1994).

Both embraced a simultaneity of perspectives or divided awareness during performing.

Not surrounded by specific representational imperatives, the katas’ tight discipline channel attention to the corporeal and synaesthesial currents of communication between audiences and performers. The intensity of concentration within a performer’s body in Suzukian discourse is thought to activate the clarity of connectedness, as if there is no distinction between the inside and outside of bodies/people. The role of the inside training audience is a testing ground for performers’ capacities to engage spectators’ eyes, ears and even breath. Though directly entertaining or representing images for spectators was not encouraged, awareness of spectators is not thought as external to the core business of acting/performing.

Practicing stillness repeatedly directs the attention of spectators to the minutiae of individual variations in each moment. Features such as qualities of stillness, twitches, shapes, muscular tensions, facial gesture/expressions, breath, voice, acute group synchronizations or lack of it, traces of how performers present their identity, both their ‘real’ bodies and any imaginings – stand out. Spectators, drawn to particular
performers, witness how the intensity and clarity of performers’ presence catalyses their attention. Despite repeating the same vocabulary, presence is seen to flux from day-to-day. ‘Presence’ in SMAT’s values system is not a continuous attribute attached to particular actors like an presumed charismatic effect of their personalities; rather it is an outcome of the way performers channel their capacities in particular kata on a particular day. ‘Presence’ as an abstracted mystical concept shifts to being instantiated in actors’ work appraised by those who watch. Classically, individuals who garner spectator interest are not named publicly within a training group as exemplars for others’ aspiration. Spectators must come to their own estimations. This is influenced by trainees’ memories of the injunctions and critiques of teachers. Suzuki’s bon mots, of course, have been particularly memorable for those who trained in Toga, retold to emphasise certain understandings in teaching back in Australia. The regular and discreet locations performers and audience occupy in the training room spatially frames the zone between. Teacher coaching does not guide students’ interpretations of this zone, allowing each spectator to spend time with their responses to individual and group performance on the training ‘stage’. For some this may be meaningless. This zone is so readily available to being inscribed by individual or collective desires, it seems to barely resist inscriptions. Of course interpretative translation begins from the first moment mediated by values trainees already carry. When performers went on to teach, this was recontextualised within the autodidactic communities of practice of the ‘shed academy’ during the 1980s and 1990s, reinforcing interest in this type of performer-audience nexus across the local field. The importance of audience relations in all the works of The Sydney Front resounded with SMAT’s high degree of orientation to spectators (See previous section on open fieldscapes).

Pollard captured succinctly how she adapts this audience orientation in her practice.

Practicing performance with an audience is very good. I have borrowed this manoeuvre. It makes your students’ or your collaborators’ focus high. It becomes the situation that will be, in a way. It reminds us always that this is not just an aerobics exercise (interview 2001).

While the ‘Eye of God’ image could be analogous with a working relationship with an all powerful and controlling director, Pollard’s transposition of this, into a more democratic frame in the context of a collective ensemble of artists, spreads its potential directorial agency through a group. Prioritising audience relations was a discourse that dispersed across the field of contemporary performance. Evolved, it
continues to resonate with field concerns of second wave artists as they extended to working with non-artist collaborators and communities. For example, in the dramaturgical methods led by Alicia Talbot at High Youth Health Service and Urban Theatre Projects, during devising of often very social site-specific works, culturally relevant audiences were paid as expert-insiders to criticise and suggest directions for an unfolding piece Cement Garage (1999) and The Longest Night (2002). The conventional attachment to being sequestered away, only showing ‘finished products’ publicly at the end of a rehearsal period was transgressed. When filmmakers came into our training sessions in Toga, what they documented was chosen by Suzuki to be repeatedly shown in public demonstrations and lectures over several months on a European tour. All this was done without notifying students: whose work was considered already viable ‘performance’ for public exposure.

This contrasts with how a cohort inside a Stanislavskian training session is framed. One gains the impression through reading manuals, watching and listening to teachers informed by these traditions, that the optimal learning environment would be quasi-private with only two actors and a teacher. Immediate responses of this inside audience are seen as broadly irrelevant, even damaging, to an individual’s development. While the glossing of the role of teacher with that of a future director remains unacknowledged, teachers occupy an analogous relationship anticipating that of a director in rehearsals of play scripts, coaching actors in interpretations and expression. The emblematic coaching point in these conventions seeks to erase audience presence from awareness: “Forget I am here”.

In The Sydney Front, where the ensemble chose not to have one person in the role of director, the performers necessarily had to place themselves in the positions of future audiences. Martin’s transcription of the Don Juan rehearsals maps a continual flood of feedback on fine details of directionality, scale, shape, eye focus, timing and energetic qualities of the performers’ embodiment.

Ideas are ‘put on the floor’, physically articulated in space – Often ideas are generated in the rehearsal room, with performers bringing only vague ideas to rehearsal. And it is in the act/movement of these ideas that the performance is built (Martin 1992, 3).

This type of rehearsal relies on a capacity to sense yourself, as others perceive you. Or at least be comfortable with this because movement images were shaped and
structured by other performers observing. Detailed amendment of emergent images was equally dependent on participants’ abilities to ‘feel’ themselves with spatiotemporal acuity. Without this, progress in devising material gets bogged down in uncertainty and a lack of ability to account for bodies, movements and voices. Martin cites a fragment of conversation with an artist C who had recently joined the company for the project:

C: The secrets of the group are unarticulated – I had an image in my head and I tried to talk about it –

X: You don’t need to – just do it. Then it becomes a talking point.

Y: Don’t explain, do it – it has to be able to be put on stage. Go away and think about it – get shape to it – to then put it to everyone. [Alluding to C’s suggestion] It’s a nice image don’t justify it – leave it open so it can go somewhere and we can develop it – that physical moment is a risk in a rehearsal room – some ideas do get through and get reworked in other people’s heads (Martin 1992: 1).

“Bringing into non-narrative visibility the fluctuating dynamics of motion, thought and intuition” (Rainer 1974: 301), each member of the ensemble anticipated that every other member could respond immediately to feedback and thus make requisite changes in the next run of a segment. How the formal disciplines of SMAT may be generative in groups, which improvise spontaneously, and intuitively craft action and images in devising, is often overlooked on the assumption that it is only a ‘technique’ for performing. The relationship between the method and the practice of devising is better understood by analogy with jazz improvisation and scales practice, facilitating a rapport to develop between players through inarticulable skill memory that supports, as composer Anne Boyd describes it, “spinning it into the now” (Boyd 2004).

Tina Landau, who works with US director Anne Bogart, describes a similar process of making composed segments of performance in “unbelievably short amount(s) of time (anywhere from three minutes to half an hour)”:

We make pieces so that we can point to them and say, “That worked,” and ask, “Why?” – so that we can then articulate which ideas, moments, images, etc., we will include in our production. It is an alternative method of writing. Together rather than being alone in a room with a computer, composition is writing with a group of people on their feet (1995: 27).

This ‘writing together’ is intertwined with performers’ spatiotemporal capacities, requiring the regular giving of audience by the group for meanings in whole work to
coalesce. Carrying a highly visual audience orientation even before a director recognises effective material, this orientation supports recognition by participating performers of serendipitous spatialized images, tableaux and audience-performer relations that appear to arise spontaneously in improvisations and trial and error phases of devising.

Indeed, things needed to be seen in Sydney’s ensembles. In 1998, Kellaway and Grant, who collaborated with a range of Sydney artists beyond The Front, compared the bundle of virtuosities that distinguished contemporary performance practitioners from mainstream theatre actors (Sussman 1998). Performers they observed “were good at creating performance images or compressed actions” through “taking a story and asking, ‘What’s the image?’” This writing with their bodies in action was predicated upon the ability to instantly “turn on” performance by framing what they did as ‘tasks’ in rehearsals “without the narrative consistencies of the psychological through lines” of characterisation. In creating montages, Kellaway and Grant stressed “there are enormous inconsistencies in the moment-to-moment narratives”. Thus each individual takes on more responsibility “to find his/her own path” through any performance and for devising a work as a whole (ibid).

That two groups both trained in SMAT on opposite sides of the world, who devised ‘on the floor’ with very similar ways of organizing rehearsals (but with very different starting points, resource bases, and cultural backgrounds) but no knowledge of each others’ work, have found this synergy useful, suggests that the orientation to audience decisively impacted on ordering their creational practices. Giving audience, early in rehearsals, foregrounded performers’ roles in the dramaturgy of their works, as authors, and in their direction. These intra-ensemble audience relations can be understood as one of the complicities between habitus and field formation in Sydney’s contemporary performance scene. The following two brief case studies illustrate the process.

Deborah Leiser-Moore appreciated critical attention inside training while in Toga. The first week she and Tanya Gerstle worked together on Hungry two years before the public season, Gerstle thought she was tough in her feedback. Leiser-Moore
initiated by performing segments accompanied by bits of autobiographical monologue for Gerstle from the first day. Leiser-Moore’s segments resembled the *kata* Statues, Sankyo and Slow Tentakaten accompanied by forceful speaking of texts.

A lot of that week was Deborah and I arguing and me being very honest saying “Look at this image? This idea?” I took the perspective that I am just the outsider. So all I could do from my aesthetic, from my interests is say “I am an outsider [i.e. to the faith and culture] that doesn’t interest me at all [theatrically] or ‘Yes, that would be an interesting concept but what do you mean, “Now I do a movement pattern?”’ (Gerstle interview 1997).

Leiser-Moore would perform a segment, and then Gerstle immediately interrogated what she saw. Speaking texts was conceived in the context of actions from the first moment. Their ‘on the floor’ working methods emerged in this week: their openness of communication and their commitment to exploiting the juxtaposition of four performance languages. At week’s end there was a presentation to an audience of peers.

During the final 1996 five-week rehearsal phase, Leiser-Moore was aware of a process of ‘giving over’, to Gerstle as a director. The term maintains a clear sense of authorship while allowing one’s work to be changed by an active audience interlocutor. Leiser-Moore described how her performing in SMAT training articulated to collaborating with a director:

> While you are just ‘in’ it, you can indulge in the pure excitement of where it can take you; how many barriers can you crash through. And leave that responsibility for what is happening to your own body to an outside eye to then make you think and take you further. So you are relaxed more in terms of experimentation and it takes you further in that way (interview 1996).

‘Giving over’ is consonant with her belief that a performer’s work essentially does not exist separate from its reception by an audience and the exchange of energies between them.

Three weeks before opening, some sections still had no clear initial shape. Their provisional place in the evolving order had been designated, and Gerstle anticipated giving these detailed ‘acting notes’ once Leiser-Moore had made them. Leiser-Moore’s desires and understandings of actor’s work did not arise from conventional methods with which Gerstle was conversant: their expected procedures for handling
language, thinking, action and impulse. To align their ways of developing segments that involved naturalistic text, action and storytelling, Gerstle found herself at times offering detailed coaching. But early in this phase of five weeks they swapped places: Gerstle would bodily take up the role of the performer while Leiser-Moore observed. Leiser-Moore would then resume her role as performer and committedly trial what she had received of the actions and speech.

One thing that happened a lot, which I normally would never, ever do, is me doing it ... giving a line reading. Now, if I was rehearsing a conventional play, I would never do that. [Deborah] would often ask for it. When I did it once or twice, she responded to that enormously. Her seeing me do it as an actor, just dealing with the text or the way I would do it. Somehow the visual of that with her looking at me doing it, very quickly processed for her. Sometimes, she could actually, having seen me do it; she could process that to do it herself in her own way (Gerstle interview 1997).

The swapping of roles continued throughout rehearsals increasing in frequency and ease, until just before opening. Switching places was not planned or discussed as a conscious rehearsal strategy. This mode was productive for Leiser-Moore though it initially disturbed Gerstle's expectation of her role as director. Material was very quickly communicated, tried out, discarded or refined.

I found myself 'doing' things partly because of Deborah's needs and also the limitation of time; me going very fast and far very quickly to test whether it was at all possible because it may not be too late to drop it (ibid).

Gerstle thought Leiser-Moore's experience with Suzuki supported her acting technique through her ability to focus, concentrate, incorporate and to quickly process information. "That was the satisfying thing about it -- this is Suzuki-like" (ibid). As works, created within the contemporary performance milieu, had very little actual rehearsal time for development, this swapping evidences how Leiser-Moore's SMAT engendered performance sensibilities matched the material conditions of production.

The swapping put Leiser-Moore in the audience place and kept the focus of their negotiations in creating Hungry in the space between them. Leiser-Moore did not respond as if she were insulted, told what to feel or think or as if it were a curtailment of her freedoms as a performance maker. Gerstle expected these reactions from actor-trained performers. Having someone physically perform their directorial idea was framed as attending to the work being jointly made and not
directed at Leiser-Moore's identity. The swapping augmented Leiser-Moore's capacity to see how audiences may see her work, by placing herself in a position to gauge Gerstle's directorial suggestions by musing from an audience perspective. This case linked to Leiser-Moore's working concept of substantial distance between selfhood and acts of performance practiced in SMAT. Leiser-Moore stressed that it was her responsibility and desire to deal with her own 'internal world' as a performer, the value of which she discovered through Suzuki training. This 'internal world' she did not expect to be spoken to, or for, by a director. Leiser-Moore's initial ideas arose out of deeply felt autobiographically concerns. Leiser-Moore confronted herself and Jewish audiences by publicly staging core religious rituals she had never performed in her life such as reciting Kaddish for the dead as this was 'men's' business'. The non-verbal exchange with Gerstle created room for Leiser-Moore's interior experiences of the sacred to remain with her. This allowed her to reflect on relations between her actions, these core cultural experiences and her immanent local audiences. She could contemplate material's sacred significance without compulsory discussion with a director, who did not share her religious beliefs. Questions about the cultural legitimacy remained primarily her concern in the collaboration. Swapping created room for their differences. However, direct verbal feedback and criticism about performance qualities were always embraced and Leiser-Moore used this to broaden the referential scope to encompass non-Jewish spectators.

Swapping roles incited Leiser-Moore's perceptual style, blending her visual and kinaesthetic senses, capacities that she had honed concentratedly over several years as a teacher and SMAT practitioner. Swapping 'who viewed who' kept rehearsals focused where Leiser-Moore desired them to be, on communication through embodied forms of expression. Gerstle's 'doing it' fuelled their non-verbal means of collaboration through extending the kinaesthetic dimension. The swapping of places could not have occurred if Gerstle's sensibilities as a highly physical performer herself were not incited by the imperatives of the rehearsal process. The synchrony of Leiser-Moore's and Gerstle's embodied knowledges, forged in different but related performance experiences, precipitated a spontaneous orchestration of their practices. Habitus, Bourdieu identified, fuelled arts of invention through the "conductorless orchestration" that arises when those with similar dispositions wrest a problem from in a shared situation (1990, 59). Problems are recognised, solutions are
framed and resolved by practical dispositions, without resource to conscious rules. The ready adoption of this swapping of places to create opportunities to see and be seen concurred with the logic of each of their physical theatre dispositions.

Leiser-Moore’s Suzuki training affected her responses to observers, including guests, the other artists, production people, press and the director inside rehearsals:

I liked it because it puts you in front of an audience before you have a bigger audience and that is always testing you as a performer. If anything it created a fear barrier you had to then break through as if it might be an opening night audience. That type of thing Suzuki helps me internally to do. I need people to be there, even though I find it incredibly difficult. The work’s not finished and they are looking at it. I remember the first time Elena [the composer] came. I felt “Oh. This is just awful” because there were no visuals but they are collaborators and that is vital (Leiser-Moore interview 1996).

Spectators’ comments were direct, at times forcefully critical and questioning of parts and the whole. Leiser-Moore used them to gauge her own performance in addition to Gerstle’s feedback. Visitors couched criticisms and questions in very different terms to the artists. These created substantial tension especially when they highlighted areas Leiser-Moore and Gerstle, too, thought problematic. The tensions though intense, did not threaten to derail the process. They provided another means for Leiser-Moore and Gerstle to usefully distance themselves from their material via these other perspectives. Rather problems were clarified and their generative devising capacities were marshaled to reform key parts. This occurred whether either resisted the criticism or agreed.

My presence as a note-taking observer was actively embraced and not problematic to them, even though there were often only three people in a tiny shed. Early in the process they interrogated me about my interpretation as a non-Jewish culture bearer of Leiser-Moore’s handling a piece of fabric I did not recognise, a shawl. I demurred, reluctant to inflect how work developed, but they both pressed. I told them I thought it was a piece of household manchester. I made no suggestions. Leiser-Moore in response invented what became a recurring motif of approaching and touching of the prayer shawl that she, as a woman, was not allowed to touch outside of a theatre.

Now I want to turn to another case study to analyse how the role of internal audience was caught up in the contentions about the coordination of devising within a transitory ensemble. This group was assembled under the aegis of SIDETRACK in
1997, for the project titled *Country Love*. Through an audition process, director Don Mamouney assembled a new ensemble interested and experienced in devising, training during rehearsals and drawing on physical skills and actorly resources. Mamouney included daily training to aid formation of ensemble relations and generate material for the final work using SMAT and yoga. Three of the assembled group of seven had extensive backgrounds in physical theatre, two with an extensive SMAT backgrounds (trained by Suzuki) and the other in circus and variety; the other four identified themselves as conventional actors, one with some experience in physicalized devising.

Mamouney described *SIDETRACK*’s theatre making strategies:

> Anyone who knows our work at *SIDETRACK* knows we haven’t been dealing with narrative for a while. Our approach to theatre is that we make theatre on the floor. And the writers of the theatre are the director, the performers, the musicians, the choreographers and includes the writers. I see writing as [a] visual [process] and as much as writing a text (Mamouney 1997 ABC TV interview).

Mamouney proposed the overarching conception of *Country Love*:

> I was interested in the way the culture of one country is transposed into another country and what kinds of links are made. I didn’t want to tell the migrant story - that has been told a lot. I wanted to tell a much more subjective story than that. The way, in which people make sense of their world when making those journeys, between what seems to me to be incommensurable worlds. The story was my idea; I wanted to tell not so much a migration story but a story of the movement between a pre-modern world and an agrarian society to a postmodern and technological society (*ibid*).

Mamouney considered the weakest aspect of Sydney contemporary performance was its spoken language. He invited Melbourne author Raimondo Cortese to participate in the process. Mamouney hoped they would “interpret these ideas between one another.” They discussed ideas, themes, and characters before rehearsals began. Mamouney stated he did not want anything written before rehearsals started.

> I certainly didn’t want an author. I wanted a collaborator to work on the piece. I wanted a co-author who would write it, along with me and the actors as co-authors (*ibid*).

The writer presented, just before rehearsals began, a ninety-page draft script titled the *The Old World*, set in a hypothetical southern Italian village of the 1930s. It was not clear to all the performers in the rehearsal room whether this text would be played out, trialled, edited, redrafted by the writer, with new and ‘later’ material to
progressively arrive on the floor. Rehearsals, led by the director, did not begin with the usual sit-down text analysis read of the script. Instead, the director positioned this script as a resource to be delved into and began discussions of the driving social concepts, the work’s anticipated structure and potential characters with performers. The writer withdrew active participation several weeks into rehearsals.

From the outset of rehearsals, the director set performers ‘projects’ as starting points for them to devise material, as he had with his previous ensemble. This was the most frequent procedure for creating new material ‘on the floor’ throughout rehearsals. Project tasks were mostly solo, although later in the process this expanded to include group-devised activities, particularly those organized around sculpting a vast pile of bark chips to define changes in location. In these ‘projects’ it was often assumed that performers would play characters by contrast to other kinds of contemporary performance making at the time in the Sydney scene. Starting points for most personae were suggested in the Old World script. What performers devised was shown the same day or the next to assembled cast, director, and, sometimes, to other collaborators like the costume designer and video maker. Discussion, led by the director, would follow. This signaled the structure and mode of communicating was to be discovered and refined ‘on the floor’ in ways not substantially predicted from the outset. Just before opening, writer Cortese spoke about the difference of working with a script as starting point:

When you enter into a situation where nobody knows what the show is, that’s always going to involve more emotional intensity than a situation where you say “here’s a script”. Because that degree of planning allows people to go, “Oh, Phew. I know what I’m doing already”. Whereas when it’s an open book you go, “Oh Christ”. It makes people more vulnerable and more scared. You have to deal with “Oh dear, where is this going to end or go?” You don’t know. When it starts on day one, you have no idea of what’s going to happen (Cortese 1997 ABC TV interview).

In a separate media interview, Mamouney described how he used the rehearsal floor:

Mamouney: During the process there was some conflict with the actors where they were saying, “I don’t know what it is you want me to act. It appears to me you are not taking what I am giving you. It always seems what’s missing is what you are interested in?” To a certain extent, it is true. I’m writing through them—shifting all the time and this is an uncomfortable process. For those who are used to it, it is not so uncomfortable.

Interviewer: What are you drawing out—their personal strengths and attributes?

Mamouney: Nothing as personal, as say, Mike Leigh using someone’s personal life. I’m really asking them to create. It is a genuine collaboration. I like to do a lot of talking and let
them know what the basis of the thing is and how it is working thematically. There is an
awful lot of editing that goes on, on the floor. I'm usually a couple of weeks ahead of them
because I'm going, "I've got that bit there. How does that fit there?" I perceive of my work
as painterly. I construct a performance like a painter paints a picture.

Interviewer: Laying down a ground and building up surfaces, trading on the happy accidents?

Mamouney: Trading on the happy accidents, using them, rewriting them back in (Mamouney
1997 ABC TV interview).

As rehearsals progressed, actor-identified performers voiced dissatisfaction with
'doing projects'. Dissatisfactions pivoted around perceptions that the director was
more interested in the visual 'look' of their work, that this was not an effective way
to handle scripts and that performers were not getting enough feedback to guide their
continuing work.

Cortese explained his usual writing method "involved long periods of contemplation
then writing a play in an intuitive mode" where he crafts action "from go to whoa,
developing characters all the way. I see words and action as the same thing. The
action is buried in language all the time" (1997). Rehearsals for Cortese involved
actors and director finding what is underneath in the manner of subtext. Cortese
wrote stage action in a narrative with realistic circumstances "rooted in a reality
somewhere - to make it drive and for the audience to recognise their place in it"
(ibid). Models he cited as exemplars of written dramatic construction included
Shakespeare, Horvath and Chekhov. In Country Love, he framed his writing before
he withdrew as:

\begin{quote}
Spur-of-the-moment, based on concepts, then handing it over to the director in a theatre
driven by concepts, not driven by your typical character-based scenario (ibid).
\end{quote}

Despite briefings, Cortese was not interested in concepts as starting points, and
presumably not the director's.

\begin{quote}
In plays where they borrow ideas from outside or where the writer wants to say something,
makes a comment about politics or social reality the dramatic action slows down and the
audience yawns unless they are particularly interested in what's happening (ibid).
\end{quote}

Cortese assumed that an interest in social concepts carried a didactic intent.
Mamouney acknowledged that using the power of images he saw on the rehearsal
floor rather than the script's language produced tensions over authorship. Early, 15
pages of the *Old World* draft were cut. Images formed on the floor that took one
minute replaced them. The overall structure, key scenes and threads of character narratives of *Country Love*'s final form came out of material created by performers.

In each new devising process an ensemble seeks to construct a clear relationship with the rehearsal floor as they get underway. When practices and relationships are not confidently shared by a troupe then the organization of the rehearsal room remains unstable. *Country Love*'s performers with the director sought through repeated discussions to fix the turbulence in working relations. As the contentions between absent writer and director rippled through this new group, on-the-floor tensions polarised performers’ identifications around how words and actions were handled and where artistic judgment resided.

Commitments of performers giving defined and committed performances of material early in rehearsals can clash with conventions of script- based rehearsal and concomitant performer habitus. In these genres of rehearsal praxis, this giving of performances is customarily considered to more properly arrive much later in the process. Recurring side comments made early in the rehearsal period by actor-identified performers urged those identified as physical performers ‘not to perform’ or ‘do segments ‘performatively’. The openness of the physical-theatre-identified performers to the inside rehearsal audience were framed as seeking to please and entertain this audience, rather than exercising their own perceptions of and their interior responses to a script in action. At the midpoint of rehearsals, actor-identified performers and assistant director conducted an impromptu workshop on the fundamentals of realistic acting about ‘intentions’, ‘objectives’ and ‘beats’ to help the progress of rehearsals. Given the larger struggles polarising relations, those identified as physical performers received the comments and workshop as if told they were doing ‘bad acting’, did not know how acting was practiced or scripted dialogue was properly handled. The ‘actors’ believed that the physical performers were committing themselves too early to (what they read as) set vocal and physicalized forms of expression, thus presumed to be reducing chances to collectively make further changes closer to the public season. A segment’s spatiotemporal definition and energetic commitment was also thought at risk of over-rehearsal signaling to the actor-identifieds that their physical performer colleagues would not respond or be sensitive to them on stage.
The polarisation of aesthetic approaches in *Country Love*’s rehearsals disadvantaged all involved. There were a couple of misrecognitions in this designation of heightened audience orientation as obstructive. It assumed physically inclined performers did not treat the forms of their performances as malleable or use them to explore or test the efficacy of their ideas and self-written texts through their paralinguistic qualities. Being invited into the project with this habitus they were unlikely to explain the degree of provisionality of the material they devised or their use of the attention they received each time they showed. These concerns about prematurely ‘showing’ material always already participate in ubiquitous discourses about those who work with their bodies in very ‘decided’ forms as not thinking in or through what they are doing, where performers’ actions are supposed to be ‘buried in the language’ of play scripts. ‘Common sense’ values about relations between bodies and minds conflated around the tensions. The sparseness of talking about showings in rehearsals reinforced a presumed absence of thought and feeling. This assumed evacuation of creative agency by the physically skilled in producing ‘performances’ in rehearsal simplistically reduced their working methods.

This analysis was borne out on another day after this workshop, when the whole group with director sat and read a revised draft of the *Old World* first ‘act’ in a more conventional script analysis approach. The physical theatre identified-performers, coached by some of the actor-identified performers were actively encouraged to address the ‘other’ character they were ‘talking with’, or about, eye-to-eye. The atmosphere lightened, with the actor-identified performers relieved that they were finally doing some ‘proper’ work on the text. Yet I was struck by the quality and depth of all the reading performances in handling the text. Many bare traces of their project tasks and other physicalized improvisations during this ‘first read’. This reading did not ease tensions about the position of the prewritten draft script. The director continued to use performers’ work on the floor as the principle engine for devising scene action instead of the written dialogue. The reading did however offer a mode of working that ‘spoke to’ the dispositions of the actor-identified performers in the group.

One of the interminable discussions to fix the problems shows how differences
between expectations actor-identified performers and directorial practices were interpreted. Participants were losing confidence of finding a way to progress through discussion but nevertheless all persisted. The actor A, newly arrived in Sydney in 1997, had not witnessed experiments in hybrid practices in contemporary performance that had proliferated over the previous decade, including at SIDETRACK. Thus actor A, coming from interstate, had not come across how devising relations had evolved differently either signaled in works, workshops in the ‘dispersed shed academy’ or through talk with peers. Actor A had not incorporated SMAT in his/her acting and his/her previous rehearsal and devising experiences were script based. The director had asked the cast to say what it was they needed.

Actor (A): I need to workshop, to improvise, not discuss.

