

# An Interview

With Nicola Elliott on the making of *Run!* (2013)

**Conducted by Alan Parker, March 2015.**

PART 3

**[AP]** Often when making work artists are inspired or influenced by particular experiences and/or events (personal or not) that initiate the beginning of the idea or concept for the work. Were there any particular experiences or events that inspired your desire to make a work like *Run!*?

**[NE]** Several of my past works have been very personal. However, I never go into a project intending them to be so. In general, I start a work from either an aesthetic interest, or an emotion-concept combination, or both. In the case of *Run!*, I was inspired by an aesthetic challenge.

I admire Ana Teresa De Keersmaeker's *Rosas danst Rosas*, which she created in 1983, and I wanted to see if I could be in any way close to as good with rhythm and if I could create the interplay between dancer-personality and formalism that she does. That was a formalistic aspiration. Apart from that, I was very moved by a work by Mathilde Monnier and Jean-Francios Duroure called *Extasis* (of *Pudique acide/Extasis*) that I saw at the National Arts Festival the previous year (2012). *Extasis*, originally created in the 1980's, is theatrical and dancerly while also being meta-theatrical and meta-dancerly. Despite being made 30 years ago, it still carries a freshness and a freedom from the shackles of the norm. It feels as though the creators did not rely on pre-existing formats but were brave enough to create exactly whatever was right in each moment of the work. I had these two works very much on my mind as I entered the process of making *Run!*, and I think they are both responsible for a lot of what I tried to do, although, as usual, the process was such that the outcome became its own creature. A further aesthetic starting point, which perhaps is just a starting feature, is the musculature of the dancing leg. In the last decade or so, many other choreographers have exposed the leg too, so perhaps I was unwittingly responding to a trend.

It must be said, however, that for the years 2010 – 2014, due to an injury and ongoing complications in my hips and pelvis, I was in fact not able to run without causing myself injury. Even the slightest impact, such as from tripping or missing a step, would have me in pain and discomfort and back at the body therapist. So for all those years, which were mostly in my late 20's, I didn't leave the ground to jump or run except by accident (and then with bad consequences). Even at the time of writing this, I'm doing only very short funny jogs which involve very little impact; a full-stride run still feels too risky. This probably had a role to play in the work – me probably wanting to live vicariously through the action on stage – although it definitely didn't play as great a role as the aesthetic aims, and I don't think I got much vicarious pleasure out of it anyway.

A further factor is that I felt, at the time of writing the applications to the National Arts Council and to the National Arts Festival, that the notion of presenting women as strong and powerful still carries currency from a funding perspective. It ticks a particular box and I know that organisations need to tick boxes to be able to agree on things. It helps individuals within organisations transcend personal tastes, which are difficult to act on. So I felt I was creating a win-win situation. I get to make the piece I want to make, and here is a clear and relevant box to tick to help make it happen.

**[AP] The title of the work is very simple and striking. The word 'run' clearly denotes action and movement and the inclusion of the exclamation point seems to imply urgency and a sense of rush as well. These are not foreign or unexpected attributes of a conventional 'dance' work. But when experiencing the work, this initial expectation of 'running' and 'action' is much more complex than the title implies. What was your thinking in selecting the title for the work and how does the title add to the experience and/or interpretation the work?**

**[NE]** Sometimes I feel it's right that a title complicates and/or frames a work, adding a layer of meaning, or contrasting the experience of the work so as to create argument or dialogue. Such titles need to have an edge to them, or precise detail in how they relate to the work, and they can often be political, or powerful meaning-making tools. Then, for a different type of work, or perhaps a different process, a title can work like a name. A good name feels right for the person bearing it. It enables them in what they want to do in the world and in how they want to be. Sympathetically, we also sort of grow into our names. Yet no-one's name, however good a fit, can possibly represent or speak to the complexity of the individual at any given moment. Instead it acts as a tool for us to identify and interact with them in order to access their complexity. "Run!" as a title functions in this latter way, I hope.

There is also the practical side of things and that is that the title is chosen, by necessity, before the work is made. I say 'by necessity' because it is much more effective to submit a funding or festival proposal with a clear and defining title, than having to put the confusing 'untitled' or 'title in progress' label (it's confusing because sometimes artists title their work 'untitled' as the finished title). In this discipline of devised choreography, so much of the work is discovered and created via the process of making it. Once again the analogy with a person's name is good: how can parents possibly predict whether or not the chosen name will be right and good for the adult when naming the baby? It's a challenge. Of course it's possible to change the title as one goes along (before the programme goes to print), but I wouldn't change or have changed "Run!".

What I like in particular about it is that it is an activity; an instruction; it suggests a response to something; that it is not simply movement in a vacuum removed from context (as you said, 'run from' or 'run to'). The exclamation mark makes it a verb not a noun, thereby prioritising activity over story. We answer the title right at the start: the dancers come on running, and thus we create the basis of the work. It's a basic de-mystification: it's called *Run!* and we ran. Thereafter, I feel we are free to explore.