Director (D): I can’t be there all the time. I’ve got to work through the confession scene. I trust you. You are a mature actor and you can work on material. There’s tons of performance material for you to work on; physicalisations, walk etc [He lists a series of other acting related tasks].

A: I’m not used to working with a director in this way. I’m used to having a director tease that out of me. Now I realise my role, as an actor, is different.

D: I keep hitting up against the fact that I’m not fulfilling your expectations as a director.

A: I see my role now to be self-directing. Self-create. Self-direct and self-write.

(Documentation of rehearsals, July 1997).

Transforming divisions of creative labour amongst collaborators had been at stake across the local contemporary performance field. Later in this discussion, a Suzuki-trained performer with decades of experience devising physical theatre addressed the actor-identified performers. They expected the director’s role was as an internal spectator seeking to construct meanings through the combination of performer’s material, texts, sound, objects, floor surfaces, clothes, video projections, furniture and lighting. These ‘other’ artists had worked simultaneously around, but not always on the rehearsal floor.

The director is making all the shapes and we are going to fill those shapes. Ultimately, what an actor does is our responsibility. We create these roles. They are ours. I want to create something fascinating, that makes the audience go “Wow” and that satisfies me as an actor—that is my responsibility. Often when he doesn’t like it (i.e. a project presented) he’ll tell you and when he does he won’t. He’s orchestrating from all different directions. I’ve worked with this director a lot and these processes are hard. He will put all the elements together. We all ‘own’ different parts and that makes us co-owners of the production (ibid).

That this speaker presented this bricolage process as legitimate practice locates the
speaker's position in the Sydney field. All parties felt the pressure of getting work practiced on the rehearsal floor but interpreted its position and use differently.

The lack of fit between audience giving on this rehearsal floor and what was carried in each performer's habitus towards devising in Country Love highlights the complicity of field and habitus, not revealed until dysfunction prompted the necessity to speak and actively grapple with the organization of rehearsals. Struggles about whether stage actions were to arise from the script or be generated by performers devising with the director, as audience on the floor, continued to reverberate. The dysfunction revealed the micro-procedures of deeply embodied acting practices intertwine symbiotically with the creative starting points of particular genres throughout rehearsal and are not axiomatic for all theatre making under the rubrics of 'proper' ways to devise. Shared or commensurate trainings contribute to confidence in devising by foreshadowing relations between all players and thus, by degrees, foreshadow kinds of performance without totally determining them. Actor training regimes, whether they are autodidactic or programmatic, powerfully adumbrate divisions of creative labour for devising and rehearsals in particular fields of cultural production. “What kind of place is this rehearsal?” is an important question about how the environment is shaped by the kind of audience participating collaborators give each other. Praxial understandings about the role of inside rehearsal audiences are a critical part of an ensemble's language for devising; it was not shared amongst the Country Love group.

In Australian performance with little actual exchange between practices, local capital city fields have evolved in relatively autonomous ways with little contemporaneous inter-state touring. The equivalence of culture gaps or intra-theatrical rehearsal culture experiences may prompt tensions when unanticipated field borders are crossed in a country that thinks of itself as broadly homogenous from state to state. The contrasts in context were neither anticipated nor considered very important by some participants in this case study. Yet each spoke from particular positions within distinct fields. Pressures were amplified by ambitions to create a full-scale new piece with a new ensemble in a single short phase of development to launch SIDETRACK into a wider audience.
1 While Heilmann considered this hyperawareness and capacity for stillness valuable, she also felt negatively constrained by these same capacities when they were used exclusively. Heilmann reflected that it had been valuable to train in Suzuki before engaging in freer-flowing and internal image-based trainings with contemporary dancer Ros Crisp, and Body Weather derived practices with Nikki Heywood during the rehearsal period for a room with no air.

2 Through the 1980s and 1990s, casts generally enjoyed four to six weeks of rehearsal. From the mid 1980s there has been a growing recognition of the need for one or two brief periods of creative development prior to rehearsal, spread as far apart as six months to a year. There was not this widespread field recognition in the first wave period, though groups capitalised on times between meetings prior to and around rehearsal/creative development periods. While the genre I’m referring to is not dance per se, that the conditions of work echo those of contemporary choreography outside the few standing on-going and government subsidised companies is a sign of the degree to which contemporary performance works sank so substantially on corporeal expression and a sign of the interdisciplinary flavour.

3 Gerstle had trained ‘on the job’ in Carol Woodrow’s Grotowski-inspired Canberra ensemble, FOOL’S GALLERY, touring nationally in their SOP, Standard Operating Procedure (1982) to critical acclaim.

4 There were examples on non-narrative compositions amongst local precursor performances that these artists would have seen. One memorable example from the interdisciplinary group All Out Ensemble was Situation Normal...out-up at Art Unit in 1982 (see Allen and Pearlman 1999, 199). Several first wave contemporary performance practitioners cited witnessing this group.

5 Abrupt and frequent segmentation was a hallmark in works in the scene by those who trained in SMAT from its earliest phase. These segment breaks involved changes in all the signifying systems of their stage works. That inside ‘chunks’ performers often broke from one state and tableau to another increased the fragmentation.

6 Heilmann prefaced this comment by saying “if I’d done the sort of chaotic, sort of individual, sort of release work [with Ros Crisp in devising of a room with no air] without having Suzuki training, that wouldn’t have been a better foundation either. The combination of the two work really well.” This indicates the persistence of the structuring prior training as well as pointing to the value of an interaction, within the one performer-devisor, of the two ways of structuring work in one body for the devising performer.

7 Saccedes or saccadic movement of the eyes is the intermittent refocusing movement of the eyes that occurs as the eyes fix on one point after another in the surrounding environment or visual field.

8 I included a short list of these pieces in the descriptions of the second wave in Chapter Three, 74-75. Curiously, Baylis also performed a memorable solo monologue at Contemporary Performance Week (1997) from the point of view of a spectator sitting in the audience speaking out loud memories of previous performances he had been involved with, and which members of that audience may have seen. Molino suggested that impoverished financial conditions encouraged solo works. Pieces could be rehearsed in a lounge room, and thus were affordable. Impoverished conditions disadvantaged artists unable to create and perform based on their embodiment, without writer, elaborate staging or production support. It is one thing to devise a short work in your lounge room; it is quite another to do so without confidence you have the embodied powers to translate this to public theatres with spectators and without an established public following or reputation to keep spectators attentive.

9 Photographs of Shiraiishi’s performance on this platform show the reconfigured use of the Recamier theatre at the Theatre du Nations Festival in 1972. It is very close in dimensions and proxemics, if not in total design to a traditional noh stage and also WASEDA LITTLE THEATRE’S first space above Mon Cheri (See Carruthers and Takahashi 2004 and SCOT’s own company booklets from 1991).

10 For an example of the kind of teaching and terms that are synonyms for Thorne’s “playing an action” see Uta Hagen (1973, 184-190). Thorne’s term in context is closer to Robert Cohen’s notion of “playing tactics” (1978, 81-88).
11 THE FRONT created *Burnt Wedding* (1988) for public plazas. Pollard created *Girt By Sea* in collaboration with Indonesian visual artists installed on Manly Wharf beach. Ryan toured in STALKER'S outdoor work *Blood Vessel*. Pollard and Ryan have both worked as consulting directors with a number of dancers.

12 The texts of performances of the first wave, transcribed after the event, often take no more than a couple of pages. For example, one of THE SYDNEY FRONT's fieldscape performances, *First and Last Warning* (1992), took up only four pages of the published anthology *performing the unNameable* (Allen and Pearlman 1999), including the notated action of the all five performers and only six paragraphs of written monologues.

13 THE FRONT practices these *kata* in a group, which they referred to generically as 'stomping'. Elizabeth Burke of ENTR'ACTE identified these tactics in Decrouxian mime terms as “living immobilities” as recursive marks of the Sydney style (Burke 1993, 6). However SIDETRACK and THE FRONT did not train in this regime as a group.

14 A “kineme” is the smallest unit of movement recognised as meaningful by insiders who perform them. The term was proposed in ethnographic anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler’s analytical method, in which she trialled a Labanotational system for her observations of Tongan dance. See Ness’s critique of Kaeppler’s cross-cultural method (1996, 258-261).

15 By the time Bogart first visited Australia to speak at the Australasian Drama Studies national conference in 1997, all the works that are case studies in this thesis had been performed and none of the artists used or knew SITI’s ‘Viewpoints’ approach to composition.
CHAPTER SIX
Reaching limits and conceiving selfhood in Sydney contemporary performance

Experiences of and discourses about how to handle oneself in performance encompass all SMAT kata practice contributed to the formation of artists’ ‘shared language’ in each of their project’s dramaturgy. This chapter traces these in the interpraxiologue with Suzuki’s training and his discourse about his theatre making aspirations. I begin with experiences of pain and difficulty that are provoked during training. As pain, corporeally speaking is an individual experience, after setting out the phenomenological perspective offered by Drew Leder on which I based my analysis, I trace four artists’ reception and application of their experiences: Kellaway, Leiser-Moore, Thorne and Pollard. I briefly draw on the accounts of two of their collaborators, Ryan and Mamouney to elucidate how experiences of pain and difficulty articulated to their devising.¹ The pain provoked in reaching their limitations in performance was central to notions of performers’ subjectivity in acting, thus pivotal to the kind of performances the Sydney artists staged and key issues about performance at stake in the local field. In the second part of this chapter, beginning once again with artists’ reception of key practices in SMAT, like the pedagogic device of the ‘empty vessel’, and drawing on specific examples, I examine how these conceptions of selfhood participated in debates around acting qua performing as it evolved into a distinctive opening out to spectatorial interpretations that characterised their genre of performance.

¹ In neutral kinesthetic, the visual, and tactile self-experiences may play as crucial a role in the construction of our body image, but they do not place upon one the same demand for an affective and metaphysical wrestling with embodiment (Leder 1990: 91-92).

6.1 Confronting difficulty and limitations in Sydney post-Suzukian training practices
The theme of difficulty threads throughout the accounts of the Sydney practitioners cited throughout this thesis. Movements and vocalisation in SMAT are extremely hard on a body. The duration of specific kata, clusters of kata and cycles of intensive training are explicitly designed to take trainees to their limits, to experience an exhaustion of a body’s ability to continue to perform its training figures, physically and vocally. The repertoire insists on endurance of the musculature, breath capacity, proprioceptive
awareness, control and concentration though it is not very demanding on complex coordination. The absence of free flowing improvisation accommodating rather than challenging existing corporeal capacities in SMAT’s disciplined kata is extremely demanding. Difficulties manifest to each individual as degrees of corporeal pain that prompt a wrestling with their embodiment as performers. This gives rise to self-questioning and clarification of priorities and values. In turn this yielded for Sydney practitioners a reformation of aesthetic principles about acting, starting points for new works and a tenor in devising that supported a tenacious grappling with creative problems and constraints through, often but not exclusively, argumentation and contention within an ensemble.

For several commentators (Carruthers 2004, Goto 1988, Pippin 1997 & 98 and Schaeffer 1997) the main purposes of SMAT’s difficulty is cultivation of strength, stamina and intensification of performances to make them more engaging, even hypnotic for spectators. These effects have been demonstrable in Sydneysiders’ works. However, for those Sydneysiders who continued to train there were substantial impacts yielded from the confrontation with difficulty and, at times, kinds of pain that were not publicly visible. This will become apparent through close studies of individual practitioners’ examples and their testament.

Drew Leder offers an account of how an individual’s heightened body focus in experiences of pain precipitates generalisable principles for future art making. Leder identifies four invariant features of disrupted embodiment that mark it out from other states. First, specific sensory experiences are intensified when for example a region of the body that previously “gave little suddenly speaks up” (1990, 71). Second, disruption becomes prominent for finite periods. “We usually notice in the ongoing stream of sensation that which stands out as episodic and discreet” (ibid). This tends to happen at times of unusual stress or trauma. By contrast to unthematised background embodiment, “pain arises suddenly. It punctures the scene with novelty – feelings of general neutrality or wellbeing are typically amorphous, marked neither by definable beginnings and ends nor abrupt transformations. Pain, as a symptom of the problematic frequently is” marked (ibid). Thus difficulty and discomfort stands out. Third, the hurt that pain effects “exerts an affective call that has the quality of compulsion” (ibid). It seizes attention. Direction of attention in such circumstances is not optional. Fourth and finally, the usual state where a performer lives from his/her body to the world is reversed. A person’s intentions
flowing outward toward the world through their actions are interrupted. "(The) painful body emerges as an alien presence that exerts upon us a telic demand" (ibid). Intentions to continue activity or interaction with others are interrupted. Accustomed ways of conducting oneself in the world either change or cease.

Pain, as a term relevant in this discussion of confrontations of limits in SMAT, is a matter of degree. Pain is gradated experience for individuals arising around specific training practices. The substantial disorientation SMAT provokes ebbs and flows as part of a larger self-chosen life project for artists akin to athletics training. It is particular to each individual's experiences of the limits reached. The very seizing of attention marshals acts of will to resist abandonment of the practice when discomfort ensues. Reflexivity is marshalled to solve the problem; in short to analyse why one is struggling (see Grant in 5.1). The interval-type structure of sessions, the on-stage off-stage phasing mark out episodes for reflection during a session that continue beyond the immediate episode during training.

As I interviewed artists, their struggles with SMAT spontaneously peppered their accounts and pointed to the encounters with difficulty as a generative theme of practice. While unique in its instantiation for each individual, they shared a broadly interrogative thrust with affects beyond cultivation of corporeal stamina and concentration - the usual effects SMAT is promoted as producing. The heightened body focus in experiences of difficulty appeared to yield creative principles that resonated with particular issues and moments in the continuum from conception through to public performance. These incorporated practical strategies expanded the scope of their creative freedom to perform and devise. Deborah Leiser-Moore, as an example, took what crystallised through her SMAT practice as metonymic of a whole creative strategy.

You should put 'walls' in front of you to break through them. That is the creativity, that is the way into learning your weaknesses, your barriers - where you are in this very moment in time. That's what it is really about. Those physical forms [ie the kata] are just physical forms but they are our tangible minds, a tangible way of getting into ourselves (interview 1992).

Leiser-Moore's term "tangible mind" points to the reflexivity triggered by reaching performance limitations that yield understandings that could not be previously articulated. When corporeal limits are repeatedly reached, artists' wills to continue are taxed, and they undergo a radical form of self-questioning about their drive and understanding. Questions arise such as "Why am I doing this?" "What can I do to
sustain myself in this work?” or “What’s going on?” that lead to detailed reflection about their physical expression, relationships between embodiment and mentality, values and priorities. To use the vernacular, such experiences, at the limits of exhaustion, “focused the mind” – on the existential condition of a body/psyche and how embodiment in performance is understood. This reflexivity or thinking about what one is experiencing is not only for beginners. The constraints of the kata continue to resist practitioners even when the seeking of limits has become, effectively, a mundane aspect of practice.

A body asserts its presence in a heightened state of awareness during dysfunction. The rendering of the presence of performers’ bodies palpable to self and peers during devising foreshadowed the centrality of embodiment as the main channel of communication with spectators. Prominent movement vocabularies such as using stilts, acrobatics, circus apparatus like harnesses or web ropes or substantial quantities of contemporary dance were absent from most of the works of Sydney’s post-Suzukians. Even though they rarely used these movement vocabularies that customarily mark out physical theatre in common and critical parlance in Australia, the encounter with difficulty underwrote the identification of their pronounced physicality by peers and public. Repeated encounters with limits in training sustained the identification of the Sydney artists’ works as a type of physical theatre, contributing to the genre identification of post-Suzukians’ works in the local field forging alliances and working relations with other types of physical theatre performers. Field affiliations that were reinforced by individuals from a number of post-1986 ensembles experiencing SMAT in open sessions in the dispersed shed training networks.3

In the accounts of the artists that follow I chart their individual responses to confronting difficulty in SMAT. Each drew from their unique corporeal experiences significant creative principles that informed their subsequent performance practice.

Nigel Kellaway positively embraced encountering the limits of his endurance as he stomped.

This happens constantly in class – It makes sense to set this up for yourself if you were doing a defined thing like a marathon runner – If you were doing a classical ballet class for yourself,
you'd bring in music, if you were seeking to do 24 plies. Otherwise, you'd stop, say, at sixteen and never get to end. It is the same with Three-minute Stomping and Shakuhachi. You wouldn't stomp so long. It's only because there's a known piece of music there. It has to be something outside of you that pushes you on. Of course, in theatre, it's the material that pushes you. Consequently, countless times I've had to push beyond my limit onstage – The worst thing is Statues with a ladder: that is THE most difficult of all. Not many people can get through it.\(^4\)

There's nothing complicated in Suzuki's work. It's all such simple exercises. The least coordinated person can do it; it's just one foot after another, which is the whole point of it. It's only a couple of weeks, after which you never really have to think about what your body is doing. So in those moments (of difficulty), it was defined – It is resisting the temptation to slide back inside yourself. You've got to stay outside yourself (interview 1994).

When questioned, Kellaway agreed that this desirable exteriority is a mental and emotional aspiration.

Because the minute you go inside yourself, the whole body will start crumbling. It is finding that technique, that device in the classroom that pushes you beyond that limit sensibly. Beyond what YOU consider to be your limit. You are building up an armoury of techniques to get you through those moments, which happen regularly onstage. You just learn this device and ways of staying outside yourself because collapse comes. Your body will stop before it has to. It is a natural thing. Our bodies are built to do that, to save ourselves (ibid).

Kellaway relied on enduring the rigours of the kata themselves rather than harsh critical feedback from a teacher. He trusted to a somatic intelligence as the requisite component of performer agency to identify limits and deal with kata performance.

When this is not taken into consideration the whole thing is extremely fascist and the role of the teacher can become a highly fascist one. Observers of Suzuki classes have been surprised at and become quite alarmed at how fascist the whole thing seems. Yet, I have never had a complaint from any student I have ever taught. Most of the time, the first thing they learn is that they hardly notice I'm there in the class when they are actually negotiating the exercise. When it actually comes to doing it, the 'person' who is pushing them on is the material, and nothing to do with the teacher or director. Essentially, it's the material that is tough and it is in the personal negotiation with the material. You've got to find a way to do it (ibid).

Pollard and Leiser-Moore registered the absence of verbal criticism in Kellaway's teaching. Pollard stated, "He would just make you stay there longer or repeat it all again".\(^5\) Appraising the relevance of SMAT in the local environment, Kellaway contrasted the teacher-learner relationship with the director-actor relation in a theatre company:
Kellaway considers that a more agentive performer relationship with SMAT risks being overridden in an Australian setting where sensei-apprentice relations are usually read as domination or subsumed in simplistic notions of 'team work'. Kellaway's 'personal negotiation with material' emphasises the cultivation of an individual's reconciliation with extreme acts in performance rather than acquiescence to the impositions of another performer, teacher or a director. He was known for staging extreme acts in for example, The Front, being fire hosed out of the theatre into the street (Waltz 1987) and having his anus stuffed with cream cakes (Pornography of Performance 1988). During devising, personal negotiation began with setting difficult tasks for individual and group exploration. Dealing with the demands of the kata was commensurate with handling tough and obscure tasks from other troupe members by which material generated became their performances. For The Front members these difficult tasks were both challenging to render conceptually as well as being emotionally, vocally and physically demanding. The Front consistently strove to avoid 'easy solutions' to creative problems so as to avoid stereotyped, familiar and hackneyed imagery in performance.

In the previous chapter, Kellaway recounted his intense effort keeping threads, attached to his body, taut as he smoothly progressed across the stage in Slow Tentakaten. Kellaway registered the disruption in graphic terms “It was so f*****g hard. It throws your whole image” (interview 1994). Even if transitory, seeking to keep the imagined threads taut temporarily threatened his body image – his perception of himself as a performer. The demand-type kata disrupted “the very routines and goals by which he defined his identity” (Leder 1990, 77). His adaptive response was to 'step outside' himself by taking three-dimensional photos of his body. Just as in dysfunctional embodiment, Leder recognizes “the seed of a body-self division”, Kellaway energetically acted towards his body by adopting a perspective from without. “Whenever our body becomes an object of perception, even though it perceives itself, an element of distance is introduced”, writes Leder, “now I ‘have’ a body, a perceived object in the world” (Leder 1990, 77). This effect was amplified by
incorporating an external point of view of his performance through the ‘Eye of God’
image. Kellaway, on later reflection, acknowledged that, although it was not part of
his conscious attraction to Suzuki training, this external perspective had been
something he had been looking for.

You are in this dialogue with some ‘beyond’ whether that is the ‘Eye of God’ or your audience.
That is removed or outside what is actually happening onstage – I had to remind myself and
always struggled with that. Then Suzuki showed me a method of doing this that I found
extremely useful. I knew what it was as soon as I saw this happening onstage. I saw the SCOT
company perform before I started class. I fell to pieces watching Shiraishi and Suzuki Kenji.
They were doing everything I wanted an actor to do … Their sheer ability as performers I found
so exciting and I knew it was this distance that they had from the material that was working
(interview 1994).

Subsequently, his style of teaching stomping emphasised a trainee’s being distant from
the kata in performance. Kellaway returned to the centrality of this theme in
formulating principles for his approach to performance making.

For me the body in the process of making theatre is objectified … actually in the studio with the
bodies we are there to objectively move the bodies around the space (ibid).

Asked whether it is possible to create this ‘objective’ embodiment Kellaway conceded:

This is very difficult. So it is important that we don’t complicate it with too many things. So
many things have to be rejected. I put an awful lot aside when I’m actually making. When
problems arise I decide whether I am going to confront that problem at that time or say this is
irrelevant to this moment. And I will worry … If I’m going to think about what Suzuki offered
me in that time it is objectifying of the body or objectifying of the actor which is his legacy to
me (ibid).

Kellaway’s divided subjectivity was not only an outcome of the experience of pain but
also an adaptive response enabling him as a performer-maker to consciously prioritise
rehearsal matters. For Kellaway and others this adaptive response of reflective
distanciation from material structured devising during rehearsals in his discourse of
objectification. Kellaway was not the only FRONT member for whom surpassing usual
limits forged an arena of creative freedom. Chris Ryan examined the example of one
person slapping another, without recourse to stage combat safety conventions, to
unpack this nature of his adaptive response.
Whether someone is slapping you or whether it is how you jump on someone’s back, somehow the training is infecting the way you do that – that means control of space and time again – that’s about how you have maintained yourself in the training. You’ve been asked to go to an extreme that you can maintain, maintain the stamina within that extreme. Once you find the limit – how do you push it that little bit further until you reach a point where you can maintain that ‘furtherness’ and then that becomes your limit. That gives you an incredible sense of power when dealing with others. The level jumps in those extremes. You are not taking the action as personal (interview 2001).

Ryan described the impact of training for a duration that exhausts a performer’s usual responses. The interactions around for example, a firm slap, had

no psychology involved – your body is still yielding and has a reaction but your mind is not; your personality is not and somehow the action is clearer. There is more acceptance that this in not an aggressive act. [Rather] it is an action of one body on another, like material. It is not saying the mind is not involved but the defences aren’t there and they are not readable [by an audience]. It is a very qualitative thing that changes. It is about the knowledge of your own body, so that the relationship with the action is a relationship with the self, first ... so you can renegotiate your reaction which means you don’t have to react or you can choose to ‘over react’ (ibid).

The knowledge of pressing back limits in a relationship with his ‘self first’ gave Ryan space to make a choice thus expanding the scope of his freedom to make decisions about how he shaped material when working with collaborators.

In the previous chapter, Deborah Leiser-Moore explained how she relied on her SMAT-engendered habitus to overcome a chronic fear of heights and attendant spatial disorientation in Hungry in 1996. A pivotal encounter with difficulty in Standing Statues in 1991 foreshadowed this confident reliance on her SMAT habitus.

I got to this other point. I always loved Statues, that was one thing I could really do. Then all of a sudden, “Oh, Oh! What’s happening here” and that’s when you’re working through that point to a new level. I thought I had an understanding of what the core idea of the Suzuki training was and could translate it into all the exercises. I enjoyed the creativity of Standing Statues coming from a dance as well as acting background. I started to realise this was very wrong. Subconsciously something was tearing that away saying, “No, don’t do that”. Then everything went weird. I couldn’t keep my balance. I was pushing myself further, trying to get under that layer. While I was doing that, everything was rocking. All I thought I could be, my whole understanding of myself wasn’t there. I threw myself into turmoil. I was getting underneath that shell further and further to a deeper understanding. Looking back, this shell was very image orientated, shaping very consciously. When going to do Statues, I thought, “I’ll be very strong here”, make inventive shapes rather than focusing on inner awareness. When I arrived at the next point, I realised its not about that. You need both. Ultimately there has to be an elegance of image, but it’s not the main point. The inner understanding comes first (interview 1992).
A number of things stand out in Leiser-Moore’s account. She located earlier enjoyment of Statues as coming from within her existing interests in shaping the appearance of her body. SMAT was her fourth influential performance training. Leiser-Moore had carried an investment in line and shape, traditional in her classical ballet, figure skating and Decrouxian mime backgrounds as an abiding aesthetic through her personal biography up to this point. The high degree of disruption Leiser-Moore registered thoroughly dislodged the very routines and goals by which she defined her identity existentially as well as in her arts practice. Leiser-Moore posited the Statues *kata* as a force, both inside and outside herself, demanding a different response. The force of the *kata*’s tight disciplinary constraints destabilized her existing understandings about performing consonant with Leder’s description of the effects of pain.

The disruption and constriction of one’s habitual world correlates with the new relation to one’s body. In pain, the body or a certain part of the body, function or sensory capacity emerges as an *alien presence*. The sensory insistence of pain draws the corporeal out of self-concealment, rendering it thematic (Leder 1990, 76; italics in original).

In a 1996 interview Leiser-Moore called this process one of ‘making discoveries’ about a new way of using her mentality in relation to her body: bringing together inner understanding with an awareness of what was visually available for an audience. Leiser-Moore repeatedly referred to this discovery of her ‘internal world’ in training that reformed her understanding of acting. Leiser-Moore’s appreciation of this ‘internal world’ was the driving force that initiated and carried through her solo work, *Hungry*.

Repeated encounters with limits over time in Suzuki training counterbalances the sedimentation of incorporated skills into fixed habits imperceptible to performers. From session to session, the same weaknesses don’t manifest as the same difficulties practitioners have with the *kata*. The interpraxialogue between performance making and training practice shifts parameters as new meaningfulness and thus possibilities for performance making evolve.

Leiser-Moore’s ‘discovery’ informed how she taught the turn in ‘Slow Tentakaten’.

You can shape your hands however you please but what I don’t want to see is “Wow, now I’m free to choose, I’m going to think how I shape may arms and hands in the most wonderful aerial
Concern for 'weird' shapes is positioned as a superfluous investment in decoration that revealed trainees' paradigms for understanding relations between bodies and performance acts. If actors change their way of conceptualising their embodiment in performance a decisive change of theatrical aesthetic is effected. Potentially their relations with audiences are also being reconfigured.

Mémé Thorne was known to insist on an extremely firm weighted attack in stomping. Heilmann spoke of a shared drive to make the kata harder to execute at SIDETRACK. Thorne referred to how handling particular body parts and energetics in various dance and popular aesthetics influences the appraisal of women in public performance that was challenged by SMAT's kata. Thorne came to SMAT with a substantial dance background as ballroom dancer and teacher and with a heightened Grotowskian type body-centred training at KISS. She was intimately aware of the power of these particular schemes of appreciation and beliefs in dance practice to generate a self-image. Since 1980 she has described her kind of performance as 'physical theatre'.

We all bring with us our own self-image and that stands in the way. Dancers who study the method have more difficulty, even more than actors or people who have no movement background apart from being fit. You see that particularly in the way they use their hands. I think it ties in with any single person's ideas about what is beautiful, what is poetic about a human body and we all have our own ideas about that. Certainly as a group, dancers have a very specific idea about what is beautiful and it's all because of the dance training. It's all in the way you hold your hands or hold your head, the tilt or the shape. Suzuki method strips away all of that and asks you to allow yourself to be ugly, which offers women something very powerful.

What it said to me was that in making a shape that was not traditionally seen as beautiful, I can be beautiful because I can be powerful. For instance I can put out my hand ... and still be beautiful. Traditionally if you look at that, [Mémé holds her hand aloft in a contorted shape], it is not a beautiful hand and you do that with the rest of your body in the way you hold yourself. It is especially the case in the walks if you are doing uchimata or wantashi. Those forms themselves are not graceful but when you're working at it you think 'dignity' and then these forms — as awkward as they might feel — after a while, don't feel so awkward because your muscles learn to accommodate the movement (interview 1993).

Thorne isolates dysfunctional awkwardness as a necessary phase to transform body hexis. She acknowledges that which is "poetic about a human body" drives a performer's intentions in their future devising unless interrupted. She recognises that
the power of dancerly doxa is so deeply embedded that anything short of ‘stripping it away’ via disjunctive experiences in the face of pedagogic demand will not create room for reconsideration. By implication, intentionality towards future performance making, thus innovation in practices comes through challenging practices like SMAT. Bourdieu similarly typified skilled artists’ relations with genres of practice and fields of cultural production.

Endlessly overtaken by his own words, with which he maintains a relation of ‘carry and be carried’ – the virtuoso finds in his discourse the triggers for his discourse, which goes along like a train laying its own rails … Being produced by a modus operandi which is not consciously mastered, the discourse contains an ‘objective intention’ … which outruns the conscious intentions of its apparent author and constantly offers new pertinent stimuli to the modus operandi of which it is a product (1990, 57).

The practical mimeticism by which schemes of perception and appreciation are incorporated in training “implies an overall relation of identification” that fuels a process of reproduction or

practical reactivation which is opposed to both memory and knowledge (and), tend to take place below the level of consciousness, expression and the reflexive distance which these presuppose. The body believes in what it plays at … It does not represent what it performs, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life (ibid:73).

Frustrating this ease of reproduction through intense demands for endurance in kata that contradicts current doxa, Thorne recognised as painful and confusing.

(Suzuki method) really works against the grain of how dancers usually work. Dancers, generally speaking, work on extensions of the fingers, the toes, even the head. This method is all about containment of energy (interview 1992).

Stillness is this containment. The testing of endurance and concentration was for Thorne directed to expanding the scope of creative freedom beyond the taken-for-granted body hexis with embedded beliefs about the appearance of bodies, particularly women’s bodies in performance. Thorne’s aims were clearly signalled to prospective trainees by her inclusion of a quote from Tadashi Suzuki in her advertising pamphlet for public workshops in the 1990s. “Performers should be judged on how profound their reasons are for being on the stage”. As an artist devising performances this quote married with her field position and sought to locate others so inclined. As a
performance maker rather than actor inside others’ projects she was, like others in the field, invested in creating the raison d’être of their works and their capacity to excite and locate audiences. Like Leiser-Moore and Pollard in 1996, she tested out her profound reasons and her own tenacity in a full-length solo work of her own initiation.

Thorne’s renunciation of appearing beautiful and embracing ugliness taken together with her simultaneous judgement of her own performance from a spectator perspective, was a seizing of the control of her own representation as a woman performer. Thus through practice of the severe disciplinary kata she came to assert her authorship rather than accept the constraints of the then horizon of public schemes of appreciation surrounding women. As a Malaysian woman performer her attractiveness was also captured within the logics of an exoticised and orientalist framing of beauty. 7 Her 1996 solo, Burving Mother intimately examined the ugliness of dysfunctional family relations at a time when the underbelly of filial relations by Asian performers was rarely publicly exposed. This pain went ‘against the grain’ of Malaysian cultural ethos that celebrates close supportive family ties. 8 It equally asserted the giving of public attention to the subjective experiences of Asian-Australians in the year when the now-defunct racist One Nation political party’s prominent representative, Pauline Hanson, was elected to the Federal Parliament. The kind of courage and power from which Thorne garnered her profound reason to create and stage this work resonated with her experiential reconsiderations of what was poetic and beautiful in her own SMAT practice. (For a more in-depth description of this performance see Taylor 1999)

Deborah Pollard did not carry prior training in dance or mime into her experience of SMAT in Toga. She described herself broadly as ‘non-physical’. Pollard cites her master class experiences with Suzuki and Katoh Masaharu, a senior SCOT actor, as major influences on the evolution of her aesthetic principles as a performer-maker, director and initiator of collaborative projects. She remains keen to extend the boundaries of form in theatre. Painful experiences that thematised her embodiment and her ways of understanding performance were as much about verbal criticism as kata practice.

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Pollard spoke emphatically of fierce ongoing criticism from Suzuki about her movements on the training floor. Suzuki, frustrated that she did not negotiate weight bearing appropriately for stomping, literally pursued her into the dining hall of the Toga compound one evening. She described the impromptu intervention with Suzuki literally gripping and hanging off her hips, forcing a deeper squat, as humiliating. On reflection, she acknowledged the value of this kind of experience in enabling her subsequently to approach performance making. Pollard linked her bodily experience of negotiating the ‘impossible’ demands of the *kata*, the scrutinising and criticism she received with crystallisation of her conceptualization of immanent performance projects. “Suzuki training taught me to be analytical and to go through a lateral process to be analytical” (interview 2001). It is an approach she typifies by starting “always concept first” then seeking to consult with collaborators. Pollard referred to Slow Tentakaten to demonstrate how conceptual thinking about performance precipitated from experiences of bodily difficulty in training.

*Every individual walks in a particular way with stops, and jumps, ups and downs. So ‘natural’ walking patterns are very varied. In order to understand how yours works, it is useful to take it into a neutral state* (interview 2001).

Asked whether this was possible, Pollard revealingly responds:

*Nothing is ultimately possible in the Suzuki method. It is about the attempt: that’s what I like about the method; you can never actually achieve the perfection* (*ibid*).

Pollard recalled Katoh Masaharu phrasing the challenge to be neutral in the slow walk as “to attempt the superhuman – attempt something greater than ourselves”. The more information Katoh gave, “the more difficult the exercise became, the more shaky I was with it, which is interesting. My sense of balance was really skewed because all of a sudden, I was asked to go somewhere else with it”. Pollard considered “striving to be neutral”, without individual accents put to her by Katoh, disclosed a general principle she extended to her devising.

*It is process. And relates again to my practice of creating performance that looks to bringing elements together that will make the process challenging or disruptive of the usual ways that my fellow co-collaborators and myself work: to take us into another area. Whether that was cross art form practice, the challenges of a specific site or a contentious concept presented in a particularly contentious way* (*ibid*).
The intensity of her experiences in Toga was a great jolt to Pollard; a kind of culture shock which the fine details of training built upon. This she aligned with subsequent experiences working as a theatre artist in Indonesia. Experiences of culture shock formed the departure point for her first solo Mothertongue Interference (1994). You can see the close weave of her body and these tensions in an extract from this solo text about being in Java.

Settled settled settled. Adapted like a bat to a ball.
When I walk down to the markets I only
Have to shout STOP LOOKING AT ME,
once every visit. Why? Because I feel
accepted. Home Sweet Home!
Apparently it’s the involuntary wimpy
noises you have to be on the look out
for. But me I’m fine, I only had a
little mother tongue interference.
(extract from performance at Playing with Time Festival 1995).

These concerns also formed the basis for her full-length collaborative solo work Fish Out of Water in 1996.

Conceptualising in Pollard’s experiences of training in Toga had two manifestations: first, thinking about actions, movement and her body and second, thinking about philosophies of theatre instantiated in training as well as disclosed by Katoh and, in his role as a director, Suzuki. She cited her interest in Suzuki’s attitude to making theatre as one of striving continually “to make theatre greater than our selves, that resonates beyond the original intent of makers over time” or “beyond everydayness” in its immediate reception by audiences in a kind of illusion making that stuns at the visceral level (interview 2001). Her desire to make work ‘beyond everydayness’ is echoed in core aesthetic values about the social role of theatrical performance expressed by Kellaway, Leiser-Moore, members of SIDETRACK and Thorne, which I return to in the final section of this chapter.

Pollard’s experiences of Suzuki training in Toga set in train the paradigm of placing herself and her collaborators in “precarious situations”. In the confrontation with these demands and constraints more is revealed about their initial ideas and themes that
enabled them to make work "bigger than themselves" (interview 2001). It's as if precarious situations, like her body awareness, made the nature of the creative challenges in devising more defined. Difficulty now focused the disparate minds of a whole team of collaborators.

While Don Mamouney did not train in SMAT his role as director coordinating ensemble devising at SIDETRACK was conditioned in the symbiosis of mutual relations with a group who trained for six years in SMAT. When asked in 1998 whether he could look back over the period and imagine a collaborative devising process without difficulty, he could not.

When we set out to make a work, the work already exists within our relations and within the problem that we already set ourselves. And by asking certain questions about, in the case of Country Love, landscape, memory and the transportation of the old world to the new world, there are certain things there that have to be investigated. And there's going to be problems. The success of the work depends on how much we're prepared to investigate those things and how much we're going to be open to what we draw out. You won't make a journey unless you put yourself on the road. But you don't know what the journey is going to involve. If I set out to drive to the Blue Mountains, I don't know what I'm going to come across. I just know I have an intention to make this journey and to make the journey well. When I set out to make a work with a group of people, the quality of those relationships, the quality of the investigations and the degree to which we're prepared to overcome difficulties will contribute to the success of the journey - but the times when it does become hard are the times that you cherish later, especially if you found a creative way of getting there, or just with your will or with your muscles (Mamouney interview 1998).

Mamouney's metaphor of overcoming unforeseen problems as a group 'travels' together encapsulates a disposition towards devising shared with by Leiser-Moore, Pollard, Ryan and Kellaway. That Mamouney considered himself "tamed by ensembles over the years" reveals that in the joint embrace of difficulty changes are wrought in the practices of all involved (interview 1998). The tenacity built in the SIDETRACK group, through their willingness to risk both injury and pain in training, amplified their dramaturgical powers giving them confidence to take, at times, a resistant stance around decision making on the floor (see Heilmann in Chapter Four). While they developed the Suzukian 'power tools' to devise and perform with, Mamouney, despite internal group tensions, looks back at this phase as working with "artists on his own wavelength" by comparison to the clashes of theatrical practices inside Country Love (interview 1998). 10
All the practitioners’ beliefs about the possibilities of performance-making up to the time they engaged in SMAT were intertwined, deeply embodied in the prior state of their performance habitus. Kellaway crystallised his notion of objectivity in performance and devising. Pollard drew on SMAT as a platform for articulating meta-textual conceptual frameworks prior to devising. Leiser-Moore rethought her visually decorative aesthetics and Thorne notions of female beauty. All different but all arose within the disruptive experiences of training. Claims that the adaptation of SMAT was an exoticised adjunct in a simplistic orientalising by the Sydneysiders cannot be sustained in the face of their experiences of its difficulty. Suzuki’s kata resisted practitioners, while their reception was problematised. What issued forth from these phases of disorientation contributed to local performance making beyond intensified presence and stamina. This interrogative turn enhanced motivation to explore and create works that extended previous genre boundaries.

The reflexivity brought with it tendencies to split performer subjectivity grounded as it was in experiences of dysfunction, tiredness, limit and pain. This divided subjectivity is an attribute inherent in SMAT’s paradigm of selfhood. Refracted in local applications to performance making and disseminated through artist-audience networks, acting practices developed, alternative to and often at odds with the dominant models that had gained symbolic ascendancy since the importing of Stanislavskian pedagogy in the 1960s. I will now turn to the question of how notions of self in SMAT’s discourses were translated in Sydney contemporary performance.

6.2 Practices and uses of the self in Suzuki training, devising and performing in the Sydney contemporary performance theatre scene

This section focuses on images of selfhood understood by local Sydney practitioners of SMAT; how the core pedagogic image of being an empty vessel was translated in their reception in relation to their own selfhood in practices of acting and devising; and participated in the debates around the nature of acting in the local field.

Phillip Zarilli proposes:
Every time an actor performs, he or she implicitly enacts a "theory" of acting—a set of assumptions about the conventions and style which guide his or her performance, the structure of actions which he or she performs, the shape that those actions take (as a character, role, or sequence of actions as in some performance art), and the relationship to the audience. Informing these assumptions are culture-specific assumptions about the body-mind relationship, the nature of the "self", the emotions/feelings and performance context (1995, 4).

As a specific use of body and self, notions of acting are constituted by their conceptualising of human subjectivity. Informed by social and cultural context, acting as practice instantiates and examines notions of selfhood contemporaneous and cogent for artists and audiences. Thus discussions of acting in particular historical and social milieu rely on understanding how practitioners practice and conceive notions of selfhood.

During SMAT each performer may be said to be attending to the theory of acting, thus notions of their selfhood carried in their bodies. At times this theory is transparent to action. At others, it is problematised in confrontations with difficulty when an internal division in subjectivity prompts reflection. This brought with it reformulations of the Sydneysiders’ theories about acting and theatre making.

In the mid 1980s and 1990s period there was considerable debate about notions of subjectivity in aesthetic and intellectual arenas where post-structuralism and reconsiderations of Australia’s settler history and cultural identifications circulated in the communities of practitioners. As contemporary performance emerged as distinct form, but alongside, genres called ‘performance art’ discussions intensified amongst artists around distinctions between acting and performing. Widespread SMAT practice and its reception by artists participated in these debates, carried within the bodies of interlocutors.

Clare Grant offered insight into how she aligned training with performing, key elements of which are typical of those who ‘stomped’ in the Sydney scene.

*Audience members used to often ask SYDNEY FRONT people, “How can you change emotional direction so fast – quick cut and go from one huge state to another huge state?” For a start, it is not me or my state. It’s a performance state. I’m not attached to it. Suzuki training is extremely useful in pulling yourself away from yourself, detaching from identification with your ego. If you create a task beyond what you are doing, you don’t identify with the tense muscles and so on (interview 1994).*
The state Grant frames as “detaching from identification with your ego” during execution of Suzukian training figures is the most common way of describing performing during training. Typically, Grant used audience feedback to describe the divergence between her emotions and identity in acts of performing.

The pedagogic image of the kind of actor body and self in classic Suzuki training is one of an ‘empty vessel’: one available to be responsive to or (to use another kind of discourse), constructed by forces beyond one’s self. These forces could be elemental and psychic or, as was mostly frequently the case in the Sydney scene, social, political and cultural. In performing a task transitory identity arose, for the duration of an action, for Grant. She drew a very clear distinction between this and her quotidian sense of self. ‘The tasks’ in training are the kata. For Grant this was a way of conceiving what she did onstage. ‘’ (See Chapter Five).

Key teacher-performers used the term ‘empty vessel’ in interviews. Others were clearly aware of the term. Grant’s allusion to detaching from identification with ego by performing a task resembles the effort to make one’s self an empty vessel as described by her stomping teacher Kellaway.

It’s about stripping the actor bare of his or her ego and personality traits so that we can be in any kind of fictional state on stage, unencumbered by personal baggage. (Kellaway in Orb and Miller, 1989, 16).

Deborah Leiser-Moore described the physical forms of the kata being a “way of stepping outside ourselves”. About acting in the training and on a public stage she stressed:

You’ve got leave your personal life out of the performance – I always fictionalise – It is my energy but it’s not ‘me’ (interview 1996).

For Leiser-Moore, akin to Grant, playing a variety of roles within any one work was as typical of the performance that interested her. Thorne’s use of ‘empty vessel’ focussed its challenge to a performer’s existing doxa.
Observing how people progress and their rates of success, I’ve decided that it is true that until you can strip your own ego as a performer, you cannot open as a vessel to receive and learn and then use what is being offered (interview 1993).

Pollard translated the term ‘empty vessel’ as “paring one’s self back” and valued its minimalist effects through making embodied expression more economical (interview 2001).

The movements of Suzuki’s kata performed with commitment to their precise form, without seeking to express a character’s or one’s own feelings constitute the vessel. The raison d’etre of a vessel’s design, to extend the metaphor, is that it is open and awaits what it will carry. Using one’s self by setting one’s identity aside became a paradigm for negotiating relations between oneself and performance material. As a performance state, it facilitates rapid change from state to state, action to action, segment to segment as Grant suggests. Readiness in entry, exit and re-entry are the most frequently practiced transitions in each session. The emphatic rupture between states becomes embedded in performer praxis as habitus (See temporal themes in Chapter Five).

The differentiation between a daily state and the fictionality of the performance state is highly marked. In training, the thematising of energetic intensity and concentrated focus accompanying being empty without compulsory representation of character or narrative throws attention onto the presence of the performer. All practitioners registered awareness of their presence and that its impact was brought forth and intensified in training. As a teacher-practitioner, Pollard evolved her own working term for the elusiveness of this quality – The Ting factor - pronounced onomatopoeically like the striking of a bell— a metaphor that emphasises vibration in reverberation. Katia Molino’s responses as a spectator to the Suzuki company performance of Trojan Women in the bicentennial year, 1988, represents a typical registration of the importance of the SCOT actors’ presence by the Sydneysiders.

I was really taken by the amazing energy of it all. It was that you couldn’t take your eyes off them. I think that is what makes something theatrically valuable is that it makes you watch it (Molino interview 2001).

Performers’ embodiment became ‘more real’ to them even as the artifice was accentuated. The encounters with scores of performance action in training and
performance accentuated the paradox. One of the effects of repeated practice is to disclose and point to the theatricality of events onstage for performers and audiences. Embracing both inside one action helps understand Suzuki's cryptic statement that SMAT allowed 'actors to feel themselves truly "fictional" on stage'.

It can be described as one working hypothesis for pulling off the "sham" of acting (Suzuki in Allain 2002, 126).

The 'pretendedness' of acting sits alongside a palpable corporeality disclosing theatricality without the explicit Brechtian devices. With SMAT's high degree of audience orientation any images summoned for an actor into this 'empty vessel' were not assumed to be complete or resolved by that individual actor. Kellaway was emphatic – "What you are learning is this way of simplifying down to impart only what you intend to" (interview 1994). Acts are valued if they induce spectators' engagement.

A greater receptivity to audiences through reduced self-involvement with the interiority of an individual psyche potentially facilitated a fulsome participation in the questions and goals of a collaborative project. As a foundational principle Grant listed the role of an empty vessel-like condition as

abandoning the ego to the larger aims of the group in order to make a work that reflects more than the sum of the individuals that contribute (Grant July 2005).

Grant's publicly performed conversation with peer, Virginia Baxter, shows how Grant saw her identity in a jointly 'written' solo, Woman in the Wall (1991).

CG Theatre is fiction with its own logic. Nothing to do with me.

VB Nothing?

CG It was constructed by four people.

VB So other people had constructed your identity?

CG With my collusion. I held on to my ideas but at the same time, gave them up completely if that makes sense.

VB Perfect sense. And in the performance, the audience moved around.

CG There were no seats.
VB You let your audience construct your identity? Write your performance?

CG Not my identity!

VB Sorry! The performer’s identity. What do we call her “She”? The Woman?

CG “I”

VG “She who is I but Not I.”

CG She who moves from one “I” to another so she can’t be held down.

VB And who are you?

CG In this case, the performer who must keep going no matter what, move through the performance to its conclusion in approximately 50 minutes, always with her eye on the audience (Grant and Baxter 1994:19).

Striving to make oneself empty takes the metaphor as a state that can be achieved. It is unlikely, if not impossible that a performer can be aware of all they carry in their corporeality, their conscious and unconscious movements of mind, habits and the marks of their history. A second wave artist who trained in Sydney, Alicia Talbot, summarised what she took from SMAT.

The training asked for emptiness; a neutrality that revealed idiosyncrasies. You must give up the fidgets, the personal habits. You can be other than your personality, though your personage still matters.¹³

It is as if those seeking to become empty were asking, “How empty can I become?” The striving to work ‘as if’ empty can be understood as an interrogative practice: a disorientation procedure for making observations stand out about one’s own performance embodiment and the attendant beliefs. Some idiosyncratic beliefs and movement inclinations fall away easily, others do not. What stands out in performers’ perception against the background of stillness may shed light on what resists being set aside or stripped away. What remains as important thus contributes to performers’ crystallisation of matters of importance that subsequently yielded points of departure for devising projects.

Not surrounded by the inflections of psychological motivations, the nuances of physical and vocal actions become clues to how, in particular audience contexts, various acts become construed and are visible. Given that all actions were valued for their effect on spectators, this interrogative self use could illuminate for groups of performer makers
how audiences in particular times and places interpreted the minutiae of embodied stage imagery. An analytic orientation towards human action in rehearsals supported performance composition through attention to this minutiae. For performer-makers, who explored how meaning is socio-culturally constructed in embodiment (including images of identity) – and virtually all in the local field did – this grounded their devising in an intimate corporeal mode. Details could be chosen, manipulated or rejected rather than spontaneously flow forth beyond their capacity to direct themselves. Interrogating what their bodies and actions carried as bearers of particular discourses about acting, human relations, cultures and identities in a Foucauldian-like mode, histories could be isolated and read through the ways these marked their own bodies. A number of local solo artists made works that explicitly staged being caught up in paradoxical experiences of culturally specific identity. For example, Pollard staged Fish out of Water, Leiser-Moore Hungry and Thorne Burying Mother in 1996. In each, their positions, in the crosshairs of contradictory cultural trajectories, needs and desires, intersected in the comportment of their bodies. The ‘empty vessel’ image does not posit a body as a ‘non-thing’, but a radically indeterminate organism, incomplete and caught up in an ineluctable reciprocity with the world. This allows acknowledgement that no metaphor can adequately stand in for the ineffability of human and social experience. As a device it assists a person training in SMAT to unravel cultural assumptions informing human action and representation in live performance as it insists that the performer-maker take nothing for granted.

Ironically, too, this detaching of self/ego enabled solo performers to approach material from close autobiographical sources through a useful distanciation from these sources. Grant, then director of the women’s writing for performance organization Playworks, offered insight into this apparent contradiction.

Maybe Suzuki training enables you to take back all your own personal baggage and perform it. And that’s ok as long as you haven’t invested in it. There was a scene in Photocopies of God where we took little boxes of photos of our lives … The night before rehearsal when I was finding them, I was talking to someone of saying, “And this is me and my husband. And this is me and my cousin”. It was just some game I played and that was the way I actually performed. Then in performance I’d move onto the next box belonging to another performer and say, “This is me with my husband, and this is me with my cousin” and so they would absolutely question which one was really I. I’m not saying anything about my relationship with my husband. It was just this little rhyme, a rhythmic
Registering the prosodic structure of her sentences, the action of handling photos and boxes, Grant generated a performance score of action. The process of distanciation allowed perception of what was important and usefully staged as performance.

Through practicing detachment by positing oneself as an ‘empty vessel’, limits on what an actor’s body can execute during devising and performing are not arbitrated by the limitations of what an individual considers proper behaviour in everyday social life. The extension of the conceivable possibilities can go beyond the everyday limitations of the habitus of their audiences as well. Staging acts of extremity and transgressions of social taboos become possible and provocative points of departure for examining socio-cultural meanings inscribed in embodiment. Equally, the chronological order of actions or material in devising equally does not have to conform to the ‘proper’ logics of individuals’ notions of narrative or tastes for what is customary. Elaboration of the art of montage composition, widespread in the first wave, was thus supported.

When, in 1985, SMAT arrived in the local field, its practices challenged the assumptions of the governing episteme of acting. Rather than a militantly Oedipal avant-gardist ‘search and destroy’ campaign conducted on the-then acting doxa, performer-makers’ reconsiderations of human subjectivity were where challenges emerged. During the formative period of contemporary performance, performer-makers’ critiques of governing models of human subjectivity occurred in light of the rapid changes in public discourse, debates over attitudes to the heterogeneity of national identity and the arrival of the anti-humanist thrust of post-structuralism. The reliance in Stanislavskian modes of acting training (and all permutations of its legacy) on substitutions of daily experiences of emotion and situation in acting does not arise in day-to-day SMAT practice. The notion of a whole identity or ‘character’ pre-existing performative action as an autonomous unitary subject that is the source of action was set aside inside the local take up of stomping. The degree to which this undercuts a Stanislavskian model in practice becomes apparent when we recall the central tenet of Stanislavski’s thinking on the connections between an actor’s self and their role.
On stage we live emotional memories of realities ... At such times, a creative artist feels his own life in the life of the part and the life of his part identical with his personal life. This identification results in a miraculous metamorphosis (Stanislavski 1937, 284-285).

This abiding model of actorly transformation and notions of what it is to be human and was reinforced in the American legacies of acting that proliferated throughout the 20th century. This form of acting was still the most popular in Australia when SMAT was taken up in Sydney. SMAT's 'empty vessel' often meant it was not recognised as a form of actor training at all because it did not fulfil these unmarked assumptions of what constitutes acting, or was thought to be badly taught because something was missing. This missing element was the unmarked model of human subjectivity, as had been popularly assumed. An examination of Tadashi Suzuki's literature reveals the close attention he gave to conceptualising actors' subjectivity. He did so while designing the first kata against an extensive practical education in Stanislavski's realist acting methods and European play literature (Goto 1988; Carruthers 2004). More of this later.

The absence of literature by Suzuki on subjectivity in acting from the early local field coupled with the indeterminacy of its empty vessel image contributed to THE FRONT's sense of stomping as having 'no baggage' they recognised in the form of a pervasive theory of acting. In the non-institutional circumstances in which they stomped they sought to avoid re-inscribing the 'grand narratives' of gurus of acting such as Stanislavski, Strasberg, Decroux, Grotowski, Jean Pierre Vooss or Suzuki. While THE FRONT did not forcefully agitate as anti-Stanislavskians, their published talk and my interviews reveal a familiarity with modernist theories of acting and their reconceived uses of an actor's self. Kellaway reflected on the local heritage of Grotowskian practices in the light of his interpretations of stomping.15

Grotowski took Stanislavski and packed it with as many psychological complications as possible. Suzuki's thinking is a total antithesis to what Grotowski was talking about. Both were developing at the same time - both being radical, gritty. Grotowski is talking about unmasking to find 'the essential self'. It was about unmasking the actor so that all you could see was the screaming-suicidal-drugged-out mess of the actor that is there at the end of the process. Whereas Suzuki is about the opposite. He is talking about stripping away so that one arrives at the purest gesture. He is not interested in what the actor thinks in performance, he is totally disinterested in the personality of the actor (interview 1994).
Baylis described encounters with Stanislavskian trained actors in rehearsals soon after The Front's formation.