**[AP] The music for the work is the result of a three way collaboration between yourself, composer Braam Du Toit and the musician, Mareli Stolp, who actually performs and plays the score in the work. As a choreographer who works strongly with process and collaboration, how did the score develop from concept, to composition, to performance? In what ways did this process correlate or dialogue with the creative process of developing the choreography with the performers?**

**[NE]** I had wanted to work with Braam for several years. When this opportunity arose the score wasn't necessarily going to be for piano, and I left it fairly open in the funding proposals. The piano was Braam's suggestion and I was very happy. I am always looking for the most paired down aesthetic or form. Once one has that, uncluttered by too much initial variety, then the scope of infinite possibilities become more tangible and accessible. A score entirely produced by a single live pianist was a tangible uncluttering, and also allowed me to hint at the Dance/Ballet narrative of the piano accompaniment.

The final score is Braam's original creation, but the process of getting there involved Mareli improvising according to tasks I set in rehearsal and us sending that as inspiration to Braam. I also sent him many notes, which were probably more confusing than anything else as the work was still developing. He took these ideas from the improvisations and the notes and composed several exquisite works, which connected in parts to our explorations but were also completely transposed into his compositional language. As I see it, he explored subtextual

elements and connected strongly with the undercurrent of beauty and fragility found in the thoughts and feelings that the work was developing. We worked separately, although he saw a rehearsal and I sent him some video footage of the sections as they were developing. It was a very challenging process because I wasn't working through story, meaning or effect at all, but purely through form, and even then the rules of that form were not always clear. Braam usually composes for theatre, which would have some narrative or at least an objective concept on which to rely. Because I felt instinctively that this work would fall between genres, I had very little vocabulary with which to communicate my needs or ideas. For instance, at the start of the process I didn't know where I needed music, for how long or how many distinct sections there would be in the piece. Ultimately I was asking him to create the text of the score that I could craft and weave into the performance, which is indeed what happened, but it was via a very roundabout method of direction from my side.

So, while he wrote certain pieces for certain sections (once we had sections) he wasn't prescriptive about it and I didn't always pair them with the section he was thinking of, choosing to problematise the music-movement connection rather than create immediate synergy. In some cases, I stretched and pulled them in a similar way to how a director manipulates text to tease out the particular meaning she wishes to highlight. Braam came on tour with us, and the 'prepared piano' section (where Mareli puts screws and other bits into the piano in precise places) was implemented there. He supported my direction of the music enormously, and took it further in his notes to Mareli. Ultimately it was a fantastic collaboration which produced components integral to the essence of the piece itself.

While not having the absolutely final score until near to performance was challenging (and probably vice versa for Braam), it was never my intention to choreograph to the music. I created the movement score that I wanted and then allowed it to dialogue with the music. They are two different characters in the piece and to a large extent their conversation is the work itself.

**[AP] The role and use of music in the work is very layered. The music is never simply atmospheric, or merely complementary to the dance, but always, it seems, in dialogue with the other elements of work (the space, the performers, the dancing, the mood). It seems to occupy a liminal space in the work, oscillating between being 'transportative' and emotional (as music often is) as well as practical and material, emphasising its own 'liveness' and function in the work. How do you use the score in the work?**

**[NE]** Yes I think the word 'dialogue' is good in describing the way the music works in the piece. The accord between the music and the movement only comes in small snatches throughout and then finally at the end of the piece. The two media occupy different temporal spaces for most of the first parts. This was important because the work requires that you take nothing for granted, least of all the relationship between movement and music, and I think we are quite clear about that in the early sections.

Despite the initial separation, however, the music is allowed to affect and infect the space, the performers' journeys and audience's journey. This is one of the colossal strengths of Braam's craftsmanship. His music is so transportative that it feels not only emotional, but almost 'spiritual' sometimes. He wrote the score with specifically Mareli in mind, having worked with her many times before. He knows her incredible technical skill and perfectionist attitude, but also her emotional depth in performance, which one accesses clearly throughout but especially in the solo piano moment, which is the second section of the work. Having this depth of emotional experience via the music allows the dancers to be able to make the expression of their own emotional journey subtle, which ultimately makes it more powerful. They are reflected by the music, they don't need to create that part from nothing.

In terms of how I used the music in the work, it is very much about dialogue. The music, via its emotional quality, transports us, as you said. It engages our emotions and textures the way we experience the present moment. Having the pianist live, means that we can undercut that experience with the tactics of, for instance, breaking the flow (interrupting her playing) and

revealing the mechanism (revealing that the transportative experience is in fact constructed). It's the push-and-pull of being drawn out of the immediate moment via the effect of the music and being thrust back into it that creates the liminality where both can exist together.