We're not interested in psychological through-lines. A lot of actors who come through the classic method of Stanislavskian training get very precious about through lines and allowing something to grow organically. Improvisations with them can be very frustrating. We never get precious, everything can be chopped up ... We've all had some acting training so we'll use emotional memory or Stanislavskian tricks. But we can dump them as soon as we use them. We change gear very quickly (Baylis in Miller and Olb 1989, 17).

Again we see a valuing of subjectivity that foregrounds openness to spectatorial interpretations via montage composition. When Front members 'acted' in a Stanislavskian mode, it did not require their adherence to a singular ideology about human nature. This became one acting tactic amongst others.

Sidetrack's 'turn' in acting methods also pivoted around how the personhood of a performer was understood.

I'd sort of latched onto all these kind of post-structuralist and postmodernist theories and ideas. I remember coming in and saying, 'Now listen, we're going to empty out the subjectivity and I don't want to know about the subjectivity within the characters, at all'. The term I used was 'I'm going to 'denude' everything of subjectivity'. I had it written up every time it came to character stuff ... In order to get that, we had to train differently and that's when we started doing this naive version of Suzuki (Mamouney interview 1998).16

While acting at Sidetrack was not solely conceived of as tasks, this was integrated in their approach (See Heilmann and Mamouney Chapter Four). Mamouney, no stranger to Brechtian and Stanislavskian modes of acting, considered that skills performers gained in Suzukian training were more conducive to Sidetrack's collaborative dramaturgy in the period (1990-96). His analysis of working with Actor Z in Country Love allies Sidetrack with The Sydney Front.

With the skills like those in the Suzuki style of work, the performer is not emotionally attached to that work in anything like the way someone looking for a deep characterisation a la Stanislavsky is. Actors identify themselves with the character. "I am that." Everything that Actor Z ever said was about himself - was not about what he was painting, but about what he was feeling. When you get that language coming back to you, without any detachment ... I'm not saying that all his feelings were invalid. I'm saying they're perfectly valid and in many ways they could be very useful. But he needed the detachment to know that it's not a personal attack, if I say, "Stop there. It's not going anywhere or we need to go in a different direction?" (Ibid).
Given that the SIDETRACK ensemble would use whatever modes suited their purposes in devising, the distinction resides in reframing how ‘acting’ is conducted in practice rather than as an identification of an artist as ‘character’, ‘actor’ or ‘performer’. This hybridised practitioner identity was not a familiar trope to all the cast of Country Love.

Despite THE FRONT’s desires to avoid grand narratives of acting theory, and Mamouney’s pursuance of performance where “the meaning lay more in the form than in the ostensible content” (interview 1998) they did encounter, like other Sydneysiders, without Suzuki’s writings about actor’s subjectivity a discourse of acting instantiated in training as practice. That FRONT members each referred to setting themselves tasks to focus upon as recurring catalysts in performance with clear scores, starts and ends (as distinct from ‘acting’), suggests how stomping was commensurable with a task-based paradigm and how it was possible for them to say its kata came without an ideology of acting even though Suzuki never used the terminology ‘acting as task’. These were the connotations that marked out the distinction between ‘acting’ and ‘performing’ as both discourse and praxis in the local field debates from the mid 1980s to mid 1990s. However the distinction was not as exclusive a dichotomy as here described.

None of Suzuki’s literature that detailed his notions of acting and selfhood, from the period when he developed the regime with the WLT, were accessible to Sydney’s contemporary performance community in the mid 1980s unlike SMAT as training practice. Amongst the decisive constraints on the design of the original set of kata, during their formation at Waseda in the then charged contemporaneous social and political climate, was Suzuki’s aspiration to make traditional Japanese noh and kabuki relevant to that context. Suzuki studied Zeami’s writings on the noh. He synthesised his conceptualising of the self in acting from his engagement with literature and his collaboration with leading noh actor, Kanze Hisao early in the 1970s. Suzuki’s experiences as a youth with kendo stick fighting also informed aspects of training vocabulary. Both noh and kendo practices formed in social contexts dominated by Buddhism and Shinto, traces of which informed modern notions of identity in Japan during Suzuki’s upbringing. While these influences have not directly informed the
Australian setting in which SMAT is practiced they did impact on Suzuki’s selection, clarification and articulation of the *kata*. It is useful, then, to compare the content of Suzuki’s writings about human subjectivity and performing, against statements from individuals in THE FRONT, in order to lay out the resemblances and differences in their respective stances and influences. In doing so, in a sense, I will be testing the potential of a virtually unframed bodily discipline to impart viscerally deep, essentially philosophical understandings about subjectivity in practice.

On the question of Being and Non-Being or ‘mu’ or nothingness from Buddhism in relationship to acting, Zeami, in his treatise on *noh*, elaborates on a metaphor for an ‘actor of capacity’ as a vessel.

Being might be said to represent an external manifestation that can be seen with the eyes. Non-Being can be said to represent the hidden, fundamental readiness of mind that signifies the vessel of all art (since a vessel itself is empty). It is the fundamental Non-Being that gives rise to the outward sense of Being (in *noh*) (Zeami in Rimmer and Yamazaki 1984, 118-19).

This notion of emptiness, by contrast to everyday notions of nothingness in the West, is valued as fecund and full of potential from which form, meaning and emotion in acting springs. The statement needs to be read in the context of whose feelings are prioritised in *noh* performing, the actors or spectators. If we take Zeami as a reliable commentator, to move or engender emotion in and contemplation by audience members is the higher and consistent goal of each subtle sound or move of the *noh* actor (Nearman 1984, 45). This was to be achieved by an actor mastering the suppression of their own emotion, thus keeping some things out of sight and hearing of an audience. What remains catalyses audience response by suggestion or allusion. Zeami reiterates the principle to guide *noh* actors, that “what is felt by the heart is ten, what appears in movement seven” (87).²⁰ Moving spectators relies on the ‘empty vessel’ image. Hoff (1985) argues in his chapter of the same title that ‘killing the self’ was the precondition for *noh* actors to become vehicles for spirits and gods who pattern their gestures. Emptying one’s self of day-to-day concerns and socially mediated identity was the precondition for becoming possessed. Acting in *noh* is a kind of possession. In a parallel to *noh* core beliefs, Suzuki asserts imagining as a surrogate for believing in the conjuring of spirits through the most common action in his training method, stomping.

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Even today such an illusion is necessary for actors on stage ... the illusion that the energy of the spirits can be felt through the feet to activate our bodies is a most natural and valuable illusion for human beings (Suzuki 1991, 247).

While acting in SMAT may be understood to be possession-like, it did not for Suzuki have a religious purpose during the designing of any kata of the regime. Kellaway acknowledges however, a kind of possession in the practice and explains how he translated the notion.

He is very aware that, unlike Japan, Western theatre does not have this tradition of transformation, where an actor actually transforms into the role – it is a state of possession. It is not your body out there making funny shapes. You transform into the role so you leave yourself aside. You have to create your body as an empty vessel that can then be fictionalised. You have to throw all those other things (i.e. psychologically based frameworks) away. I found this extraordinarily easy to do. In my case, I didn’t hold these things very dearly. It wasn’t as if I was trained in this way at NIDA and had it drummed into me (interview 1994).

Sydney performers encountering Suzuki’s recuperation of this traditional value of emptiness implied in his training figures, were not seeking to recuperate Japanese traditional values themselves or to represent Japaneseness on stage. Nor were they trying to enhance their credibility by aligning themselves with this traditional cultural capital. They did not represent themselves as Nihonphiles and were opposed to emulating Japaneseness. This does mean that they did not encounter some traditional discourses about acting embodied in the microstructures of Suzuki training practices, though inflected and filtered through Suzuki’s own theatrical project and their own. While Kellaway was aware of the traditional heritage of SMAT, neither The Front nor any of the local artists through the 1980s and early 1990s sought to trade off this traditional cultural capital in promoting their works. Kellaway did not deny SMAT’s historical sources rather he searched for their usefulness and relevance in active adaptation to the contemporary Australian context.

Unlike traditional curriculum of noh or kabuki, the SMAT kata vocabulary do not incorporate whole particular roles or narratives of plays, even from Suzuki’s own. Neither supernatural nor characterlogical identities are presented as necessary for acting in SMAT. Again this is in contrast with all theatrical movement regimes from Europe, UK and the US prior to the 1980s that circulated in Sydney during the 1970s to mid 1980s (See Chapter Three). In Copeau’s, Le Coq and Decoux training, for example,
exercises depict human beings in situations, even if framed as archetypal. Neutrality and stillness in these regimes are valued as transitory framing for representing the stories of represented characters in action. Suzuki’s concept of acting is without a belief in an essential singular founding identity.\textsuperscript{23}

The impulse to act springs from consistently feeling the impossibility of being oneself (Suzuki in Allain 2002, 122).

An actor was not to imitate a character or illustrate a world as described by a playwright in Suzuki’s reformulation. Goto summarises Suzuki’s notion of acting, as “each individual’s self-encounter, where he discovers and objectifies his existential being” (Goto 1988, 86). Suzuki used Shiraishi’s example of acting in On Dramatic Passions II to elucidate his concept of selfhood.

We should think Shiraishi Kayoko plays the role of Seigen, because in an essential sense at first no such being as a Shiraishi Kayoko exists. She borrows Seigen and plays the part so as to become a Shiraishi Kayoko ... That is to say, she appears on the stage and acts her role in order to endlessly give substance to her actual being. In other words, at first there is no such self-made natural being as Shiraishi Kayoko, but by playing a character, the actress reaches a certain awareness, which in turn forms the self of a Shiraishi Kayoko (Suzuki in Goto 1988, 114).

Hoff argues that Suzuki’s and Shiraishi’s notion of acting are not a simple reconstitution of traditional acting techniques. Rather, it is an internalisation of a doubled self that resembled traditional acting methods. Hoff recognised that what Shiraishi achieved embodied theatre’s inherent contradiction: “actor’s reality, role’s fiction” (1985, 22).

Suzuki locates individual actors in a social world in a theatre that generates thought about this world through contemplating an actor’s ‘possible’ self.

The reason we go to the theatre is not to watch a play but to experience the transcendence of daily reality and to share the moments when the actor, with our presence as the spectator, encounter the possibilities of his self. And, through experiencing this creative state of the actor, we are in turn to come to have a good grip of a total view on the conditions where we are placed. Or else, what is the point in going to the theatre (Suzuki in Goto 1984, 124).

In the early 1970s, Suzuki studied Zeami’s idea of riken or an actor’s distanced view (Goto 1984, 81). Zeami asserted that an actor’s self perception depended on their spatial awareness gained only through assiduous training.
For an actor to grasp his true appearance implies that he has under his control the space to the left and to the right of him, and to the front and to the rear of him ... If an actor cannot somehow come to a sense of how he looks from behind, he will not be able to become conscious of any possible vulgarities in his performance. Therefore, an actor must look at himself using his internalised outer image, to come to share the same view as the audience ... To repeat again, an actor must come to have an ability see himself as the spectators do, grasp the logic of the fact that the eyes cannot see themselves ... The expression, "the fool who carries a board can only see in front" has universal application [in performance] (Zeami in Rimer and Yamazaki 1984, 81-82).24

Zeami’s image of the fool carrying a board echoes Chan’s criticism of Ryan’s earlier performances as being all about his front surface. Molino’s account of efforts to exude herself during the Pivoting Statues kata in 1991 indicates the longevity of this influence on SMAT training practice. It is a capacity I have called ‘felt space’ or haptic spatializing in the previous chapter.25

Zeami’s insistence on performers’ skilful grasping of the whole – left and right, ahead and behind – grounds their acting in a lived experience of proximal space akin to phenomenologist Ed Casey’s notion of emplacement in six concrete dimensions. “A place, viewed in this light, is nothing but the multidimensional composition of a lived body and its circumambient region” (1993, 73). In Casey’s terms performance instantiates a ‘com-place’ where the here of a placially-astute performer’s body is in free interplay with the here of spectators – “where there becomes here before we know it” (56; italics in original). The actor as ‘empty vessel’ is a mechanistic and impoverished concept of performers’ creative agency only if seen as isolated but not when understood as an intrinsically relational self-concept dependent on the presence of witnesses. Suzuki indicates the purpose of an actor applying artificial pressure to their physical being through training was to ground the fictional dimension of performance through creating a kind of com-place of empathic corporeal resonance with audiences to trigger their contemplation of a social world without recourse to a particular programmatic politics.

The aim is to use the rhythmical tension which results in order to set the spectator’s ... own body into shared resonance, to harmonize the spectator with the actor. The spectator, caught up together in this physiological rhythm, becomes a participant ... The actor must always be an eloquent deceiver of others; he must always be the agitator (Suzuki in Hoff 1985, 24).

THE FRONT considered their performances practices in deconstruction. Members of THE SYDNEY FRONT neither studied traditional Japanese theatre tracts or Suzuki’s literature.
Yet the interdependency of tangible embodiment with fictional representations in Baylis’ following public talk at the 1990 CPW point to a commensurability with Suzuki’s desire that spectators come to have a grip on the social world of which they are a part.

If all art forms are haunted by the ambiguities inherent in the relationship between their representations of the world and the ungraspable world itself, performance has as its distinguishing feature the fact that the tension between the real and the illusionary are at its very heart. The body on stage is a fiction, yet its sweat under pressure, its bruise when it hits the floor, its smell when it sweeps past, are all very similar to those of the performer’s actual body. This coincidence of the sites of both the demonstrably constructed and the seemingly achingly real makes theatre a very good place for dealing with the problem of representation (Baylis 1990, 1).

Baylis interpreted the common ground between Brecht’s and Derrida’s perspective on the social place of art making.

With both of them, the ideal readers or spectators are those who are constantly aware of the artifice, constantly aware that what they are witnessing is constructed, not natural. And the ideal art is one that unMASKS itself as it proceeds (ibid).

While Suzuki spoke of ‘eloquent deceivers’, THE FRONT’s deception or ‘sucking in’ of spectators through the tangibility of performer presence was directed at producing ‘ideally’, spectators who reflected upon the forces that constructed their identities and performances – forces which were social and cultural thus ones in which both performers and audiences were imbricated. To elucidate Baylis’ interests in THE FRONT’s use of their own bodies in performance he invoked the impossibility of unmediated ‘natural’ expression in theatre.

We may easily accept that language mediates expression: hence Artaud’s flight from language. But it is less easy for the performer to accept that movement, gesture, gasps and grunts and spasms, also have cultural meanings that precede their utterance. A vomit, a sneeze, an orgasm, may all be involuntary bodily acts, but once performed they become immediately encrusted with history, their primacy is lost (4).

Baylis’s evocation of “Artaud’s flight from language” echoes the yakeato generation’s flight from the standardised modern Japanese language post Meiji. Creating together, THE FRONT were their own first and powerful audience. The desire to manipulate the finest details of corporeal expression suggestively to trigger spectators’ contemplation is evident in their intra-ensemble critical feedback term during devising – “Muddy it
up” or “Not muddy enough” (Baylis interview 1996). To be distant from intensely embodied images, as they unfolded on the floor of devising through practicing an emptyish self, facilitated their playful deconstruction of the self-evidential and supposed unmediated realness of their own bodily actions. This acceptance of a self-aware and fluctuating divided subjectivity as they devised enabled them to stage an unmasking of their own ambiguous presence for spectators in public. Riffing on Derrida, Baylis encapsulated the challenge.

What kind of body is this? We can readily understand Derrida’s point that language is not a transparent mirror of reality – it is obviously made out of different stuff. But a fictional body on stage is made out of precisely the same stuff as the performer’s body. It would appear on the surface that surely this body is self-present. Surely it is unmediated. But of course, as far as the perceptions of the spectator are concerned, this is far from being the case. The spectator will try to subsume that body into the great catalogue of his or her previous experience of bodies. Can we prevent this? Is looking at a body wrong? (5).

It’s all very well for Baylis to speak post hoc with this kind of theoretical acumen in 1990. However in 1986, when The Front formed and began training, how these concerns with the socio-cultural construction of embodied identity could be investigated in performance was yet an open question. There were no Australian or international exemplars. Suzuki’s kata offered a means. At the actors’ forum, where the role of a performer’s subjectivity and creative contributions were robustly debated after Playbox - Suzuki joint enterprise The Chronicle of Macbeth in 1992, Kellaway summed up his interpretation of Suzuki’s project.

[Suzuki] taught me about a heightened theatricality, and a technique to develop it. I guess what he is really working at, though he would probably never use these terms himself, is the creation of ‘a post-modern melodrama.’ (1996, 182).

I now turn to the question of how relations with spectators were conceived and enacted by the local contemporary performance theatre artists, using works as case studies.
If complete conversion succeeds then his art is expended. Once he has become the bank clerk, doctor or general concerned he will need no more art than of these people need in ‘real life’. (Bertolt Brecht on actors – Brecht 1964, 93).

6.3 A Physical theatre of ideas
In the early period the post 1986 Sydney collectives, The Sydney Front and Sidetrack, and, in the second wave, independent artists like Pollard and Leiser-Moore staged works that could be identified as a type of physical theatre of ideas. My argument is that the transformation of acting methods effected by their engagement with SMAT revealed how this possibility might be realised.

Once SMAT practice had been incorporated into their habitus as performers, it precipitated a reformation of dramaturgical principles. The extension of their various artists’ capacities as performers involved a further extension from the traditional role of actors to simultaneously encompass the dramaturgical responsibilities of writers and directors. The reformed approach to acting disclosed possibilities that exceeded what they could have earlier been able to imagine. In turn, this transformed their relations with spectators. The fruits of the surpassing of their limitations as performers were available to an anticipated audience, constituted itself by a diverse collection of individuals, for whom the experience was to involve an extension of their customary, or habitual responses, inter-textualities and understandings. The anticipation of this encounter thematised this goal in training which individuals then absorbed into decision making about the composition of their material during devising. These processes of devising, then, explicitly addressed an anticipated, yet-to-be-constituted audience. In effect, the anticipation of an audience that would need to be initiated into a new logic and aesthetic of performance figured as a dramaturgical feedback mechanism. Further, the feedback process continued apace – audiences themselves became performers, taking their lead from and developing their experiences of the post 1986 groups, tailoring them to their own culturally and ethnically inflected practices. The Sydney Front figure pre-eminently in this narrative, not least because of their impact upon the second wave performers.
First and Last Warning – THE SYDNEY FRONT at the Performance Space, Redfern, 1993 – A spectator speaks up

Before addressing how the artists understood the impact of any of their embodied performance strategies I will offer a description of how, at least for this spectator, these strategies ‘worked’ to produce certain audience states. Specifically, I want to draw upon my own experiences of witnessing acts of violence staged by THE SYDNEY FRONT in their 1993 show First and Last Warning. My argument will be that the aesthetics and practices of SMAT refracted and reflected through a complex and recursive connection between the devising room and the emergent audience, generated the potential for non-conventional, surprising, and often challenging audience experiences. What follows is an extract from my journal, in which I reflect upon the effect their way of acting had in the immediacy of interaction between other spectators, the performers and myself.26 The first two segments of the performance are described to give context to the third.

1st segment
The whole performance began with the audience being handed a paper carry bag containing a woman’s black nylon petticoat and being asked to trade the clothes they came in for the slip (including shoes). The women were ushered into the performance space through a separate door to the men by members of THE FRONT wearing the same black slips. A curtain the full length of the theatre divided men from women. Once inside people changed their clothes, unless they did so in the toilets outside.

2nd segment
When all were changed the red curtain dividing the space dropped revealing the men and women to each other. The audience were positioned to ‘perform’ for each other.
(In the foyer later, I overheard that the women laughed at the men when the curtain dropped each night.).

3rd segment
The space between the men and women becomes a performing arena for THE FRONT ‘actors’. A woman and a man both wearing black slips like us approach each other. The man presses the ‘play’ button on a portable cassette player that issues middle-of-the-road dance music. With a single everyday gesture he invites her to dance. They dance in a ballroom dance hold – plainly, not flashy or competitive. Without any lead up he slaps her, then they continue to dance. The slapping interjects repeatedly. The force of his slaps increases each time. The slaps to her arms and chest momentarily interrupt the dance. Occasionally, she lifts the straps of her slip back onto her shoulders or parts her hair fallen over her face. They don’t talk. Neither actor makes any display of intent, emotional response, or motive in relation to their actions. She doesn’t seek to stop him. He doesn’t seem angry. It is uncertain whether he wants to hurt her. As audience, we hear the hits and see her reddening skin. The slaps appear real. Not faked theatrical ones. They aren’t ‘pulling’ these punches. This goes on for a long time. Longer than expected.

Over time I found myself checking out others in the audience, noticing my own reactions, searching out the fine details of the performers’ actions for signs to tell me how to understand this act. They were a couple in the sense that the dance coupled them. They were neither friends, lovers nor married couple. They were the first actors onstage. Should I interrupt? Will
anybody? This act was located not on a stage platform but within a couple of metres or as close as one metre depending where you stood. Witnessing one person beat another was very uncomfortable, humiliating. The actors didn’t make eye contact, address us or appeal to the audience.

The segment ended, just ceased in an unmarked way.

He stops and walks away. She was left momentarily, then walked out.

The responses of the spectators, over a considerable length of time – our thoughts, our inaction or action – became a central site of the performance, a site of meaning making and narrative enquiry: “What’s going to happen next?” Ironically, given the excessive, inflammatory nature of the action, the audience found itself in a cool, meditative space: a space of scrutiny, of questioning and reflection on a spectator’s part. This interrupted dance looked like a senseless act of violence unfolding in an absence of context, and yet was allowed, by the audience, to reveal itself over a sufficient length of time to create this space for reflection. It was a reversal of the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’: I did believe that the female performer was being hurt, and I didn’t want that; and yet, I watched, and we, as an audience, found ourselves in reflection.

Framing such acts as ‘theatre’ ensured an assumption of their lack of reality. In this case, however, the act of striking a woman, repeatedly, was not surrounded by thick detail of personal identities, characters with complex personalities in a fictional social setting. Devoid of narrative context, the acts immediately attracted memories of these acts in other places not insulated by an obvious fiction that would have triggered efforts to interpret the acts within a narrative or psychological logic. Instead, the connotations and associations opened out to analogous acts in everyday life and how these are understood. Without fictional context these acts also brought with them memories of the representations of these kinds of acts in other ‘theatrical’ situations, in fictional film, video and games. They reminded us how violent actions can be rendered harmless, acceptable when rationalised as “It’s only a movie”, “It is only pretend” or “No-one is being hurt here”. Here, someone was being hurt.

As a spectator, my own mode of viewing in these other circumstances was made visible to me, even as I watched. I became aware of how readily I can watch and accept a lot of violent acts between human beings under these conditions. My interpretative habits which hitherto had passed unmarked – as, perhaps, ‘natural’ –
were revealed, in particular the ‘naturalness’ of men hitting women with impunity under a gaze that assumes fiction without remorse – we did nothing to stop him. If we saw these acts as fictional, as spectators, we could absolve ourselves from what was happening, not be implicated. This was an extreme and transgressive action, especially in the context of a ‘progressive’ audience, steeped in generations of feminism. The overwhelming effect was a denaturalisation of a Brechtian order that opened out to contemplation of the social and political significance of these acts, but without any traces of didacticism; no political program or whole worldview was being proposed. And yet, the dramaturgy of excess, enabled by an audience’s willingness to ‘go along’, produced a profound reflexivity that perhaps transcended the quotidian limits of the political.

This dramaturgy of excess, then, finds its test in the capacity of the performed work to produce certain unsettling effects in its audience. Rather than allowing that audience to settle into a comfortable collaboration with the practice, however, the logic of Suzukian practice demands a sustained extending of not only one’s own limits as a performer, but of the expectations and responses of audiences.

Deborah Pollard shows how surpassing one’s limits, which included an individual artist’s own initial frame of references for understanding her starting points at the beginning of devising, coalesced with her performance making aspirations in her reception of SMAT. Pollard was an avid spectator of THE SYDNEY FRONT’s works. Her respect for Kellaway led her to seek training in Toga. Speaking in 2001 about the significance of the master class program in 1991, her investment in devising new theatre works is evident.

[Suzuki] talked about when we make art it has to be more intelligent than ourselves. That’s one thing I will always remember and I love ... My understanding, and I don’t know if it was then or how I’ve come to understand it now, is, you can create something simple which you think has one meaning, but the audience might find some completely other meanings in it. If it is too proscribed then there is no room for the audience to see something other than what is [literally] put on stage (Pollard interview, 2001).

In light of this, Pollard’s strategy of placing herself and her collaborators in precarious situations, described in the previous section on difficulty, can be understood as directed
towards extending collective performance making practices into a dramaturgy of the audience itself. Staging minimal, uncluttered images opened up the space in which this might happen. The desire to “be more intelligent than ourselves” through training and performance practice was predicated upon a set of ideas about how audiences were to respond and react to the work. The post-Suzukians projected onto their potential audiences a desire to experience a kind of transcendence of their everyday life worlds, through a dilation of those audiences’ customary horizons of expectation and processes for understanding performance. Building on Katoh Masaharu’s rejoinder to “attempt something superhuman”, Pollard paraphrased Suzuki:

[he talked about audiences, and this is common sense, wanting something greater than themselves when they come [to the theatre] – whether that is the skill of a tap dancer, because spectators haven't trained themselves. With the Suzuki method, it is that intangible quality that they can’t work out, can’t get what is happening (ibid).

These transcendent desires of audiences are, to some extent, to be realised by presenting those audiences with something that they cannot fully reconcile because it is ambiguously open-ended, or, perhaps, something that the audience will misrecognise. Pollard suggests that the skills local performers had incorporated from SMAT were not visible to spectators: that they were manifested as an ‘intangible quality’. Spectators in this earlier period of the local scene, she suggests, had neither the language nor perceptual resources to identify how the performances they were witnessing were having their effects. Attributes perceived as the intangible qualities of placial/spatial acumen, handling extremities of time flow, intense energetic commitment while ‘paring oneself back’ contrasted with and had no parallels in contemporaneous dance, in other body-based circus, mime or acting training regimes, or in performance genres derived from these trainings. This contributed to some of the fascination with which audiences came to regard the local post-Suzukians; a regard, which, as Pollard’s account suggests, had recourse to inexplicable qualities of embodiment to explain the impact.

**Front** member, Chris Ryan, explains how he understood the impact of these ‘intangibles’ on audience response to **Front** works.
The action happening onstage [between the performers] has a distance. As a performer, you are not personally involved in it. But the audience doesn’t know that. That makes the action more interesting or strong, because the [audience’s] expectations of that action are destabilized (interview, 2001).

Ryan then switched to speaking from an audience perspective:

I am watching, expecting personal interactions, but what I see is a physical interaction with a very different outcome (ibid).

He continues speaking as a director.

A simple way to describe it is that you have two performers very centred in what they are doing, grounded in actions rather than psychology. The interaction still has an absolute physical credibility but its outcome on a psychological level is different. [Spectators] place cultural expectations on certain physical interactions like hitting, kissing, stroking, pointing, looking and being seen. Those physical interactions have a history prior to the interaction [onstage]. You are dealing with – I’m nearly about to say truth. And I don’t want to say that. What the audience sees is something they don’t expect. It has logic, has an absolute logic and a convincing physiological logic. It is unexpected from a cultural perspective but has [a] physiological truth because they can’t deny they are seeing it and that it is happening (ibid).

Audiences, versed in the physical logics of the practice, attempted to read into the performances a very different logic: for want of a better term, the audience expects, and is determined to find, psychological logics at work. Instead, spectators encounter a work grounded in intense, rigorous physical action. Customarily, Ryan posits, audiences were attuned to ‘reading through’ actions to a root psychology. Actions are implicitly understood as unproblematically re-presenting psychology by means of a putatively ‘natural’ logic: a character kisses another character because the kiss is the natural expression of an inner-ly held love. Where the logic is disrupted – for example, where a character we know to hate another character kisses them – audiences customarily invoke the post-Freudian logics of sub-text to maintain the integrity of their reading strategy. In the case of The Front’s application of SMAT-engendered embodiment, however, audiences were being invited to – or, rather, it was being demanded of audiences that they – discard such logics: to discard the culturally-mediated assumption that physical interactions are predicated upon inner intentions of a unified identity or character. They were being asked to set aside what Baylis called their “great catalogue of previous experience” (interview 1996). Audiences were confronted by an alternative logic – one grounded in an extreme physical practice. In effect, the ‘self’ that is being extended here

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is that of the individual audience member, who is being asked to move beyond not only their habitual performance reading strategies, but beyond the common sense logics (of representation, of metaphysics) upon which those strategies are grounded. The way of acting Ryan describes is not contained within either imitation or identifiable characters. Rather this dramaturgy of acting embraced an extremity of action that could readily exceed the normative boundaries of actors’ quotidian selves and subsequently audiences. As a performance state it relied on the performers practising becoming ‘empty vessels’, as discussed previously.

For THE SYDNEY FRONT, confounding spectators’ customary assumptions and interpretations during a work was a means to facilitating a simpler, more direct relationship with audiences. THE FRONT’s ‘mission mantra’ graced programs, catalogues and grant applications. It explicitly asserted excess as the goal of their performing, albeit in more self-consciously post-structural terms than those of other post-Suzukian artists’ public declarations.

Our work is about excess, about a gesturing that goes far beyond that necessary for any reasonable discourse. The superabundance of our work has the paradoxical aim of releasing the spectator from false complicatedness. We continually collapse our own rhetoric and bring the focus back to the body’s fleshy organs. By thus returning to where meaning is embodied, we aim to protect ourselves and the spectator from the terrorism of grand abstractions that cannot be lived out (Artistic statement, 1989, in Waterlow 1994).

The overwhelming impact of their extreme but often-unadorned physical performance was intended to clear a space for a subsequent clarity of reflection. Playfully, THE FRONT described their ideal spectator as “one who would surrender to us for one night, and think better of it in the morning” (Waterlow 1994, 54). This is an image of a spectator being caught up in the immediate flow of performance viscosity that, through its very excess, brings in its wake a critical reflection by spectators or at least a reappraisal of what they witnessed in performance. The extension of habitual spectator responses was dependent on the intensified presence of performers in their insistent and excessive corporeal ‘gesturing’: a state of performance presence inherent in Suzukian training practice. This resonance with THE FRONT’s goals in this regard accounts for their continued return to the practice of stomping in their first five years. 28 However,
while Kellaway taught stomping to The Front, he understood it was in service of a theatrical strategy that contrasted with Suzuki’s (See Chapter Five).

I’m playing more dangerous games with my audience than Suzuki. He tends to define his relationship from the outset very clearly, whereas I’m always playing a roller coaster ride with them. I’ll take them in a certain direction and as soon as they feel comfortable with this relationship and with a way of looking, I’ll flip it around and interrupt (Kellaway interview, 1994).

Five years earlier, Baylis articulated The Front’s strategy for expanding audience responses:

[we’re seeking a feeling of liberation for the audience. We work by taking something, gutting it and filling full of other things. We move in one direction and then suddenly change course so the audience feel the vertigo of not knowing where they stand (Baylis in Orb and Miller 1989, 16).

I understand “taking something” to refer to The Front’s staging of a usual or recognizable theatrical representation of human relations, emotional state or attitude that is then ‘emptied out’, counter-pointed or undercut, during the devising process, with contradictory elements of expression, either within a performer’s body, or in the proxemcs of the mise en scène. The slapping segment in First and Last Warning described above is one such example. Kellaway retold another flip of perspective that prompted audience awareness of their own reading strategies that involved their role as voyeurs:

Pornography of Performance (1988) was about the actor’s ego and libido – as well as the spectator’s, and about voyeurism. In the beginning, I think audiences believed the voyeurism was encapsulated in the fact that we invited them to grope our naked bodies. By 20 minutes into the piece they began to realize that the essence of voyeurism is purely in the act of watching. An actor, whether naked or fully dressed, on stage is in a state of heightened exhibitionism (Kellaway in Orb and Miller 1989, 18).

Kellaway cited the “Fuck me” scene in Don Juan (1991). as a specific example of how the shift in acting dramaturgy provoked audience thought. A women performer sitting on the floor behind the troupe performing in unison a pavan-like dance, relentlessly and repetitively insisted that men in the troupe have sex with her (thus the segment’s working title, “Fuck me” which was also her only speech throughout the episode). Her repeated insistence was intercut in an alternating pattern with the rest of the troupe’s pavan and their brief flirtations with spectators standing nearby. As the alternation
progressed, the men just looked at her in a cool, scrutinising way. Understandably, the segment stimulated much discussion amongst spectators, both immediately after the performance and in subsequent commentaries, reviews and conversation. Kellaway described a range of spectators’ reactions:

[Some] audience members came out with these stories about what an emotional ordeal this woman was going through at this time. Women came up to Andrea after the show, hugged her madly or they couldn’t talk to her, look at or not go near her. Or they want to endlessly talk about, “How do you feel?” or “What was that like?” And Andrea goes “Nothing. I’m not feeling anything.” A lot of people don’t do this because they are actually aware of what is going on – that it was the actor’s choice to present these issues. There is a myriad of ways “Fuck Me” can actually be looked at. It can actually be seen as a very dry argument, intellectual argument about desire and rejection (interview, 1994). 29

Kellaway understood the segment ‘worked’ because of the absence of

[r]eal emotional messages of how this ‘woman’ is thinking about this at all. We were never interested in doing that. It is purely the action. And that is the power of that scene. You are a cartoon character onstage, not this fully fleshed complicated psychological creature out there (ibid).

It was not only the audiences’ common sense and social values that were being challenged. Within their devising process FRONT performers worked in a state where their usual ‘common sense’ interpretations of actions were separated from the ways they embodied action on stage. In conversation, Grant described this as a state of ‘wildness’ that had no place in her everyday life world. “In performance, I can do exuberant, outrageous things but it’s not me… I am the person who can let myself do certain things in performance“ (interview 1994, 19). 30 This demarcation was thought necessary as a basis for their capacity to extend spectators’ horizons of understanding. Kellaway expanded on how reliance on extreme physical action, cultivated through the troupe’s training during rehearsal periods, aided this demarcation:

[it] was about having our material so physically grounded in the body that we are able to make quick mental leaps … We do that by physically pounding out of our bodies every morning … you can’t strip an actor of his or her imagination but you can get them to have that special personality under control (Kellaway in Olb and Miller 1989, 17).

In 1992, Kellaway clarified how control of that “special personality” extended beyond a dramaturgy of acting to embrace a dramaturgy of audiences:
[Suzuki] taught me that I'm not out there to express myself as an actor; that theatre and art, on the whole, is not about self-expression: that the process of theatre is the process of making art. We are here to make something much bigger than ourselves; we are here to do something much bigger than to express ourselves personally (Kellaway in Carruthers 1996, 182).

In discussion he was more emphatic about the narrow referential scope of individual self-expression and the necessity to surpass these limitations:

I think art is about something bigger than 'little me' or the thought matters of one sad little man. That prospect is awful...we are here to make a larger statement than just one person's thoughts (Kellaway interview 1994).

Kellaway saw unexamined self-expression as a major obstacle to the kind of opening out to and destabilisation of audience reception that he, alongside the others in THE FRONT, strove for. As a synecdoche of relations between an actor's self, performing and audiences, Kellaway used an example of one moment from one SMAT kata: the classic opening Three-minute Stomping and Shakuhachi.

The Eye of God avoids identification. It is volatile. This has to be exciting at the drop point; it has to be a dynamic thing you lying there. It's the mundane motivations, the personal identifications – any hints of the possibility are dangerous (ibid). 31

As a teacher Kellaway used SMAT's kata to dismiss students attachments to "realist theatre which I find boring, safe, comfortable (like a fluffy toy)" (ibid). SMAT proposed to him a commitment to communicating with audiences by suggestion or allusion – a commitment also taken up by others in contemporary performance theatre field – in contrast to the dramaturgy of the realist state theatre works of (for example) the Sydney Theatre Company.

There you are getting this sense of total theatre. Whereas Suzuki's theatre is just the opposite. You are getting cardboard cut outs, getting arguments. They are ideas, something that is fiercely intelligent here. He is not talking about representing 'real' people onstage. They are sketches. You definitely see that in Sidetrack's work. The characters don't hang together in any complete way (ibid).

SMAT, he continued,

[о]ffers a doorway to do other things. Conventional theatre gives you an utterly fleshed-out version of what it depicts so obviously. It gives your audience no room whatsoever and makes assumptions about them. No room for thought. No room for the criticism. That work is done for them, so they just have to sit there (ibid).
The idea of creating “room” for the audience might be understood as the first step in the practical means to effect Pollard and Ryan’s desire to extend the range of individual spectator responses to work.

SIDETRACK’s works between 1990 and 1996 depended on the collaborative efforts of its ensemble trained in SMAT throughout this period by Mémé Thorne. Director, Don Mamouney’s aspirations stand in a praxial and discursive relation with the creativity and work of the whole ensemble SIDETRACK’s performer-makers. The ensemble clearly ‘spoke back’ to Mamouney, both literally, and through what they performed at each stage of a new work’s development. This ensemble of expert-performer-makers, then, reciprocally shaped his thinking. Alongside the visceral trajectory during performance Don Mamouney expected spectators to be ‘active readers’ of the SIDETRACK works. He discussed his affinity with Suzuki’s aesthetics by tracing his own concerns with notions of self:

I think [SMAT] does have a pretty strong Buddhist sentiment and that’s very evident in his work. I think all the various post-modern theories, certainly the idea to undermine the centred subjectivity, that so much of our current debate about theatre and even film has been based on, are really valid. Except that you’ve got audiences and actors who are desperately keen to have selves, or cling to their notion of their self, in a way. In Zen philosophy there’s a nothing, there’s no thing. And I think in Vedic philosophy it’s a bit similar but they call it ‘soul’. And that soul is a self. There are some weird crossovers between post-modern theory and Vedic philosophies that all visit in me. I think you want the audience to be a reader. You want the audience to be logical. You want the audience to have an area of their brain, which is practical and questioning – and believing that in a Marxist sense that you can do something with knowledge (Mamouney interview 2001). 57

He explains his concerns with popular notions of selfhood in the broader context of theatre in Australia:

I think that there has been what I call the Hollywood syndrome. [Mainstream] theatre is about the personality and the character that you see. That is what film is about. That is what theatre is about. You don’t go to see Hamlet; you go to see John Bell being Hamlet. 58 I find it offensive really when you go to see film or theatre where the actor’s personality is uppermost - the idiosyncrasies of the actor and the actor’s foibles (ibid).

When pressed about his deployment of actor’s idiosyncratic attributes he responded:
I call them techniques. That’s why I think Suzuki was right. What Suzuki was working on was a certain kind of hieroglyphic technique – language structures (ibid).

Asking whether these hieroglyphs were visual embodied images he confirmed:

Yeah – they’re symbolic things that we understand certain things about. It depends on the way we mix them up or play them against one another that you create work, which far exceeds that sort of individual-centred self of the bourgeois individual (ibid).

For Mamouney, to exceed the bourgeois individual is to reject the fetishising of an actor’s identity and celebrity – a fetishisation which Mamouney, couching his ideas in the language of class analysis, understands as having an ideological dimension in promoting the belief that spectators gain knowledge, enjoy this and apply their understandings to their life world beyond theatre. During this period at SIDETRACK, two works explicitly targeted this kind of individualism: Idol (1991) and Heaven (1994), in which the vacuous nature of celebrity, desire for individual celebrity and instant gratification of spectators’ individual desires were staged. The address and content of these works can be seen as consonant with Mamouney’s desire to exceed what he saw as audiences and actors clinging to the stable and pre-existing parameters of their concepts of self.

Like other ensembles in the period, SIDETRACK’s works banked on generating audience engagement through hyper-physicality, to trigger their active readership. This distinguished these from SIDETRACK’s earlier works where the depiction of realism, narratives and characters was in a Brechtian mode. The open fieldscape The Drunken Boat (1991) is an example of SIDETRACK’s use of hyper-physicality. The Drunken Boat was the work which Même Thorne considered the most accomplished application of the actors’ embodied skills gained through SMAT. While, in the words of one reviewer, “the basic premise of this non-narrative piece concerns colonialism and the voyage of Columbus” (Hawkins 1992), collaborating performer-maker Regina Heilmann understood that the audience recognition of the history of colonisation was intertwined with spectators’ immersion in the violence of the performance with a view to exceeding the kind of straightforward propositional knowledge implicit in the reviewer’s gloss. She understood, for example, the necessity of painfully holding her mouth open for an extended period, surpassing her own pain threshold, in an effort to capture the sense of a
historical era still exercising its effect upon people in the present (see Chapter Four). This work unfolded amongst the spectators who shared the dimly lit floor with the five performers. Spectators could not anticipate where performance was going to ‘break out’. For Heilmann the chaos that the audience perceived depended on the performers working with a high degree of control, through an ‘accurate sense of the space and environment’ and an excessively high degree of physicalized intensity, to evoke the violence of the colonial contact.

I liked the fact that people were, not scared necessarily but enveloped by the piece. It does move you around, and makes you uneasy and gets to you viscerally – current actorly term. In The Drunken Boat, you wanted the bodies of the audience affected because our bodies were so engaged in the piece. There was a sense of movement in the space that was quite violent. It was chaotic but controlled chaos – a lot of movement happening. I imagine for an audience member it would be exciting to be caught up in that and not know what was going to happen next – to be taken in by the images and the sound. To me, that would be wonderful (Heilmann interview 1998).

Excitement and a state of terror, then, were to be catalyst for spectator reflection on colonial invasion. This audience immersion in a hypercorporeal, styled performance was in contrast to the earlier Sideltrack work where the shift in acting mode was evident. The seeds of the reformulated acting style, elaborated upon in The Drunken Boat (1991) were first seen in Whispers in the Heart (1988) staged with audience either side behind the roped off boundary as if they were watching a museum’s live diorama. Mamouney described the devising of a pivotal section and public response to Whispers.

It was the physical presence of the character and these almost banal words. It was the effect of those things rather than the effects of the emotions we wanted. I remember the first segment we made was where the anthropologist is standing there trying to find his last living aborigine [in Tasmania] and Jai McHenry (the commander) shoots Raymond Blanco [aboriginal actor and figure in the scene] and Zara (the anthropologist). turns around and says, “What did you do that for?” – with no emotion whatsoever. And Jai says, “Oh, you don’t understand these people, doctor”. And they continue on having this most banal conversation in the face of the most violent thing that you could imagine. But there’s no recognition of the violence. Very few people ever saw Whispers clearly. I think, if you did Whispers In The Heart today, people might. People [critics and funding bodies] said, “Oh, it’s just base caricature”. They were so wrong about that. It was fabulous because there was no character. There was no emotion. There were just these figures, these kinds of representative figures who did violent things and did not acknowledge them, or couldn’t acknowledge them (Mamouney interview 1998).

What Kellaway referred to as “cardboard cut outs” is recognisable in Mamouney’s rendering of the scene that revealed the possibilities for the ensemble’s new approach to acting. Mamouney’s recognition in Suzuki’s training of human action figured as
hieroglyph, is also evident. It was a strategy that required sustained and intense
commitment of actors to their actions so as to create room for spectators to ponder the
clashing juxtaposition with spoken ideas. It was a strategy that SIDETRACK’s audience
had difficulty with. On reflection, Mamouney acknowledges that this turn in
dramaturgical strategy was driven by a somewhat “naïve version of Suzuki” training in
1988 (ibid), perhaps precipitated by the ensemble’s excited response to the SCOT
performance of Trojan Women earlier in 1988 at the Sydney Opera House.

This radical openness to audience embraced a diversity of spectators, amongst who were
academic commentators, who both published and spoke at forums in the Sydney scene.
The responses of this audience fraction from time to time were given considerable
weight within the various networks of contemporary performers (see Chapter Three).
Their published responses offer evidence for the hyper-corporeal aspects of live
performance I’ve charted. Simultaneously their commentary was bound to their
theoretical interests, and this, of course, framed their spectatorship. Like other
spectators, the academic commentators did not carry in their habitus the practitioners’
expert embodied knowledges. This is relevant as the power of their commentary had, at
times, the effect of being positioned as causal: what they registered could, and has been,
after the fact, taken as representing the intentionality, processes and research of the artist
ensembles who made the works.

In 1987 Christopher Allen wrote about ENTR’ACTE’s Ostraka (1986) and THE SYDNEY
FRONT’s first work Waltz (1987) as representing Sydney’s “innovative” companies. He
framed his own response as a spectator to the performers’ intense physicality in terms of
his own theoretical interests in semiotics.

[These works use physical and emotional violence, hysteria, sadism, and the erotic, undercut by
irony, changing with the speed of mass media into their opposites or into parody and burlesque.
This is the theatre of dissociation. It exists in the disjunction of signifier and signified. The
physical violence of the emotional expression is such as to overpower the audience, and yet there
is no expression; the hysteria reveals the emptiness beneath. We watch with fascination the
utterly opaque play of signs; we see passion but don’t feel it (Allen 1987, 45; emphasis in
original).]
While a few artists in these ensembles shared his interests in semiotics as an intellectual and textual discipline, this cannot be assumed to have been their point of departure in devising. Nevertheless Allen recognises in the performers’ ways of acting the trigger for his contemplations. His appellation “theatre of dissociation” (a term that did not gain currency in the field) signals the gap between the personage of actors and their expression, a gap that I have argued was the linchpin for a radical openness to spectators in these works’ dramaturgy. Allen took the ostensible performance strategy as articulating a politics.

The whole problem of meaning is the great problem of our culture, and the question is only how aware of it each of us may be. It is no less real than more obvious problem … This doesn’t mean we forget the real crimes and injustices that continue to be perpetuated in the world. But if our theatrical language has become incapable of communicating the real passion that is appropriate to such matters, must we not begin by looking at our language? … An art, which can show us and communicate to us the truth (sic) of our cultural situation is perhaps the only political art that remains conceivable. And the semiotic catharsis that the theatre of dissociation provides is perhaps a necessary prelude to any discourse on the political realities that continue to exist beyond the semiotic barrier (ibid).

Some artists of the first wave might concur with his notion of the political embedded in the mode of acting in its relation with spectators. Such understandings on the part of the practitioners, however, were not driven by a widespread expertise in academic semiotics, rather experiments in devising ‘bodied forth’ these possible interpretations in practice. That there appeared to be an empirical fit between what academics felt and saw in live experience and what they had been searching out in their writerly theoretical endeavours does not retrospectively account for how these came into being. In his enthusiasm for what he recognises as a “theatre of dissociation”, with the potential to radicalise performance practice, Allen misrecognises the labour, and various species of cultural and social capital of the artists involved. In so doing, the artists’ complex logics of practice are rendered mere footnotes in theories of knowledge, and the power of their works to set forth speculations and experiments that redound with spectators in unanticipated ways, often ‘speaking to’ those unversed in theoretical speculation, is curtailed. Such a misrecognition – if not appropriation – denies the potential for what I have termed the interpraxiologue, wherein practice ‘speaks’ to practice without the mediation of critical theory.
While there were moments of exchange between late 20th century theorists and some local academicians which in turn fed into the complex relations of devising, training and performance, only some members of some ensembles were au fait with these bodies of knowledge. ‘The body’ of theory was not commensurate with those of practitioners who, in the future-oriented trajectories of devising, dealt with the singular specificity of their own positions in art practice, their biography and social place and time. Understanding these trajectories in terms of canons of critical theory risks overlooking the extraordinary rigour, complexity and potential of the work of performers themselves, as well as foreclosing on dimensions of knowledge and critique not necessarily available to the theory-bound. The transformation of the dramaturgies of acting was the fulcrum for the transformation of relations with spectators and thus ‘bodied forth’ a genre of local contemporary theatre as I now will conclude.

1 I trialled Leder’s framework in analysing my own experiences of reaching limits and pain during Suzuki training. However, as this study focuses on the work of other artists please see Appendix O.

2 Experiencing this excitement as spectators themselves was a motif in these artists’ stories about seeing the SCOT actors perform and part of their attraction to SMAT.

3 For example, members of STALKER and LEGS ON THE WALL both trained at various junctures in Sydney during the first wave. Pollard worked with members of STALKER and RED WEATHER when both groups had experience with Kellaway and admired his work in THE SYDNEY FRONT prior to 1990.

4 ‘Statues with a ladder’ has not been regular Suzukian kata since the mid 1980s. Brandon described it during his visit to Waseda Little Theatre in 1976. Carruthers does not list it in his chart of katas past this period.

5 This conflation of kata rigour with teacher-director aesthetics rather than using training practice for investigation of one’s own aesthetics was recently brought to notice by an ex-student of mine. He/she found an esteemed Australian teacher’s humiliation of individuals, while shouting at them about poor bodily discipline of actors in their first session, prompted the rejection of SMAT. The newly formed GUMPTION THEATRE had invited a teacher from interstate for a weekend workshop in October 2006.

6 Kellaway brought to his 1984 training in Toga, five years of modern dance training with ONE EXTRA DANCE COMPANY. He identified Graham and Limon-based techniques and “that dog’s breakfast which is London Contemporary Dance”. His earliest performance training was in piano, competing in musical eisteddfods and extensive experience from childhood as a performer in commercial musicals. Kellaway recognised the role of images used to organise his body and movement in these techniques as being in marked contrast with the function of images in his training with Suzuki.

7 “Modes of performing critiques about Asian bodies and their sexuality are over written by a distinct split in perceptions of Asian men and Asian women. Generally speaking, Asian women in Western society are hyper-visible as sexual objects whereas Asian men have been rendered virtually invisible” (Lo, J, Khoo, T and Gilbert, H 2000, 8.).

8 For a more detailed descriptions and analysis of Burying Mother, see author’s article, Taylor, Y (1998), and Lo (1998).
Ultimately the practical physical manipulation that Suzuki conducted in the public dining hall in Toga helped Pollard stamp more effectively on the training floor.

'Power tools' is the title for Suzuki engendered skills used by Ellen Lauren, renowned master teacher of SMAT internationally and known to all the Australians who trained in Toga (See Lauren 1995, 65).

Stanislavskian acting pedagogy via its Americana legacy with it various derivations of 'Method Acting' arrived in Australia with the teaching of Hayes Gordon early in the 1960s at the Ensemble Theatre, North Sydney.

Grant stated also this was her way of translating the training. "It was disciplined. You had a task to do. I'm not proposing this was put to me constantly as way of thinking with Suzuki training" (interview 1994).

Personal conversation with author, September 1993.

Local and other Suzukian trained performers may and some have fused the two approaches together. However there is nothing in SMAT that directs or insists that this is the way to act or proper way to apply it. In day-to-day practice teachers are often silent on these matters, preferring that individual trainees work out these matters for themselves.

In THE FRONT— Baylis (through Mike Mullins), Grant and Thorne through work with KISS and Jepke Goudsmitt (KINETIC ENERGY). Willem Brugman and Tanya Gerstle had substantial experiences influenced by Grotowskian notions of via negativa.

Heilmann in interview referred to Mamouney during devising saying this to the performers.

Suzuki's The Way of Acting (1986) nor his article, Culture is the Body was not readily accessible nor widely read by the first wave artists who were involved in the formative phase of the Sydney scene. A close reading of The Way of Acting does not uncover detailed or explicit attention and few allusions to how performers might construe or use their subjectivity or selves. It might be inferred by readers who are cultural insiders how this is conceived in a daily or traditional theatrical sense, but does not present readily to those who are not.

At the Bleedlines conference, Lesley Stern, a theatre academic argued against acting as task on the ground that it suppressed spectators' desires for being enchanted and drawn into fictions during live performance. She literally argued for the role of fiction in contemporary performance works. Baylis insisted THE FRONT hoped and banked on spectators' beliefs in fictions and pleasurable fantasies but that this was not achieved through playing characters in stories.

Anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), discuss notions of 'person, self and individual' as still part of contemporary social life in Japan that arise from the philosophical traditions of Shintoism and Buddhism.

The animism of Shinto fosters feelings of immersion in nature, while many of the techniques of Buddhist contemplation encourage detachment from earthly desires and gross passions and experience in the attainment of 'mu' or nothingness. Neither tradition encourages the development of a highly individuated self. The person is understood as acting within the context of a social relationship, never simply autonomously. One's self-identity changes with the social context (1987:14-15).

One's identity determined by others who witness and interpret your actions could be a description of a kind of performing for spectators. It is the audience, in this paradigm of selfhood, who determines the nature and significance of your actions rather than the actor themselves independently, and this determination could exceed whatever that actor may think of their actions.
Zeami reinforced this suggestive aesthetic roundly. “A truly great artist has for many years succeeded in training both his body and his spirit; he can hold back much of is potential in reserve and perform in an easy fashion, so that only seven- tenths of his art is visible” (Zeami in Rimer and Yamazaki 1984: 87).

How Suzuki has recontextualised these traditional practices within his own theatrical works has been both embraced and contested in Japan. A number of virtuosic traditionally trained practitioners and critics of noh have embraced Suzuki’s work as a rejuvenation and innovation of Noh. He is considered by these esteemed practitioners heir to noh tradition (Kanze in Hoff 1985). Others like Kitazawa consider Suzuki’s use of these practices illegitimate (Kitazawa 1993).

I studied Decrouxian and Tomascevskian mime, as did numerous key Australian artists in South Australia. ENTR’ACTE offered Decrouxian training from the late 1970s to early 1990s in Sydney. For the impact of Le Coq’s alumni in Australia see Everett 2000.

Interestingly this excerpt does not appear in the published version of The Sum of the Interior Angles in TDR, translated by Hoff and Goodman in 1982.

It is clear, from Goto, that Suzuki read this passage of Zeami as it is the immediate continuation of the one Suzuki cites (Goto 1984, 82).

Masakuni Kitazawa in Myth, Politics and Performance located the playing of ‘ma’ in pre-modern theatre called shibai.

Shingeki lost what shibai had: the ability to evoke equivocal meanings of words and things revealing a world beyond language and everyday life. In shibai— including noh, kabuki and village performances—there remained the key concept of acting called ma meaningful silence). “Ma” refers to sensing the presence of an invisible being in the character ruling mythically over the stage. By sensing ma, spectators could collectively feel if the actor’s way was right or not. In engehiki the concept of ma was completely lost. It had become a mere pause or timing device; it carried only psychological-character meaning. The loss of the performance of ma reveals the deep structure of modern theatre. The performance of silence is more than a concept/practice opposite speech.

He goes on to conclude that “silence, or ma, is a fear of emptiness” in the modernised shingeki (Kitazawa 1992, 20-21).

Another account exists of this work in the form of a textual documentation by THE FRONT members in Allen and Pearlman 1999. See, in addition, Schaeffer’s analysis (1994). Video documentation of the work is available in the archives of the Department of Performance Studies at University of Sydney.

Only one SCOT performance has been seen in Sydney, Trojan Women. None of Robert Wilson’s or Anne Bogart’s have ever been staged in Sydney. Wilson’s Einstein on the Beach was not staged in Australia until 2004 and Bogart’s SITI company not seen until 2006 at Festivals in Melbourne and Adelaide. So any other sources of these kinds of notions of acting or performance had become in any way familiar to spectators in any sector of the Sydney audiences.

When THE FRONT did not stomp during devising Passion (1993), a work where only one member of the troupe bodily performed and all the others became stage-managers leading and organising the spectators to conduct the performance through its stages was for Baylis (1996) a proof of its role in their earlier performances. Interestingly, too it still extends the practical logie of the interactive dynamic with audiences members that had been earlier underwritten by their practice of stomping.

Kellaway’s private interpretation of the “Fuck Me” segment was “That is what the scene is about a seduction that goes horribly wrong” (interview 1994). The female performer in question, Andrea Aloise, was the fifth founding performer-maker of THE SYDNEY FRONT. Deborah Pollard described her as the “Queen of detachment” (interview 2001).
Even after his Front experiences, an attitude of abandonment to throwing around “whacky ideas and waiting for the ideas three minutes beyond that” was still central to Baylis’s approach in community based projects at URBAN THEATRE PROJECTS in 1999, though in a less body-based mode (UTP 2006, 38).

Practitioners perform the basic stomps for three minutes then drop to the floor upstage, remaining still while suppressing visible signs of their aerobic and anaerobic exhaustion. Holding their inner and bodily resources together in this prone stillness, they wait to begin a undisturbed rise from the floor (triggered in a single momentary response to a recorded shakuhachi sound track), to smoothly travel a statue pose directly to downstage edge of the training stage over a period of three minutes to a finally stillness. This sudden transition between the two phases of the exercise is what Kellaway has called the “drop point” (See also Chapter Four).

Subsequent to this interview Mamouney became a teacher of hatha yoga. While he had long been practising yoga, he did not lead yoga practice with the ensemble during the period of this study. He talked of the relation between his understandings of selfhood in yoga practice: “It’s got a secular spirituality to it. It’s a self-less kind of activity. It gets around the kind of self that I tried to draw attention to in Heaven, for example” (interview 1998).

John Bell is a renowned Shakespearean actor, who set up a company – THE BELL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY – dedicated to staging Shakespeare’s plays.

Idol was directed by Nigel Kellaway with John Baylis as its dramaturg. It was devised in collaboration with performers Regina Heilman, Jai McHenry, Rolando Ramos and Mémé Thorne, and performed at the SIDETRACK Theatre in Marrickville, and extensively toured schools in Sydney over that year and the next. This group of actors then devised Heaven with Don Mamouney, an example of overlapping membership in transitory ensemble arrangements amongst those in who trained in SMAT during this period.

See Burvill’s detailed analysis of an earlier work, Adios Cha Cha in his account of continuities and peripetiias in development of SIDETRACK’s work (1994, 182-188).

These were risky times in the post-socialist political vacuum of the first battles of what became known as Australia’s ‘history wars’ (Reynolds 1981; MacIntyre and Clarke 2003). There was great sensitivity in the bicentennial year (1988), about the arrival of European colonists and dispossession of indigenous people of their land. There was little knowledge amongst audience networks at this time about the cultural negotiation with aboriginal artists and issues. Whispers’ handling of the anthropological incursions into aboriginal life and dispossession was not accompanied either in the program or on the floor of performance with ways of reading it that aided spectators with a clear or singular interpretation of these representations or declared the company’s position. It was unclear to a public more familiar with SIDETRACK’s previous advocacy of oppressed people in their characterisation whether the ensemble were operating in the more dominant and popularised mode of ‘speaking up and on behalf’ of Aboriginal Australians. The lack of complex characterisation of any characters and particularly aboriginal was discomforting and for some influential spectators would have been read as a continuation of a neglect of aboriginal humanity that the work itself critiqued. Though Mamouney was clear that he was telling a whitefella story and opening that up for critical reflection when he negotiated with an early aboriginal collaborator, Bob Mazza, who proposed the idea and then withdrew because of artistic over commitment in the bi-centennial year. Tasmanian Aboriginal communities’ official requests for the British Museum to return human remains taken by anthropologists from Australia had just begun in 1988 (private conversation between author and Bob Mazza); a request that has been, conditionally acceded to in 2006 (ABC News online – Saturday, November 18, 2006. “British Museum to return Tas Aboriginal remains” – http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200611/s1791689.htm).

Thorne and Heilmann had participated in Kellaway’s workshops in previous years. Thorne was yet to undertake training in Toga.
In 1991, immediately following my Toga training, I had a cautionary experience as a director/dramaturg of a version of Handke's Kaspar for 21 people rather than its original cast of one within an interdisciplinary arts/theatre faculty context. A visual art history academic's first question to me after seeing the performance was “And which post-structural theorist did these students read and did you use?” She saw this in the show. I told her “None” and asked whether she was familiar with Handke's text, and that the trope of autism that the students and I used to guide our rehearsals 'de-construction' of the language-persona relation, without recourse to post-structuralist theory in this instance.
DRAWING TOGETHER THREADS OF PRACTICE AND HISTORY:

a conclusion

As Sydney artists’ induction into SMAT from the mid 1980s was contemporaneous to the surge in local ensemble performance production, this context filtered relations between training and performing. The training and performance histories of individual artists and the then-current state of the local field were well cultivated to embrace and ‘put to work’ the possibilities SMAT offered. Artists’ performance making elicited aspects of their SMAT experiences at decisive junctures to solve creative problems in the ‘up-building’ of decisions in devising, processes which also recruited their SMAT-engendered habitus in the generation of ‘raw’ materials.

For the Sydney scene practitioners the varieties of stillness disclosed ways of acting that bound performers’ attention to the here and now of performance, emphasising the immediacy of relating to spectators in the present of live performance. Thematisation of the now-temporality continually returned performer-makers’ awareness to moments, demarcation of intervals, lengthening time and ruptures in the passage of performance time. This underwrote their developing acumen in handling non-narrative compositional strategies of montage on the floor of rehearsals. Awareness of the voluminosity of space between and around their bodies bound their presence to the facticity of theatres, studios and other ‘sites’. Enfolded in the vibratory sense of linkage with crowds of spectators, pierced by clear lines of gaze and bodily directionality their works directly addressed audiences. Confronting limits and difficulty in all of the above, while cultivating corporeal strength, intensification of energy emanating from their actions and speech during performance, compelled individuals to re-evaluate pertinent values and judgments about performance making thus expanded the scope of their creative practice. This built their tenacity and confidence in handling complex relations with collaborators in ensemble devising, (including artists from other disciplines) allowing the dissonance of ‘separate voices’ to shape a work and make a virtue of their relatively poorly resourced circumstances. As pain and tiredness bifurcated consciousness, it also magnified their internalisation of audience perspectives. Their pervasive positing of their
bodies as Suzukian-type ‘empty vessels’ amplified their receptivity to internal impulses and social influences. A keen awareness of their own habitual idiosyncracies ramified their sense of detachment from self-generated materials, giving them greater freedom to manipulate even material from intimate autobiographic sources. Heightened awareness of their own bodies as bearers of representations and histories problematised their presence in the here and now, rendering their ‘selves’ in performance ambiguous through thematizing fluctuations between the palpable reality of their embodiment and the fictional artifice of the theatricality in their performances. All this distanciation created the space for them to become writer-directors of their own works’ highly physical theatre of ideas relying on the performers’ embodied knowledges rather than other theatre technologies or written playscripts.

Their adaptations of SMAT evolved as they were re-absorbed into the dramaturgical development of new works under the scrutiny of and dialogue with spectators – indeed the engagement with SMAT was pivotal in what became a dramaturgy of audiences. That local key performers from the first wave have so readily taken their judgement and skill to work as directors and dramaturgs devising with others not steeped in their practices outside of the scene testifies to the thoroughgoing openness to audiences of the dramaturgical capacities they had cultivated. For example, Clare Grant went on to lead Playworks womens’ writing for performance organization and lectured in performance, Deborah Leiser-Moore now directs in collaboration with diverse Melbourne artists in TASHMADADA, Chris Ryan went on to forge new trajectories in youth theatre as director of PACT youth theatre, John Baylis assembled groups of artists from diverse art forms to collaborate with communities in Western Sydney at URBAN THEATRE PROJECTS to transform community arts practice, and, more recently, Regina Heilmann took over the leadership of PACT youth theatre with another Suzuki trained performer, Chris Murphy, and transformed it once again. Nigel Kellaway has subsequently worked with numerous dance and music artists freelance and in his own OPERA PROJECT with Annette Tesoriero. All subsequently have actively mentored emerging artists in Sydney beyond ‘the academy’.

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They transformed doxic relations between performance and training regimes in their practice during the 1980s and 1990s. These production relations no longer adhered to either a modernist or classical model. In these models a practitioner committed to pursuing one dominant technique with its concomitant theatrical aesthetics and the notions human subjectivity of a regime’s progenitor. That beliefs cannot be separated from embodied knowledges (after Bourdieu) raises the question of what became the locus of artists’ beliefs. It is clear from this study that local artists invested in their growing confidence to devise within the imperatives of the social world that environed both themselves and their audiences and that they trusted in their tenacity to carve out a sustained theatrical practice in Sydney.

SMAT was not approached with religiosity in the belief that, if emulated reverentially training would through a kind of sympathetic magic, deliver innovative theatrical performance through its practice. While local artists did open themselves to its influences, immersed themselves in its practice, it was not an opening up to being ‘colonised’ that Barba recommends is essential for actors to discover “their own independence and physical eloquence” (Barba 1985, 95). In carving out ‘room’ for contemporary performance’s ‘hybrid vigour’, Sydney’s artists, like other Australian performer-makers, were caught up in a series of tensions or anxieties of influence that permeate hybridised practices in our settler societal context. Across the field local artists did not: emulate Suzuki’s theatre, trade off its ‘Japaneseness’, emulate neo-feudalist relations on the training floor, (and while wrestling with their own phases of failure in comprehension) did not mystify their applications of SMAT to themselves (even if their performances were not always ‘readable’ to all spectators) nor did they promote a pan-asian transcendentalism or spirituality through their engagement with SMAT’s hyper-corporeality in their performances. Local artists mobilised SMAT in a broad project of resistance to the British playhouse theatre dominant in Australia at the time that banked on its naturalistic use of language.  

The adoption in the late 1960s of Stanislavskian derived acting methodologies, and adaptation of models of script writing and theatrical production had, by the late 1970s
generated and reinforced a homogenous ‘Aussie’ identity that had become a cul de sac for innovation rarely disclosing the realities of and questions about this settler society. The narrow scope for representing subjectivity in Australian theatrical practice was not challenged seriously until the 1980s. The Sydney artists’ take up of Suzuki training participated in this, by offering not just performing skills but powerful understandings/knowledges about their own state of performing and audience-performer relations thus, my reference to these performer-makers in the title of this thesis as ‘Doctors of Presence’. The Sydney ensembles might be criticised for not continuing to engage in direct cultural exchange with contemporary Japanese artists in their specific historico-cultural context. They did, however, take responsibility through a reflexive regard for their own critical appropriations of SMAT in a dialogic exchange relation with spectators rather than a commodity type exchange selling exotica for the price of a theatre ticket.

Works had to stand alone, to engage with spectators through their relevance and appeal, not bank on cultural authority or legitimacy through leaning on its japonised flavour or their avant-garde credentials through affiliation with such an internationally-esteemed and prolific innovator as Tadashi Suzuki. To do otherwise risked invoking a neo-imperialist gaze or the rejection of an ‘anti-colonialist’ gaze of spectators. While Suzuki, as an atheist, couched his rhetoric about training from the mid 1980s through allusions to ‘sacred spaces’ and the training’s ‘universality’, these tenets had to be set aside in the local experiments for SMAT to reveal its inherent possibilities in its dialogue with local conditions. It required the de-universalist and de-sacralising stance of the Sydney artists and in turn, this relied upon their investment in training practice for its practices to become familiar. As Holledge and Tompkins conclude in their analysis of the exotic in intercultural relations in women’s intercultural performances.

It is comparatively easy for a void or lack to be filled by an unfamiliar and exotic ‘other’-all that is required is a simple act of projection – but familiarity erodes the ability of the exotic ‘other’ to carry these imaginary constructions (Holledge and Tompkins 2000, 85).

SMAT’s resonance with local conditions made available (in contrast to the old cliché about familiarity breeding contempt) more fecund details about their corporeal presence
to performers’ perceptions, challenged their assumptions and disclosed possibilities in devising performance. This was not a revelation of an unfettered world of limitless possibility but one of tensions and uncertainties for investigation in praxis.

Unlike Suzuki’s intracultural deconstruction/reconstruction of selected traditional Japanese theatre training disciplines, for non-aboriginal Australian theatre artists this kind of intracultural has not been a viable proposition. Theatre performance disciplines have been legacies from the dominant cultures of Britain, Northern Europe and the US adapted to the situation. Anxieties around these less contested influences have often manifested in an advocacy of greater rigour and virtuosity in the skillful execution by high profile individuals in a kind of surrogacy or proof of being ‘world class’: – ‘our’ actors do it better than Hollywood, ‘our’ ballet dancers win Russian competitions for their virtuosity and ‘our’ opera singers win international accolades for their excellence in the bel canto repertoire. Not only was SMAT practice in Sydney’s contemporary performance caught up in tensions around putative expropriations of cultural capital, but as they did not seek affiliation with or to develop virtuosity in a recognisable Suzukian style, their serious engagement was vulnerable to being framed as not rigorous and second-hand. Rex Cramphorn noted the debilitating effects of these contradictory critiques in the local cultural milieu as early as 1969:

[1]n Australia, the “newest” theatre comes from overseas … Like sex-educated children we know it all without experience, and often express a lofty superiority to those who attempt to re-create the theatrical expression here, labeling them “derivative” and deploving the lack of a genuinely Australian theatre (Cramphorn in Maxwell 2005, 178).

I would argue that both the respect, honouring of value and rigour lay elsewhere in the contemporary performers’ practice of SMAT in Sydney through the 1980s and 1990s: in the active revivification of its relevance through an openness to audiences and engagement with their world. As Rustom Bharucha observed, “Power may not disappear in the process of doing theatre [or training] but it is subject to a different play of subjectivities and subversions” (2000, 71).
If Suzuki's *kata* had been bound to a specific canon of works or roles their resonance with the local conditions which animated/constrained performance making in Sydney would not have occurred. The *kata*'s very presentation as a finite set of performance exercise-like forms facilitated the complicity between the performance habitus of local artists and the field. After a phase of provocative induction, the received and re-interpreted practices entered the 'performance-making bloodstream' of the cultural and social capital of local networks of contemporary performance artists. Aspects of the contemporaneous social conditions that surrounded and constrained Suzuki's selection and articulation of the *kata* derived from traditional theatres were inculcated in the structuration of its pedagogy and these found parallels in the Sydney setting fifteen years later. These include: the dialogue between Waseda ensemble of performers and Suzuki that forged the training regime, the regime's development outside the major institutions of theatre practice in opposition to *shingeki*, the lack of reliance on theatre technology, the widespread struggles about the nature of subjectivity and accompanying suspicion of language by the *yakeato* generation in the wake of the failed anti-Ampo movement that fuelled Suzuki's artistic innovation. If the Sydney practitioners had not all already been trained and had not been engaged in physicalized theatres, were not inclined towards nor needed to devise in ensembles interested in creating new theatre forms, not sceptical of the role of language in the existing theatre in an era where the politics of colonial history and cultural diversity were the focus of public debate and the nature of subjectivity was questioned in post modern epistemologies and could not garner local audiences, then the resonance with Suzuki's codified training would not have reverberated through their practices.

It is a sign of fragile cultural autonomy that the almost total reliance on artists' networks, artists' investment in developing their cultural and social capital for innovations in Australian art making that historical accidents can have such an impact. But it also points to some of the dynamic aspects of Australian artistic practice.

As Kellaway has said it was just a fluke that he was in the right place and time for an invitation to work with Suzuki to come his way. Yet the virtuosity in making do and in
the adaptation of practices is also evident in this history of practice – a history without the massive weight of cultural institutions and traditions that surround artists in Japan, Europe and North America. As the artistic director of Zurich’s Theater Spektakel, Maria Magdalena Schweagerman observed after a visit to Australia in 2000 “We are used to giving answers in Germany, you are used to asking questions” (Schweagerman in Hamilton 2003, 186).

The shed academy is no more. The lack of investment in places or academies for continued practice has not resisted the effects of ‘global economic development’, radically reducing arts funding for innovation that has marginalised practice outside the mainstage companies and the international touring market. As institutions, the universities have faiired better for longer, but as I wrap this up only one teacher education-oriented dance degree and NIDA (with a national brief and substantial government and private patronage) remain in the public sector to offer education in live performance practice in a city where one fifth of the nation’s population live.

1 The playhouse model was by this stage, while still dominant in terms of funding and profile in Britain was only one model used for theatre production. For the rise of alternative models for staging and devising works in the UK see Gooch, S (1984), Itzin, K (1982) and Heddon and Milling (2006).
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APPENDIX A - PERIOD OF HIGHEST ACTIVITY IN SYDNEY CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE
[all dance works not documented in list]

1986
The Sydney Front formed. Starts training during seasons; Grant having just returned from working with KISS during ‘84/85.
Legs on the Wall formed.
Kellaway performs solo in ‘Give me a Rose’
Enteracte performed ‘Ostraka’ with some members of The Front, John Baylis was dramaturg. Kellaway and Aloise performed
‘Archaeologic’ – Enteracte, Aloise was a performer
One Extra Dance perform ‘the shrew’, remount my father’s house, Ah Q goes west..
Sidetack Adios Cha-Cha

1987
Keith Gallash and Virginia Baxter having moved from Adelaide set up Open City in Sydney, and perform ‘Tokyo now thriller’
Front performs ‘Waltz’ and ‘John Laws/Sade’.
Yuji Sone arrives in Sydney

Politics of the Body conference at tps, a broad range of performances and installations were presented. The conference was subtitled the ‘NSW Art Gallery Perspecta Performance Program. Performers included contemporary dancers from melb and syd, an early version of Graft with performers from the Front and One Extra, a piece from 2 of the ETC ETC troupe, commedian Wendy Harmer, Red Weather – vocal presentation from group that arose out of the Drama Action Centre, a piece called ‘Telling’ written by Kreckler with mix genre grouping of performers from Syd eg Keller, Kohler, Pearce, Sone

1988, the year of the bicentennial
Sidetack performed anti bicentennial piece ‘Whispers in the Heart’,
The Sydney Front performed ‘The Pornography of Performance’,
Open City ‘Photoplay’,
‘Nuremberg Recital’ solo performed by Nigel Kellaway..
Clarkson, Mc Cormick and Swain form Stalker Theatre in Sydney, after shifting from NZ.
Enteracte perform ‘Last Circus’ collaborators included Baylis and Krekkler
SCOT tours The Trojan Women to Seymour Centre, Sydney, sponsored by Mitsui as part of their bicentennial ‘gift’ with several other Japanese groups, including Sankai Juku.
Feminism and Performance conference, Dissonances at the tps in Oct

1989
The Front performed ‘Photocopies of God’.
Stalker performs ‘Fast Ground’ in Sydney Festival.
Sidetack returned to tps with ‘Whispers in the Heart’
Enteracte –‘memory room’ at tps
Open City –‘Girl with a Stone in her shoe’

1990,
Enteracte performs ‘Memory Room’ at Toga Festival
Open City ‘All that Flows’.
Clare Grant performs ‘Woman in the Wall’.
Eventspace opens and runs in tps gallery space.
Kellaway directs Stalker’s ‘Toycart’, choreographed by Ros Crisp.
First training in Toga.
Don Marmourey rejoins Sidetack, changing the name and calling it a performance group; second ensemble forms with core artists to stay together for 6 years; Thorne, Hettmann, McHenry and Ramos
1990-97 Sidetrack sets up and hosts a festival called **Contemporary Performance Week (CPW)** each September of performance training, discussions and debates, a performance program of small works and its own using a number of the halls and sheds at Addison Road Marrickville. It brought some overseas guests to lead workshops and speak and perform in the last few years. For example the last one included Lisa Nelson, an early pioneer and continuing practitioner of contact improvisation and Gennardi Bogdanov, leading international teacher of Meyerhold's biomechanics.

1991
The Partyline was established.
The Front performed 'Don Juan'.
Sidetrack - 'Idol' with director, dramaturg and co-authors being Kellaway and Baylis from Sydney Front. Drunken Boat first performed at Marrickville
Stalker does 'Toy cart' in Sydney Festival.
Entreacte performs 'Aqua azzura' at Belvoir St
Open City - 'Small Talk in Big Rooms'; 'The Museum of Accidents' - tps

DDT- first ensemble was formed
Kai Tai Chan leaves One Extra
Suzuki runs teacher training in Toga markham, leiser, pollard, cohen, molina, sidore, thorne attend from sydney scene
Schacher returns to Sydney after 3 years living and working with Min Tanaka

1992
Front performs 'First and Last Warning' at tps and remounts Don Juan at Adelaide Festival.
Post arrivalists form.
Schacher forms performance group Gravity Feed
Sidetrack performs Drunken Boat at Adelaide Festival, Addison Rd
Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch form start performing, together go to Lake Mungo, do one piece at the tps.
Open City do Tokyo Two and Sense
Entreacte performed 'Possessed/Dispossessed'
Suzuki directs 'Chronicles of Macbeth' at Playbox, Melb, Adelaide Festival and Mitzui Festival in Tokyo.
Suzuki relocates to Saratoga, US sets up collaboration with Anne Bogart.

1993 – A lot of work going on;
'Passion' – Sydney Front.
'Sum of Sudden – Open City
'All of Me' – Legs on the Wall
'Heaven' – Sidetrack, John Baylis is dramaturg
'Stages of Terror' 7 women conceived, designed and performed in collaboration involving Miller, Aloiise, McHenry, Heilmann, Tesoriero, Grant, Molino
Bleedlines conference at cps, John Baylis coordinator
'Waterborne'-Entreacte at tps (Baylis is dramaturg on this production)

1994,
The Front had disbanded. Officially announced in RealTime notice.
The funding of Sidetrack contemporary performance group was placed on a different basis and substantially reduced.
Sidetrack performs The Measure at various outdoor sites around Sydney. Also No Condom, No Start AIDS education show for Builders Labourers performed on work sites
Entreacte also experience a substantial cut in funding
Club Swing created and toured 'Appetite'.
Kellaway moves in and lives in the Performance space for 10 days and performs solo in 'This Most Wicked Body'.
Sidetrack remount 'Heaven' at tps.
Nikki Heywood 'The Body Sings' solo in collaboration with composer, Julian Knowles
De Quincey performs 'Is' in collaboration with Lynch and Knowles.
Real Time was launched.
'25 years of Performance Art in Australia' event hosted by Ivan Docherty Galleries, tps and Pica. **Post-arrivalists** work in perf art celebrations.
Sarah Miller leaves tps to be director of Pica, Perth.
Grant becomes director of Playworks, until end of '97
'Steps One' new dance works, put together by Leisa Shelton.
**DDT** performs at tps as part of tour 'Eye of the Law'
Tps begin publishing journal 4 times a year.

1995

**Playing with Time** conference by Playworks.
Deborah Levy workshop and B-file performance.
**HIPPERIA** from ddt at Wharf
Stalker begins Mimi collaboration in Arnhem land.
Stalker perform Angels ex Machina, choreographed by Sue Ellen Kohler at CPW #6.
**Nikki Heywood** directs and performs in ‘Creatures Ourselves’.
**Open City** ‘Shop’ and ‘the necessary Orgy’
**Entracte** stages ‘Eclipse’ tps. It is their last show.
**Sidetrack** *Plane Truth* training project Nov-March 96 brings young performers together for 4 months of training in ‘new performance methods’ at Addison Rd
Kellaway directs *Fright* with Sidetrack ensemble et al, staged at Enmore Theatre
Future *Tempse* performance installation in shopping malls, May-June in conjunction with trade union organisations of Wollongong and Newcastle
Sally Sussman directs ‘Orientalia’ (Kg and Vb dramaturgs, Aloise, Kellaway and Molina perform with Xu Fengshan and Zhang Zhijun.
‘Body in Performance’ workshop series body weather, contemporary dance and Peking Opera at tps.
Ros Crisp and Nigel Jamieson collab in Cutting Room. Time and Motion project July

1996

**Aboriginal protesters confront** at the tps.
**Sidetrack** ensemble disbands.
**Sidetrack** *Plane Truth* performed by training ensemble in march at Sidetrack, Addison Rd.
Mamouney co-directs with Raymond Blance *Frontier Stories* in collaboration with AIDT performers et al — sit.com directed by Kreckler at Marrickville
'Burn Sonata' directed by **Nikki Heywood**.
**Meme Thorne** performs solo in her show 'Burying Mother' at Belvoir downstairs,
**Deborah Leiser** performs in 'Hungry' at tps.
**Theatre Kantanka** present Birds AveAve at Bondi Pavilion.
Noroc by **DDT** at Wharf at tps.
**Kate Champion** does solo show 'Face Value' at tps.
**Open City** - Talk Studio, Promiscuous Spaces: Table Talk, Joke, Joke.
**Entracte** still offering training summer school.
**Ros Crisp** sets up Omeo dance studios in the old floor mill at Newtown.
De Quincey/Lynch are offering training labs.
**Deborah Pollard** does first full length show 'fish out of water' at tps.

1997

sit.com directed by Derek Kreckler at **Sidetrack** remounted at tps.
Nobody's Daughter at **Sidetrack**
'Country Love' directed by Don Mamouney at Belvoir St upstairs
Last year of CPW at Sidetrack.
Chris Ryan becomes ad of Pact.
First **Anti-static** contemporary dance festival, march at tps.
**Legs On The Wall** do 'Don't Look Now'.
Sport and Porn **erth**, Hot banana, Kelly's republic.
**Joel markham** does Betty's 'Foot at tps and at CPW.
**DDT** do 'Crop Circles' at tps.
**Leni, Leni** - McHenry, Hellmann and Spence downstairs Belvoir
Baylis becomes artistic director of ddt, changes name to **Urban Theatre Projects**
'Theatre is Moving' Leisa Shelton's studio and training programs fold
Entre'acte no longer offering training

1998

Autopsy dinner for the nostalgia for performance art.

.......

One off events at tps several times a year, Event space cross generic 1992, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97
Artists who presented in event space include Schacher, Pollard, Spence,
Open Seasons in July 1992, 94, 95, 96, 97- billed as 'festival of live art/performance
art/performance/theatre/installation performance/ installation/film/video/ Art that is low and cruel and
poor. plus the rest"
CLUB bENT begins in Feb 1995, 96, 97
Taboo Parlour -1998, 99
Unbecomings- 2000, 2001
B grade began.

CPW's in September at Sidetrack
Zings begin when at Pact
Open house then B Sharp at Belvoir, seems very actorly
APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF ARTISTS WHO MIGRATED TO BASE THEMSELVES IN SYDNEY IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER (ALSO ARTISTS WHO RETURNED TO BASE THEMSELVES IN SYDNEY): ART CENTRE FORMATIONS AND KEY CONFERENCES

1977 approx Pierre Thibadeau and Elizabeth Burke
1981 Clare Grant (NZ/Victoria)
1982 Chris Ryan (Adelaide)
1984 Jepke Goudsmit (Netherlands)
1983/84 David Clarkson, Emily McCormick and Rachel Swain move from NZ where they had been doing street theatre around social issues, particularly anti-Nuclear
1984 Nick Tsoutas and Peggy Wallach, Jack Cheslyn (All Out Ensemble had performed at Adelaide’s EAF 1980-83)
1986 Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter (Open City- Adelaide)
1986/7 Russell Garbutt, Carlos Russell and Julia Cotton (Etcetera- Adelaide)
1990 Deborah Pollard (Wollongong)
1993 Leisa Shelton

Organisations/ Infrastructure in cross arts that included performance pre 1997
1974 Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
1975 Gallery of Modern later to become Institute of Modern Art, South Brisbane
1982 The Performance Space, Sydney
1985 Praxis – artist run initiative, precursor to Pica
1989 Perth Institute of Contemporary Art - Noel Sheridan was appointed the inaugural Director of PICA (1989 – 1993) and oversaw the initial renovation of the building. He was succeeded by Sarah Miller (1993 - 2006).
1970’s mid The Gunnery began to house events / became
1983 Artspace, Wooloomooloo
1985 Playworks, a national organization committed to nurturing new women writers for performance, based in Sydney,
Metro Arts, Brisbane
1980’s early Power Library became the Power Institute, at USYD
1982 NSW Women and Arts Festival (aka Women’s Art Movement), trigger formation of Playworks

Relevant Conferences/ Festivals Conferences include:

1984 Futur*Fall (Power Institute),
1995 Playing with Time (Playworks).
1987 The Politics of the Body (TPS),
1988 In(ter)ventions: Feminism and Performance (TPS),
1989 The Politics of Exile (TPS),
1990 Revaluations: Avant-garde in an age of economic Rationalism (TPS),
1993 Bleedlines- The Limits of Performance (Centre for Performance Studies, University of Sydney)
1995 Playing With Time (Playworks)
APPENDIX C – LIST OF OTHER LOCAL THEATRES INCLUDING PHYSICAL THEATRES PRE-86 SEEN IN SYDNEY (SOME KNOWN AND SEEN FROM OTHER STATES OR REGIONAL TOWNS)

First brief chronology Pre 86- immediate precursors

1976 Kai Tai Chan began One Extra Dance Group became One Extra Dance theatre.

1979 Sidetrack (Mamouny) and Sydney Corporeal Mime Theatre (Burke and Thibadeau) are formed in Sydney.

1982 Situation Normal cut-up by All Out Ensemble performed at Art unit, Sydney and at contemporary art institute in Adelaide. AOE performed, Basket Weaving for Amateurs (1980 Adelaide), Last Days of the World (1983 Adelaide) Selling Ourselves for Dinner before moving to Sydney at various sites the EAF, the basement of the Rundle Street carpark and the Box Factory respectively.

1982 Entre‘acte renamed, performed in Sydney and toured small corporeal mime pieces.

1983 Vella, Shanahan and Furaya work with One Extra. Ah Q Goes West.

1983-86, Sidetrack early ensemble had 10 people in 86. Did quite explicitly Brechtian and contemporary social realist type work in this period.

1984 Jepke Goudsmit leaves KISS after 8 years to join Kinetic Energy

1984/85 Clare Grant in the Netherlands with KISS.

1985 Julie Anne Long moves from Melbourne to join One Extra in Sydney. Dinosaur project with Rhys Martin involved Chris Ryan, John Baylis, Roz Hervey, Clare Grant, Julie-Anne Long, Gary Lester and Scott Blick.

Splinters forms in Canberra, mostly performs in Canberra but does some touring performing in non theatre spaces for the most part and including galleries like Ivan Dougherty, 1ps, town halls and in Adelaide Fringe

1985 Nigel Kellaway trains in Japan. Goudsmit and Jones set up Edge (laboratory) in Newtown.

COLLATION BY GENRE OF PHYSICAL THEATRES

Street theatre and physical theatre – Cartwheel Theatre later to become Death Defying Theatre. Shows that toured between 1980-1985 Dr Floyds Fly By Night Medicine Show, Really Interesting Gypsies, Living Newspaper, Discipline and Punish, Riff Raffle, Coal Town. (UTP 25th Anniversary booklet). Every year since this company was formed, continuing in its incarnation as Urban Theatre Projects groups of artists have made work in, toured or sited in Western Sydney. From around 1990, the street theatre was no longer its style or format. Interest in different kinds of physicality in its works have either explicitly or implicitly been important to all its manifestations.

In 1983, a small collective performing a mix of comedy and circus in Newcastle, precursors to Legs on the Wall, Thor Blomfield and Brian Keogh performed ‘Bruce Cuts off his Hand’ for two seasons under the auspice of the Workers Cultural Action Committee. Their participation in the first 3-month intensive training camp led by the Nanjing Acrobat Troupe in Albury-Wodonga was the major catalyst consolidating the continuation of Legs on the Wall. Brian Keogh, Thor Blomfield and Kristen Robinson attended this intensive. Brigid Kitchen, founding member of Legs on the Wall in conversation, July 2005.
Theatre-in Education - Toe Truck Theatre created in 1978, in early 1980's performed seminal works by indigenous playwright, Jack Davis.

Dance Theatre-

Margaret Barr's Dance Drama Group began performing in the 1950's in Sydney continuing up until the early 1980's. Her definition supports the continuing interest in dance theatre fusions in One Extra's work during the 1980's. Dance drama is much more theatre with a capital "T"- and theatre was for her is "a social forum". (Lester 43) The Sydney Dance Company emerged from its dance-in-education roots in the mid-70's, securing ongoing government funding and begun international touring in 1980. Artistic director, Graeme Murphy's most celebrated works, like Poppy (1978), Some Rooms (1983) and After Venice (1984) staged narratives, even if not linear, and represented characters using a fusion of neo-classical and modern dance vocabularies and were billed as dance theatre. In 1978, Poppy was billed as 'a dance-theatre experience'.

The Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre was created in 1978 by Carole Johnson. This company embraced narrative and character depiction in dealing with matters core to their aboriginal constituency. They trained in a fusion of modern American techniques and traditional techniques. Kai Tai Chan mounted dance theatre works on this company periodically until the late 1980's. This company became Bangarra in 1989.

DARC Swan Company, led by a New Zealand ex-patriot choreographer-dancer, Chris Jannides was a small dance theatre, creating narrative dance theatre works from a modern dance base from the mid 80's They had a small studio in Darling St, Balmain.

Independent dancer, Julie Ann Long also referred to another small dance company seen and working in Sydney, Russell Dumas's Dance Exchange. This group was operating from the mid 1970's (Lester:49) Their works were not a dance theatre of the kind others mentioned in this discussion. Their works focussed on the aesthetics of dance movement and eschewed any kind of representation of ideas, feelings or identities beyond this focus.

'Many of us in Sydney miss the work of Russell Dumas and his special attention to bodies and light, cultivated with care over the years, at different times, with lighting designers Margie Medlin, Karen Norris and Neil Simpson. The tender partnership between Jo Mckendry and Nic Sable in Dance Exchange could only have been achieved by working day in and day out alongside each other, over an extended period of time. For me, the work of Dance Exchange rarely fell short of defining moments.' Julie Ann Long Performance Space: some defining moments delivered at the Performance Space Politics and Culture Symposium, Museum of Sydney, November 2004, reproduced in Realtime Vol No 64.

Heightened physicality in actor-groups

The Performance Syndicate - initiative of Rex Cramphorn who drew ensembles of actors many who trained at NIDA in the late sixties and early seventies together to work intensively on European classic texts, to research methods of performing and devising. Very inspired by Grotowski's methods, for training and investigating relations with texts – see Maxwell 2005.

Other groups carrying this Grotowskian influence whose work was seen in Sydney, include Canberra's Fool's Gallery formed and led in 1977 by director, Carol Woodrow. Two full length works Standard Operating Procedure (1980) and It sleeps, It bleeds (1982) toured also to Melbourne's Anthill Theatre and Adelaide's Australasian Drama Festival. Fool's Gallery, were an experimental theatre group committed to intense and long development periods. This often involved members establishing and living/rehearsing in situations in the bush near Canberra (at Captain's Flat) akin to the circumstances of the works that were the starting points for their devising. See http://home.vicnet.net.au/~czazor/ewa's%20cv.doc

The work of Anthill's theatre collective (ANT - Australian Novæau Theatre) was known to a number of artists in Sydney and was broadly considered 'expressionist' in it corporeal style.
ANT under the direction of Jean Pierre Mignon staged the first Australian work of Heiner Muller’s Hamletmachine in 1982. Kidstuff was performed by Anthill at Belvoir St in 1986.

KISS group toured to and performed in Sydney in 1980 bringing Oresteia, Salome and Bon Beau Cher.

Mime oriented
Another collection of Lecoq mime alumni in NSW including Russell Cheek and Claire Teisen collected together in a troupe called ‘Double Take’ using mime, movement and shadow play in works seen in Sydney and Newcastle around 1982. Cheek also went onto to direct devised works deploying Lecoq techniques with Freewheels, a regional theatre group. Four performers went onto form ‘THE CASTANET CLUB’; Stephen Abbot (later to become The Sandman of popular radio fame), Glen Butcher, Russell Cheek and Andrea Moore. Russell Cheek still directs comedic plays on a freelance basis.

Local performer Jean Paul Bell was performing some mime works at the Nimrod in Darlinghurst, e.g. Mimact (1977) and Brandy Mime and Soda (1980).

Puppetry
SKYLARK, Canberra innovative puppet company toured to Sydney through 1970s and 1980s. Audiences mostly children (see Wilson and Milne 2004)

The Compagnie Philippe Genty who is internationally known for their visual theatre first toured Australia, including Sydney in 1984.

ETCETERA formed in the mid 1980’s in Adelaide blended illusion, mime and comedy, Russell Garbutt, Julia Cotton and Carlos Russell. They shifted to Sydney in 1987.


The mime-based works of Lindsay Kemp’s company appeared in Sydney from 1975 to 1982, starting in small non-mainstream venues like the New Arts Theatre, Glebe. The Kemp Company’s The Dream was the last show in the Capital Theatre in the Haymarket before it closed.

Some of the visual Arts informed performance pre 1986
TOLD BY AN IDIOT, Sarah Miller, Adrienne Gaha and Derek Kreckler 1983 –84, The Gap- Trade Union Club, Art Unit, Betaville House.

Derek Kreckler, 1984-85 Last Stand….Standing Still, and Did you hear what he said?, Performance Space, Scene from an unfinished work with 12 Opera Singers, Art Gallery of NSW.
THE PERFORMANCE SPACE
CONFERECE 1987
POLITICS OF THE BODY

(N.S.W. Art Gallery Perspecta Performance Program 1987)

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

SPEAKERS:
Moira Gatens
Helen Grace
Lyndal Jones
Susan Melrose
Charles Merewether
Andrew Murphie
Noel Sanders
Lesley Stern

FILM SPEAKERS:
Felicity Collins
Barrett Hodsdon
Laleen Jayamanne

PERFORMERS:
Libby Dempster, Anne Thompson & Jude Walton: Off The Page
Greg Clarke & Carlos Russell as Beautiful and Georgeous: Clothes Maketh The Man
Peta Sanderson & Neil Stevenson: Balancing Burdens
Jack Cheslyn, Bruce Keller, Sue-Ellen Kohler, Derek Kreckler, Yuka Mitani, Ion Pearce, Jenny Plumstead & Yugi Sone: Telling.
Wendy Harmer
Gregory Hordacre: r dance
Red Weather: extracts from: The Fourpenny Opera

PANELISTS:
George Alexander
Christopher Allen
John Baylis
Susan Dermody
Noelle Janaczewska
Derek Kreckler

Vineta Lagzdina
Robin Laurie
Sarah Miller
Kim Spinks
Terry Threadgold
Geoffrey Winestock
GALLERY ARTISTS:
Joyce Hinterding & Ian Hobbs/Shh1Ratios of Luminance
Video: Documenting a Decade of Difference. Curated by Sally Coucaud.

WORKS BY:
Simon Biggs, Peter Callas, John Gillies,
Leigh Hobbs, Stephen Jones, Jennifer McCamley,
Mike Parr, Rand elli, Sam Schoenbaum & Nan Hoover,
Hill Scott, Julia Tresidder & Anna Munster, Cathy Vogan.

FILMS SCREENED:
Sarah Gibson & Susan Lambert: Landslides
Stephen Cummins: Le Corps Image
Anna Potts: The Film Strip
Tracy Moffatt: Nice Coloured Girls
Bettine Woernle & Meryl Tankard: Sydney An Der Wupper
Laleen Jayamanne: Rehearsing.

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The Performance Space, 199 Cleveland Street, Redfern, NSW 2016 and Spectator Burns, P O Box 330, Strawberry Hills, NSW 2012, Sydney Australia (02) 698 7235.

The Performance Space Conference 1987 was produced by:

Noëlle Janaczewska
Barbara Allen
Simon Wise
Sarah Miller
Sylvia Simon
Vineta Lagzdina
Ruby Davies
Nicholas Tsoutas

Artistic Coordinator
Finance and Promotion Coordinator
Technical Coordinator
Research
Front of House Manager
Consultation
Conference Photographer
Layout, Design

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Art gallery of New South Wales
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The Australian Opera
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Max Burke, General Manager, Australia Council
Artistic Sub-committee, March — July 1987
of The Performance Space

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APPENDIX E: Training places and Performance venues- 1970s – circa 1990

Margaret Barr was still offering training outside of NIDA through the 1970’s. Bodenweiser’s Dance Centre was very active in modern dance and choreographic development on City Road in the CBD from 1960 through to mid 1990’s. Drama Action, One Extra and Sydney Dance Company had long term and stable relations with a particular working ‘studio spaces at the Rozelle Hospital, Wentworth Avenue, Seymour Centre and the Wharf sheds on Sydney Harbour.

Additionally workshop activities in various theatrical movement disciplines brought into use and knowledge amongst the networks of artists available halls across Sydney, including:
several huts in the ex-military depot, Marrickville’s Addison Road Community Centre,
Black Wattle Studios,
Bay St Theatre,
New Arts Theatre in Glebe,
The Edge upstairs theatre,
Stephen’s Hall in Newtown,
Lolly’s Warehouse in Leichhardt,
Darc Swan Studios in Balmain.
Some rooms in the Police Citizens Youth Clubs in Newtown and Glebe were also used. Performers would often borrow or share these spaces. Some studio-like open space was used on campuses of the University of New South Wales and University of Sydney. A number of individuals travelled interstate for training in acrobatics, puppetry and mime to Melbourne and Adelaide.

Summary of public universities’ offerings in the early 90’s revealed little practical arts education in performance of any genre. Most focussed on visual arts oriented undergrads:

Oatley campus of University of University of New South Wales had a dance program for teachers.
UNSW had a theatre undergraduate and some post grad but little practitioner education
Nepean had actor program.
NIDA did not teach any ‘alternate’ practice
University of Sydney, Theatre Workshop hosted a series of artists projects for student study which were observed
Macquarie had academic program in theatre
UTS focussed on media, humanities and art theory study
Art Schools in Sydney-
Alexander Mackie College, later City Art or later renamed College of Fine Arts,
University of NSW
East Sydney Tech, Paddington
Tin Sheds, Sydney College of the Arts
List of Metropolitan Sydney venues for alternative performance, including ‘performance art’ up until early Nineties, as listed by visual –media artist – John Gillies.

1. Inhibodress (Charles St, Woolloomooloo)
2. The Squats (Bourke St, Woolloomooloo)
3. the Church Hall (Bourke St, Darlinghurst)
4. Stanley Palmer Culture Palace (Stanley St, Darlinghurst)
5. ICE: Institute of Contemporary Events (Old Marist School, Darlinghurst)
6. The Gap/Trade Union Club (Foveaux St, Surry Hills)
7. Art Unit (Henderson Rd, Alexandria)

He considered the following ‘Secondary venues’, however a number of dance and physical theatre performers would consider them more important as rehearsal and performance places. Italics indicates those that still present live performance:
Art/Empire/Industry,
Australia Sculpture Centre,
The Brickworks (King St/Pacific Highway),
The Cellblock Theatre (Paddington),
*The Gunnery, (Woolloomooloo)*
Blackwattle Studio, (Glebe)
*Bondi Pavilion,*
*The Studio (SOH),*
*Sydney Town Hall,*
The Paris Theatre,
Tivoli,
all the Art Schools (City Art aka COFA, East Sydney Tech and Tin Sheds @ USYD),
Central Street

Others mentioned by my interviewees include:

Sidetrack at Addison Road, Marrickville
Bay St Theatre
‘Glebe Arts theatre’ or the Atelier, Glebe Point Road.
APPENDIX F: TERTIARY ENROLMENT
- EXPANSION OF AND SCALE OF ARTS STUDENTS IN SYDNEY FROM MID 1970’S

There appears to be the reaching of some kind of critical mass of population reached for a seismic shift by 1980. That there was existing an invested and interested audience that could sustain developments in experimentation in theatre/live forms from the earlier 1980’s as a claim seems to be supported by these stats. An informed and critical local Sydney audience across the arts was a force in the precipitation of contemporary performance from within the local milieu. So that not only were there aesthetic and producer initiatives afoot but that these synergised with changes beyond practitioner networks. It may also account in part for the shifts in the tertiary backgrounds of the artists of the 1st wave in contrast to the 2nd wave that I noted.

Sources:
ABS records on university arts and humanities enrolments between mid 1970’s – 1980’s
Prior to ‘98, DEET web reports.
Current DEST annual stats 2003-04 for comparison.


All university enrolments had doubled between 1965 and 1973. 40% of this growth was in the last 3 years to 1973. There were surges in mid 70’s with population being…

30,665 in 1950
53,663 in 1960
91,272 in 1966
116,778 in 1970
133,126 in 1973 -32 % were in NSW ( table 3.2)
322,098 in 1979 Total uni population had more than doubled in 6 years. 242% precisely**
( so most of this was concentrated in Victoria and NSW so arts population would have to have increased even more so in this period)
357,373 in 1984
420,850 in 1988 - 99,818 were arts students, 40351 were creative arts students
441,076 in 1989 - 98,533 were arts students ( Table 16.1)
485,075 in 1990 – 106,151 were arts students
658,827 in 1997 – 164,804 arts students, approx 4,000 were OS students, 65,986 were creative arts students.

Roughly 31% arts stayed stable proportion of NSW students. 3 of Australia’s largest universities are in Sydney and 2 of the ‘large middle sized’ institutions [Macquarie and UTS] are in Sydney. All carry arts: including performance interested courses,
arts and critical/post modern theory studies 4 out of 5 include arts practitioner education specialisations of some kind. Between Victoria and NSW had 57–59% of all tertiary students between 1979–1997. Tertiary student populations surged again 1988 to 91 - without changes in data collection method. Between 1970 and 1990 the populations at universities (must remember this includes what were called CAE’s) trebled.

Interestingly, there were 88 thousand men in 1973 and approx 45 thousand women. 1988 was the first year where female enrolments exceed mens. (Table 4.1) 1993 (the peak year for contemporary performance scene/performances), there were approx 268 thousand men and 307 thousand women. The proportion of men to women has stayed the same since roughly. Women also constitute the larger proportion of arts graduates throughout the same period. Older and more mature students ie over 30 grew as a subset of all graduates during the same period, exceeding the 19 yo and below by 1994. Women’s enrolment really jumped 87-90 while men’s had plateaued then decreased overall.

**DEET summary 83-97** - seem to have slightly different data collection methods than DEETYA’s sources.

These arts students are what would be called the category of ‘creative arts’ students under current DEST nomenclature.

‘83 —33500
‘88 — 40351
‘90 — 45244
‘97 — 65986

**83-97 all arts students as percentage of all tertiary enrolments**

‘83- 24.7%
‘90- 23%
‘97- 25% but remained single biggest category of enrolments. (2 other categories also climbed in proportion Law 24% and Health had doubled to 11.6% in 1997) By state NSW is the largest tertiary enrolment approx 31%. With Vic and NSW comprising about 57% of total population. South Australia approx 9% of tertiary population and Queensland reaching 12% by 1997.

**Arts Commencement enrolments 89-93 (from DEET sources web marked)**

‘89- 83451
‘90-89838
‘91-98179
‘92- 100346
‘93-103632

Total arts enrolments jumped 1989-90, 57,225 to 61, 825 DEET stats (these vary a bit from DEETYA’s, are end of year confirmed enrolments for funding purposes and include attrition)
DEST statistics 2003 and 2004
(Categories changed so I’ve added Society and Culture to Creative Arts) curiously Law no longer exists as separate trackable category compared to DEETYA earlier collections.

<table>
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<th>NATIONAL</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>% of tot uni pop</th>
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<tr>
<td>Society and Culture</td>
<td>202,738</td>
<td>203,236</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Arts</td>
<td>57,892</td>
<td>59,735</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
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<td>259,624</td>
<td>262,961</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
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NSW has retained its pre eminent spot in quantity of enrolments of students. Sth Aust has dropped to 6.8%. Overall arts/humanities category has slipped as proportion by approx 2%.

There has been a 97,960 increase in arts students between 1997 and 2004. Approx 59% increase while whole uni population increase was 70%.
APPENDIX G- Visits by OS avant garde performance companies

Before the Sydney contemporary performance scene became visible, a number of the key artists saw avant-garde theatre works through seasons of European, US American, British and Japanese companies visiting the Adelaide Festival from the early 1980s. The most frequent but briefest exposure was through festival performances. The most influential and early Australian art festival bringing works of the international theatre a-g was the biennial Adelaide Festival. In the series of interviews and discussions I have had with practitioners in the course of this study, a number of artists alluded very briefly to visiting works. One Sydney performer-maker asserted that seeing works could not change their whole practice but might reflect how a decision might be made along the way during devising. This perspective on the impact of visiting theatres is in contrast to critics and even funding body representatives who cast them as derivative. Unlike in the northern hemisphere where companies and artists shared venues with each other and toured on the same ‘circuits’, especially in the UK and Europe, (Heddon and Milling 2006, 91) the exposure to these artist’s works was limited to seeing single works, unless the artist then travelled to work or study abroad. None did in relation to these artists listed below, except the first KISS (see chap 3). Several groups like ALL OUT ENSEMBLE and TROUPE both in Adelaide and ONE EXTRA in Sydney had extensive bodies of work created before international avant-garde performance works listed were seen in Australia and before these groups migrated to Sydney. Local artists reception was filtered by their own aspirations, existing practices and backgrounds, the possibilities, conditions and constraints of the field they worked in Australia. Ultimately local performer makers had to articulate their own means, methods, relations and processes with whatever resources they could assemble. Being an audience briefly of the international avant-garde is better understood as one inspiration in a cluster of points of departure or references. To grasp the impact of actor-performance, their corporeality and use of staging devices in relations with spectators, it had to be seen live. This is in contrast to viewing published photographic documentation of visual arts works by overseas artists. Directors, writers, performance makers and actors et al had to be part of their audiences. Witnessing the resonances with their own practice of experiments of international avant-garde companies gave cultural confidence to local performing artists by signalling there might be an audience for their works – vital for to create a sustainable field. Sydney artists needed to locate audiences here to gain any profile.

Artists who saw visiting works in the 1980 spoke in terms of recognising things in these performances that they were working on in terms of single ideas or overall strategies or having various concerns confirmed by witnessing these works. No doubt they offered some devices that were borrowed but for the most part these were single ideas or possibilities perceived in these visiting works. Younger second wave artists tended to cite in interview works by Sydney based artists across theatre, visual arts

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2 Adelaide Festival was inaugurated in 1960, Perth’s Festival began 1953. The annual Sydney Festival started in 1976 but until recent years has barely been noticed by the inhabitants of the city.

based installation and dance as offering inspiration or points of departure that they resisted.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Works by international avant-garde referred to in interview with first wave/senior artists. (Only one or two cited not the whole list by each artist. Only 3 artists represented in this list studied SMAT - it)</th>
<th>Ideas that they took away, were memorable or felt confirming of own existing practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1980 KISS tour, Oresteia, Salome and Bon Beau Cher and Crystal in 1982 (Netherlands)</strong></td>
<td>- heightened and stylised expression could embrace diverse sexualities and create heightened fictional world</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1980 and 1982 Flowers and the Dream - Lindsay Kemp</strong></td>
<td>- That there was the possibility of experimental theatre work was not just the preserve of young artists, just graduated. - that the role of a director is not compulsorily the usual text related, or 'auteurish' dominance of usual theatre relations - a viable of alternative to a narrative based theatre was possible and cross-fertilisation of visual arts and theatre</td>
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<td><strong>1982 - Crichot 2 (Kantor) Dead Class - Adelaide Festival</strong></td>
<td>- new possibilities in dance – theatre crossovers - ways of using repeated gestural movement motifs</td>
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<td><strong>1982 Wuppertal Tanztheatre - Pina Bausch Kontakoff, Bluebeard and 1980 - Adelaide Festival</strong></td>
<td>- duration and speed dismantled naturalism and psychologised base</td>
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<td><strong>1984 Theatre Tenkei Gekijyo - Miso no Eki (Japan) - Adelaide Festival</strong></td>
<td>- lack of overarching fable or narrative fruitful use of lack of dialogue or over-elocted voice in speaking with audiences</td>
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<td><strong>1986 The Wooster Group LSD - Adelaide Festival</strong></td>
<td>- simplicity of staging - fruitful use of lack of dialogue or over-elocted expression in speaking with audiences</td>
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<td><strong>1986 Spalding Grey, Swimming to Cambodia - Adelaide Festival</strong></td>
<td>- possibilities in the use of visual staging technologies, particularly video projection</td>
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<td><strong>1986 Laurie Anderson, Home of the Brave - Adelaide Festival</strong></td>
<td>- audience engagement and use of whole site's space</td>
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<td><strong>1988 La Fura del Baus - Suz O Suz (Spain) Sydney Festival</strong></td>
<td>- that sharp strong political debate could be effectively dealt with in bringing together various physical, visual and sound disciplines and modes of communication. - that a physical theatre could communicate through seamless transitions</td>
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APPENDIX H: Chronology of contact between Australian performers in Australian theatre, Tadashi Suzuki and his training method.

1984 Kellaway does the International Intensive at Toga. Alison Broinowski, cultural attaché at Australian embassy introduces Kellaway.

1985 Kellaway returns to Australia, continues his own training alone. Witnesses collaboration on Dinosaur. Sydney Front members become aware of each other.

1986 Sydney Front forms. Training occurs in company during rehearsal periods. Kellaway leads some freelance training also with members of Entr’acte.

1987

1988 The Suzuki Company of Toga performs Trojan Women at Opera House as part of the Mitsui Bicentennial gift to Australia. Sankai Juku is also part of this Mitsui sponsored plan. They perform at Seymour Centre. These performances and some public lecture talks witnessed by members of Sidetrack and some individual performers, eg Deborah Pollard and Katia Molino (then undergraduates at Wollongong) Sydney Front does 6-month residency at Brisbane’s Expo to raise funds for own venture, training with the company in stomping regularly. Sidetrackers begin some invented version of SMAT in their own company training. Afterwards the number of key artists in the first wave train with Nigel Kellaway regularly in Sydney.

1989 Suzuki and his company from Toga bring their rendition of The Bacchae to Melbourne’s Spoleto Festival. Kellaway still teaching freelance open sessions/intensives periodically in Sydney.

1990 Entr’acte’s Memory Room does season at Toga Festival July with Keller, Leiser, Molino, Thibadeau in the cast. Leiser and Molino training intensive while they are there. Contemporary Performance Week #1 includes stomping in training intensives.

Suzuki comes to visit Australia meets with key people working at universities and dance and theatre companies in Melbourne and Sydney. Alan Clark, Vincent Crowley, Sue Kennedy, Joel Markham, Deborah Pollard, Meme Thorne. From Melbourne, Matt Crosby, David Pledger attend residential international training intensive. Regular weekly training of ensemble members is occurring at Sidetrack from this period. Sydney Front trains during rehearsal periods as ensemble is not continuous like Sidetrack. Open courses/cycles being run by Pollard et al in Sydney. Leiser is teaching at NIDA, UWS and Wollongong Universities as guest over next 4 years.

1991 Teacher training masterclass intensive offered for first and only time in Toga - From Sydney; Alan Clark, Michael Cohen, Vincent Crowley, Sue Kennedy, Joel Markham, Deborah Leiser, Katia Molino, Deborah Pollard, Olivier Sidore, Meme Thorne. From Melbourne - Matt Crosby, David Pledger, Bruce Naylor, Peter Curtin trained.

September Katoh Masaharu, master teacher and actor from SCOT runs 2 weeks of workshops in Melbourne in preparation for the Chronicles of Macbeth at Playbox at invitation of Carillo Ganttner. John Nobbs amongst
others were part of this workshop and this work was observed by Jacqui Carroll. These 2 went on to establish a theatre, Frank Productions and training ‘academy’ in Queensland from 1993.
Lech Mackiewicz, Polish-Australian artist from Sydney directs Beckett pieces with cast of SCOT actors in the Toga Festival.

1992 Chronicle of Macbeth rehearses with cast of Australians and one American, at Melbourne’s Playbox theatre. Opens at Playbox in April prior to touring interstate and to Tokyo with Clarke, Crosby, Curtin, Gantner, Markham, Molino, Naylor, Nobbs, Roberts, Sidore and Ellen Lauren from Stage west in cast.

1993 Simon Woods (Qld) studies with Suzuki at newly established SITI in Saratoga Springs, New York State, US. He and Lynne Bradley set up Zen Zen Zo company in Brisbane after Bradley 5-year residency in Japan studying butoh. Studies Suzuki Technique at SITI too. Interested in fusions. Regular intensives and summer schools operated by ZZZ. John Nobbs and Carroll set up Frank Productions in Karnak on rural Queensland coast. In Melbourne, David Pledger with colleagues sets in train 3 physical performance research laboratories in Danceworks studios over 2 years. Then forms NOT YET ITS DIFFICULT, as a company in 1995. All these endeavours are continuing at time of writing.
Sydney Front disbands.
Freelance training continues by members of group trained in Masterclass, including offering at CPW’s at Sidetrack.
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Photographs of Entr’acte works by Regis Lansac. Taken in 1985. They show work in the style of their early work, Refractions, that toured to Adelaide Fringe Festival in 1982.
Ostraka – Entr’acte 1987, Performance Space

APPENDIX N
APPENDIX O: Case study of my own encounter with difficulty, limit and pain in SMAT – When a plié was not a plié

During my training in Toga in 1991, the teacher yelled criticism across the group performing after a couple of sessions, “Don’t jump. Don’t dance Statues”. I was completely flummoxed. I tried not to ‘jump up’. It hurt. I was weak and wobbly. I did not know my body any more. My body’s self-evidential state totally failed periodically over several weeks.

Goto describes the fundamental position in SMAT as ‘a knees bent out into a rhomboidal or “boxed” position’ (1988:200). Some Australian teachers and students call this position a ‘plié’, from the classical ballet term. The term and practice is used widely in Australian dance technique teaching. A plié’s ‘good’ technical execution is often taken from classical ballet into other theatrical dance and movement techniques. I am very accustomed to pliés in a classical ballet context and in various western dance forms [Corporeal/Object mime, Graham, Horton, Laban and Tap]. Pliés are the oldest move in the repertoire of my own personal habitus on which all meaningfulness and my skills have relied. Ballet barre is also a daily training component used to maintain dancers’ preparedness to perform in a number of Australian modern dance companies, like The Sydney Dance Company or the Australian Dance theatre. Dancers do dozens, if not hundreds, of pliés each session. Movement regimes within a number of Western actor training traditions also call a knee bend a plié (Pisk 1975, Sabatine 1983, King 1986)

SMAT’s knee bend is a plié – of sorts. It is not a plie in a dancerly sense. Its immediate biomechanical function differs. In recoiling to push off the floor, plies facilitate smoothly continuous large-scale movements in propelling a whole body into the air or across a space. The knee bend in SMAT serves to cease all apparent motion in stillness. These ubiquitous deep and shallow knee bends derived from noh and kabuki can hardly be called, “Suzuki’s plie”.

I will narrate my kinaesthetic experience of learning a ballet plié from within to give a ‘feel’ of the stark contrast.

I rise out of deep plié in 1st position of the feet pressing into the floor. First with the balls of my feet progressing fluidly to pressing my heels into the floor. I can feel this as a gradual smooth activation of the inner thigh muscles – a firm contraction drawing upwards to propel me up into a spring preparing for a leap or jump or up into a demi pointe relevé (onto the balls of feet, with maximum lifting of the heels). As my heels press, the inside legs drew together straightening under the centre of my hips, chest, head weight. Images of ‘squeezing oranges between the thighs’ were offered to help mobilise the appropriate muscles in the correct sequence. Tracing the vertical plumb line of gravity reversed in an ethereally skyward trajectory fused with each plie’s execution. We practiced pliés slowly to activate the series of inner muscular sensations brought into play in springing up then releasing as we sink into a landing so as to be immediately prepared for the next elevation. The step-by-step activation of muscles in plié practice narrated by teachers literally guides the wilful control of muscles. Sensations were named in order to consciously control them. Later when speed up, the sequence became a springing in time with musical rhythms. Symmetrically in motion was stressed. It was the matter of my limbs, arms and legs, their graceful spatial shaping and line, that took my attention.

As transitions, adjutic to spectacular leaps, pirouettes or arabesques en pointe plies are barely noticed. Plies are even more pivotal in contemporary dance, where continuous motion relies on easy translation of momentum from action to action without stops in fast flowing transference of body weight. Freedom of flow predominates in contemporary dance aesthetics (and ideology) as a metonym for creative freedom of individuals.

The micro interior muscular sensations in a classical ballet plié resemble in some ways ‘pushing into the floor to get out of the floor’ or ‘huppuri-ai’, the notion of inner contradiction of opposite tensions Goto identifies as a core dynamic of traditional Japanese performance practices and SMAT. That ‘Two forces tend to move contrary to each other’ (1988:197) Suzuki elaborates.

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The balance of the two vectors leading towards the sky and the earth, towards the heights and the depths, has been very important in physical expression. Only, in the traditional Japanese theatrical forms, these two forces with vectors contrary to each other meet at the pelvic region, and the energy derived from this tends to radiate horizontally. Therefore, the higher the upper half of the body tries to go, the lower the lower half of the body tries to sink to balance this movement. The feeling that the feet are planted firmly on the ground is, thus, increased. (Suzuki 1991:245/6)

My experience of resemblance between plies and SMAT knee bends was not one of verbal description of two authorising texts, teacherly explanation or purely visual appearance of movements in two distinct traditions. It was a kinaesthetic sense of the similarity of already deeply embedded skills. I did not notice my injection of the springing up and snapping into a Statue. My body bearing ballet plié cultured skills kept translating my execution of Statues without my cognisance. These invisible pliés were the linchpin holding together a cluster of my operating beliefs about how to move ‘well’, about what constituted expressively ‘good’ theatrical imagery and about the diminutive value of stillness in performance. In a particular experience of limits reached, knee bends highlighted the boundary of my embodied knowledge. I recognised the familiar power through my legs that enabled me to rise up out of the squat and kept major tensions out of my torso. This enabled me to breathe, to speak and some space for my imaginings. My entirely European theatrical embodiment facilitated my entry into SMAT, explore and test out other embodied capacities, for example of voice, that no previously silent ballet ‘plié’ practice had ever offered. My reactivated body memory of plies became labile. Now how other spectators might differently feel or see what I was doing in my ‘performance’ on the training floor entered my perception of knee bends.

I offer a narration a SMAT’s knee bend from ‘within’ to highlight the difference.

Knee bends in ‘Statues’ brought about as total stillness as my body could muster. There was no easing into continuous motion. The legs, feet and knees became the way of knowing where my hips were through sudden and short unfoldings from the preparatory squat to a held, not moving figure without straightened legs precariously balanced on the balls of my feet. The knee bend lifted my pelvis. Returning to the full squat felt like dropping my centre down as deep as possible in a readied and steadied stillness, alert for the next sudden sound.

As a centre, my hips organized; where I looked, breath and support for speaking and singing and absorption of shudders. Legs unfolded down from this centre place rather than pushing me upwards. Hands, arms, head, shoulders, chest grew out of this centre. Expression, if any, came through the stillness not flowing from move to move. I could feel my edges, my skin boundary in the moment of ‘stop’ as a porous barrier between myself, the air, the other performers and audience. There was a sense of movement but not of my body as my awareness shifted to any potential for change outside my skin. Readied, I rose from a ‘dead start’. No pre-planned trajectory in rising. It was unknown until triggered by the teacher’s explosive sound cue. My awareness shifted from a bouncing rhythm to intervals between moments. The knee bend in and out of each statue traced a pathway from still point to still point. The trace stopped in my centre displaced off the plumb line in diagonal, twisted and tilted places. Not symmetrically balanced.

Watching the adept, I was aware only of the arrival and sustain of stillness not the transitions. However ‘inside’ each statue, I continually felt internal body twitches in the ‘little dance’ of balancing. (The term ‘little dance’ comes from Steve Paxton, the creator of contemporary dance practice contact improvisation. It refers to the multitudinous sensations of internal motion noticed in giving attention in an unadorned act of standing) On some days, ‘Statues’ was a bigger failure than others. When it worked fleetingly, I felt like a thing made of gossamer stuff. There was a pleasure in this. I did not direct attention to limbs or knee bends. My body felt transparent. My body was stepping over into another territory and felt quite lost, disoriented for extended periods of time. But also patches, glimmers of ‘new’ perceptions and capacities arose returning to the same vocabulary each day. Later Statues resisted me again compelling a more detailed reconfiguration of effort, concentration and energy. After more practice, I perceived finer discriminations in Statues by others. Over subsequent sessions some ‘performers’ became irresistible to watch. All this happened within a matter of weeks.
(The marches and walks also show the difference between a plié and a knee bend in SMAT. When travelling across the stage the knee bend sustained the unvarying height of the centre, keeping it level as the whole body is displaced through space horizontally. Again the knee bend is recruited in keeping the upper body still, free of tensions, twists and shudders as weight transfers form foot to foot, especially in slow walks.)

This was a corporeal struggle as well as a struggle with my theatrical values and culture. The stilled knee bend challenged the most fundamental feelings of my previous ‘game’ and beliefs about the aesthetics of movement onstage. Stillness became action in its own right. I had presumed dynamism and interest depended on people’s explicit mobility. The parameters of my previously imperceptible theatrical tastes and judgement of my non-Japanese acculturated body became available to direct perception. Entry into the SMAT’s systemic approach interrogated these judgements through its corporeal demands.
John Baylis is Director of Theatre at the Australia Council. He has worked in theatre as performer, dramaturg, manager and director since the late 1970s. He was manager of the One Extra Dance Company (1982-86), a founding coordinator of Performance Space (1983-84) and later its chair (1992-93), and has worked freelance with Sidetrack, Entra'Acte, Gravity Feed, Salamanca Theatre Co, and many others. In 1986 he co-founded the Sydney Front, a contemporary performance company that made work until 1993, touring throughout Australia as well as Europe. Most recently he was artistic director of Urban Theatre Projects in western Sydney (1997-2001).

Tanya Gerstle currently head of acting at the Victorian College of the Arts, has worked as a performer, theatre maker, director, dramaturg, research/writer, theatre administrator and teacher in Europe and Australia. She has an honours degree in Theatre Studies, has trained in France with The Roy Hart Theatre Company, in Poland at the Drougie Studio, Wroclaw, in London at RADA and with KiSS: International Theatre Research. In Australia, Tanya has been a performing member of many companies, including: Anthill (Melbourne), Fools Gallery (Canberra), Sidetrack Performance Group (Sydney) and New Moon Theatre Company touring North Queensland. From 1986 to 1991 Tanya was based in Amsterdam creating and performing her own work. She co-created and directed several performance works with groups of physical performers of different nationalities, collaborated with performance poets/singers on projects which toured Europe and co-created and performed Babushka, a physical performance piece which she performed throughout The Netherlands. In England, she directed The House of Bernada Alba by Garcia Lorca, The Book of Quotations for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and 1992: Christoforo Colombo Viaggio Nel Planeta Arte for Plexus International, playing in Rome, Sardinia and New York. In New York Tanya collaborated with Butch Morris, an improvisational jazz conductor, and began her evolving research into improvisational performance structures and their application to performance training practice. After returning to Sydney, in 1990, she continued making new works with multi-lingual, physical performers for companies such as Noroc for Urban Theatre Projects and Sidetrack Performance Group (as well as being Company Manager ‘93’94). During the ‘90’s, Tanya taught acting and performance making at the Universities of NSW, Newcastle and at NIDA, and was invited to The 1998 Adelaide Festival with Hungry, an original work co-written with Deborah Leiser. She was Co-Artistic Director of The Actors Centre in Sydney from 1996 to 1998 and was appointed a con-joint fellow of Newcastle University in 1998. Whilst at the VCA directed projects, many of which have been adapted by Tanya for the stage, include: Angels in America Part 1 and Bright Room Called Day by Tony Kushner, Top Girls and Vinegar Tom by Caryl Churchill, Howard Barker’s Uncle Vanya, The Greeks by John Barton, New Anatomies by Timberlake Wertenbaker, Zivot, an adaptation of Brecht’s Caucasian Chalk Circle, Cassa d’Alba adapted from Lorca’s The House of Bernada Alba, Five Kinds of Silence, a radio play by Shelagh Stevenson, adapted for the stage and Anna Karenina, a re-working of an original adaptation by Shared Experience Theatre Company.

Clare Grant was a founding member of the avant-garde performance company The Sydney Front, whose on-going project was the exploration of physical and theatrical power relations between audience and performer. She has worked as performer and dramaturg with a range of
Sydney-based theatre and performance groups, and with independent artists such as John Gillies, video artist. She was Artistic Director of Playworks, the National Centre for the development of Women's writing for Performance, and for 10 years has been Lecturer in Performance at UNSW, directing new theatre and site-based works. She teaches performance making and writing for performance.

**Regina Heilmann** began her performance work as a collaborating artist with Sidetrack Performance Group. She was a member of the Ensemble from 1990–97. Sidetrack’s training program was based largely on Tadashi Suzuki’s ‘Stomping’ method. The company of 4 performers worked closely with director Don Mamouney and sound designer Peter Wells. The work was physical, visual and political and the aim was to work towards developing Australian contemporary performance. Works include: *Drunken Boat*, *The Measure, Heaven, Idol*, sit.com

From the mid 1990’s – 2002 Regina began to work with independent artists, who shared a common physical performance language through Suzuki training. Suzuki’s influence was visible to varying degrees and filtered through individual’s particular areas of investigation and sensibilities. Such works include *Leni Leni* (with Jai McHenry), *Ferkel* (Deborah Pollard & Chris Murphy), *a room with no air* (Deborah Leiser Moore and Nikki Heywood.)


In 2002 Regina was appointed Artistic Director of *PACT Youth Theatre: contemporary performance practice for young people. PACT* provides opportunities for young people and emerging artists to develop skills and an artistic practice that draws on notions of contemporary performance (including Suzuki training) and is moving towards art-form cross-pollination and hybridity.

**Deborah Leiser-Moore** has been working in physical contemporary theatre since 1989. Her devised solo and collaborative works include *The Memory Room*, *Aqua Azzura* and *Possessed/Dispossessed* (Entr'acte Theatre), *a room with no air*, *HUNGRY*, *The Cool Room* (nominated for a Green Room Award), *HazChem!*, *The Girl Who Wanted to be God* (nominated for the Queensland and Victorian Premiers’ Awards), and *A Thousand Doors A Thousand Windows*. She has toured nationally and internationally. Highlights include the Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide International Festivals, Toga Festival, Japan, Magdalena Aotearoa Festival in Wellington NZ, Sydney’s Carnivale Festival, Performance Space and Belvoir St. Theatre, Melbourne’s La Mama and Beckett Theatres, The International Women’s Playwrights Festival in Athens, Greece, and a residency in Israel with Te’atron HaNefesh.

Deborah has studied in Japan with Tadashi Suzuki, trained in the
work of Etienne Decroux, taught in many universities, presented her work at many conferences and has been the recipient of a number of grants. In June 2004, a compilation video of her work (entitled Memory, Place, Reconciliation and the Body) was presented at the University of Bamberg, Germany, as part of the CDE conference.

Deborah completed a Masters in Performance at Victoria University with Here and There — Then and Now, a video/installation/performance work, which was remounted at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research at Canberra's ANU.

In 2006, Deborah established Tashmadada whose aim is to make edgy and challenging performance works. In 2006 Tashmadada had three new works in development – The Execution of Toto Nakamura (Arts Centre Full Tilt), The Jewish King Lear (Besen Foundation – Victorian Writers Centre) and a musical feast of subversion Wasted Underground (45 Downstairs) which was remounted for further development in February 2007.

In March 2007 Deborah was invited to present her work (as a guest of the Australian Embassy) at the International Congress of Jewish Theatre in Vienna.

NIGEL KEILLAWAY
In a career embracing his skills as an actor, director, dancer, musician and contemporary performance maker, Nigel Kellaway's initial performance training was in music, majoring in piano and composition at the universities of Melbourne and Adelaide. He was the first Australian actor to train with Tadashi Suzuki and his SUZUKI COMPANY OF TOGA (1984-85) and also worked with butoh artist Min Tanaka in Tokyo. Over 30 years, he has created dozens of full-length theatre, dance and music works with companies including the AUSTRALIAN DANCE THEATRE, at London's ROYAL COURT THEATRE, THE SYDNEY FRONT, THE SONG COMPANY, URBAN THEATRE PROJECTS, STOPERA and SIDETRACK PERFORMANCE GROUP. He is presently Artistic Director of THE OPERA PROJECT INC. and continues to work widely as a freelance director and performer.

DON MANOOLEY (artistic director and writer Sidetrack Performance Group since 1979). He was director of Sydney's CPW (Contemporary Performance Week) from 1990 to 1998. He served as President of Sydney's Addison Rd Centre for arts, culture, community and environment for 14 years (91-05). He is a recipient of the Ros Bower Award, Australia's highest profile award for services to art and community. He holds a Centenary Medal for his contribution to Australian theatre. His creative work includes directing, writing, devising, design and sound design. Recent works include... writer/director Sawung Galing a collaborative work between Australian and Indonesian artists, Writer/director of The Pessoptimist adapted from the Palestinian novel by Emile Habiby, Co-writer and director It's a Father for the Cracker Comedy Festival in Sydney and The Melbourne Comedy Festival. He is currently working on research and writing for Seven Pirates a new work concerning the 7 Greek pirates who became Australia's first Greek settlers.

KATIA MOLINO abandoned a promising career in diagnostic radiographs to follow an artistic calling. She studied at the School of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, Majoring in theatre and movement in
1990. Since then she trained in a variety of skills and techniques; corporeal mime, Suzuki actor training, butoh, stilt walking, biomechanics and ballroom dancing. She has worked with many companies including, ENT’ACTE, JIGSAW, NYID, STALKER, MARRUGEHU, SALAMANCA THEATRE, THE OPERA PROJECT, URBAN THEATRE PROJECTS AND KANTANKA. She performed and toured Tadashi Suzuki’s The Chronicle Of Macbeth with Playbox Theatre.

Primarily she works as a performer and devisor, but has also stage managed, designed and made costumes, and directed. She creates her own short solo works, both live performance video, catering to audience with diminished attention spans. Katia has performed in small intimate venues and the great windswept outdoors. She enjoys touring and art that engages the non-rational side of her brain.

**Deborah Pollard** is an, artist, performer and director based in Sydney. Her work focuses on hybrid collaborations with arts and non-arts practitioners. She has created a number of multi-disciplined performance and installation works.

Deborah has performed and written a number of solo works including, *Mother Tongue Interference*, which toured to IMA in Brisbane, Dancehouse in Melbourne and PICA in Perth, and *Fish Out of Water*, which premiered at the Performance Space in Sydney, Australia in May 1996.

Since 1993 Deborah has been working in collaboration with Indonesian performance and installation artists. Together they have created a number of site specific performance and installation works in Indonesia and Australia, most notable is Postcard, 1995, Badai Pasir, 1996, To Eat Flowers and Walk on Glass 1999 and Girt By Sea 2002.

Deborah was the Artistic Director of Salamanca Theatre Company in Hobart, Australia from 1997 to 2000. She changed the focus of this company away from traditional theatre practice to hybrid and new media arts. Projects for Salamanca include Still Life, Reality Check, Ecstasy of Communication, To Eat Flowers and Walk on Glass, and Panopticon.

In 2000 Deborah received a Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship for research in Europe She received the Rex Cramphorn Scholarship in 2001 and an Australia Council Fellowship from the New Media Arts Board 2002/03. During this time she created Shapes of Sleep an installation and durational performance. A development presentation of this work was seen at the Performance Space galleries in Sydney in April 2003 and it recently toured to the UK in 2006.

Most recently she has begun work on her new performance solo Blue Print.

She has also worked with a number of companies and independent practitioners as a director, dramaturg and performer; most notable are Urban Theatre Projects, Soft Core, Riverland Youth Theatre, Performance Space and Version 1.0

Deborah studied with Tadashi Suzuki in 1990 and 91 in Japan and is a recognised teacher of his movement training.
Chris Ryan has consistently informed his twenty-something-year career in the live arts with an obsessional investigation of the performing body. His work crosses several disciplines with ease; from dance to classical and modern texts, self-devised ensemble work to film and video, performer training, directing, dramaturgy and artistic consultancy. Ryan was a founding member of The Sydney Front. He works with Version 1.0 and has worked with Kicking and Screaming, One Extra Dance Company, Sidetrack Performance Group, Stalker and Chunky Moves. As Artistic Director of FACT Youth Theatre, 1997 to early 1999, he initiated the Impact Scholarship Training Program for young people interested in cultural identity and performance, which moves into the tenth year in 2007. He has directed political works with the Australian Theatre for Young People (Borders 2004 & Exiles 2006). He has lectured and tutored in performance at School of Contemporary Arts, University of Western Sydney, University of NSW College of Fine Arts & School of Media, Film & Theatre & Sydney University’s Centre of Performance Studies. He is currently Movement Tutor at Wollongong University and ACTT (Actors College of Theatre & Television).

Olivier Sidore started by studying cinema at Paris VIII University in 1979. After workshops in Paris, he migrated to Australia where he studied at the now Charles Sturt University (Diploma in creative arts, majoring in drama, 1984/85). He then worked in Theatre in education (Patch Theatre Centre, Adelaide in 1986), and with Thalia Theatre Company in Sydney (Break of Noon, Paul Claudel). His frustration in the Sydney theatre scene led him into the painting and music art forms. After discovering the Suzuki Method of Acting exercises through Nigel Kellaway, he participated to the Actors International Training in Toga-Mura (Japan) with Tadashi Suzuki. This led to performing with Playbox production of The Chronicles of Macbeth, directed by Tadashi Suzuki (Melbourne, Adelaide Festival, and Australia and Japan tour in 1992). He then performed in Sydney, went back to Europe and performed in Geneva, and in Europe and the USA. Back in Sydney in 1996, he worked with Sidetrack and Kantanka theatre companies, and then joined the Gravity Feed Performing Group for seven years (1998 until 2005). He is now currently living in Geneva (since 2003), practicing and teaching Tadashi Suzuki’s Acting Training exercises and performing for various theatre companies (Cite, PAR64, Theatre Seraphin in Geneva and T-Ãtre in Lausanne). He is now rehearsing for his adaptation of Bartleby by Herman Melville which he is directing: Bartleby or those without a face (Geneva, may/june 2007).

Mémé Thorne began her career in physical theatre in 1980 with the International Research Theatre Group Kiss in the Netherlands. From 1984 until 2000 she co-created, choreographed and performed with Sidetrack Performance Group. In 1991 and 1992 Mémé studied in Japan with Tadashi Suzuki of the Suzuki Company of TOGA and is an accredited teacher of the Suzuki Method of Actor Training. Her solo works include: Flossing the Bride, CPW 5 and Dance Collection 95; Burying Mother, CPW 6 (Sidetrack) and the Sydney Asian Theatre Festival, Belvoir Street, 1996; Nobody’s Daughter, Sidetrack and the Brisbane Festival (1998); The Spider Witch, Tropicline, for Brisbane Biennial 1999. Other roles include: Salome and Herodius in Oscar Wilde’s Salome, Tropicline; Alex in Griffin’s Songket (Janacezska), the Studio, Sydney Opera House; The Empress in Empress of China, Belvoir Street; Goneril in Harlos’ King Lear at the Bondi Pavilion. Mémé has been a recipient of three grants from
the Australia Council and was invited to participate as an advisor on the Dance Fund (1997) and the Theatre Fund (2000).

**Sidetrack Performance Group Company Profile**

Sidetrack Performance Group was established in 1979 to create innovative theatre reflecting Australia’s diverse cultures. By 1984 the company had already toured widely and won the award for "best theatre" at the Adelaide International Arts Festival. Since then the company has gone on to produce an average of 3 new works per year. Many of its works have won acclaim nationally and internationally. It is celebrated in Australia for its bold, inclusive and innovative approach to theatre making.

The current phase of Sidetrack has produced distinctive work including collaborations with writers and directors, notably Theo Patrikareas, Bill Kokaris, Evdokia Katahanes, Adam Hatzimanolis and Carlos Gomes, adaptations from novels including The Pessoptimist by Palestinian author, Emile Habiby and The Book Keeper adapted from The Book of Disquiet and other writings by the Portuguese modernist poet, Fernando Pessoa. In 2004 the company worked in Indonesia with Indonesian and Australian artists to produce Sawung Galing, a large scale outdoor theatre work which toured 5 Javanese cities. Recent work includes It’s a Mother and It’s a Father presented by the Sydney Greek Festival, The Cracker Comedy Festival Sydney and the Melbourne Comedy Festival. The company is currently creating Seven Pirates based on the true story of how 7 Greek pirates were transported to NSW in 1829 and a new collaboration in Indonesia. Seven Pirates will be presented at the Sydney Opera House as part of the Greek Festival of Sydney in March 2007.