The way music is used in the work is central to the meaning and hopefully to the effect of the work. *Run!* is, I think, at its heart, a process of finding sure footing in unknown or even treacherous territory. As an analogy, the title offers this: in order to run, one has to have a firm foothold on something. *Run!* doesn't offer this firm foothold straight away; it's kind of a process to find it. I think when the work has impact it's because the individual audience member has found a personal 'sure footing' somehow via the course of the work. It's an emotional or energetic thing. But one does sort of feel, "yes I can spring off from here" (whatever 'here' may signify to the individual), "I am open to this movement, expression or development within myself" at some point or perhaps by the end of the piece. Or perhaps it's some version of that. I can't obviously say for sure, but that is my experience and I suspect it's similar for some others too. The oscillation of the music, as you said, between being transportative and emotional and being practical and material as well as the delicate way it dialogues with the movement, is central to creating this experience because it both moves us and then grounds us repeatedly throughout so that ultimately the emotional openness (the firm footing) that we have is not in some other place but is in fact grounded in the here-and-now. The transportative and the material are one and the same by the end of the piece.

There is one more thing and that is the discourse of the piano accompanist in a dance environment. First of all, a live pianist gives the performance a flexibility that recorded music doesn't: quite simply, Mareli watches the dancers closely and mostly matches her timing to them (as opposed to the other way round), which allows for small variations from performance to performance. Then, in terms of discourse, the live pianist raises the 'ghosts' (as Lepecki would say) of Dance with a capital D, making the presence of ballet tangible like a perfume. This helps to bring about the lens of Dance from the perspective of the audience, which enables the work to be framed and therefore to have a conversation with history.

This means that part of the firm ground underneath our run becomes, in no particular order: the choices of aesthetics; the politics of representation; politics of the female dancing body and of presenting the (female) body as an object to be viewed; the hierarchy of dance language and its perceived connection to notions of grace, beauty and stage-worthiness; the value of experience as being at the top of the hierarchy of meaning-making. While the piece, as I said before, possibly falls between known and accepted genres, it ultimately finds its place in all of these things, even if that place has been newly created and therefore is not quite understood yet. The music, its effect, liveness, and conversation with history, is a significant part of this effect.

**[AP] The performers in the work seem to exist in an equally liminal space. They often appear as some kind of 'hybrid': 'themselves' but also not themselves; 'sporty' but also 'animal'; graceful but also awkward; serious but also playful; 'otherworldly' but also firmly rooted in the real space of the theatre. What is this hybridity to you and what does it bring to the experiencing of the work for the audience?**

**[NE]** I'm glad that you've read those different qualities. I feel that this aspect, what I generally call the 'push-and-pull', is the central device of the piece and draws together the intended experience of the audience with the 'feminist' or feminist-related readings that may occur. It's difficult to know where to start in answering this. Perhaps it's best to start with the heightened sense of presence, which is one of the main effects that I hope to achieve within the audience via the performance of the work.

As a student, when I worked with Brink Scholtz, she referred often to the following tactic, which I think came from Andrew Buckland's teaching: if you want to go left, go right. What this means is that often the opposite of A can draw attention to, or create the effect of, A better than if you present A itself. In order to draw attention to the particularities of the individual, use unison, for instance. This is a very useful tool in theatre language.

So in order to draw attention to the 'real', one has to be momentarily transported away from it. In order to feel the effect of the transportation, one has to be pulled back from it. Presence in *Run!* is a very delicate tipping point: leaning too much one way and it's lost; leaning too much the other way, and it's still lost; simply staying in one place and nothing happens. Presence, at least in *Run!*, is created by a dialogue (a push-and-a-pull), because it is both an effect as well as an awareness of the effect. It works just like balance – to experience balance one has to be both in balance and out of balance at some point. It is not a fixed place. It's a becoming, a place of constant negotiation or flux.

This push-and-pull is something I feel strongly in both *Rosas Danst Rosas* and *Extasis* but in very different ways. In *Rosas*, the 'natural' gesture is made unnatural through extreme unison. In *Extasis*, constructs involved in the theatricality are made obvious and so the effect, what is transporting the audience, is revealed to be constructed at the very moment that it has effect (very similar, or perhaps even the same as, the Brechtian 'alienation' effect). This creates the sort of liminal space or constantly negotiated, constantly becoming, hybrid that I aim for in *Run!*.

The devices I used to create this hybridity can be seen in terms of patterning: set up something that can be read in a particular way and then just as it becomes a pattern (ie something to trust, to settle into) break it with something else. This happens frequently in the activity on stage. A stark example is the following three activities which occur one after the other: the performers bend over and push their hands through their legs (the shape of their hands possibly suggesting the vagina), followed abruptly by running to bash their hands against the back traverse causing ripples along the cloth (drawing attention to the 'reality' of the venue), followed by hand gestures that seem to imply running their hands through a puddle of water and then shaking that water off (igniting the use of the imagination in seeing the water, in the way that mime usually works). The way of reading, the pattern, is set up and then broken.

It also applies to the use of design. So for instance, the make-up has a particular effect. It suggests a transformation, a push away from the 'here-and-now' and towards a fantasy. But that fantasy is not supported, it's even undercut, by the choreographic devices, which draw us into the material present.

If there is a pattern, it is breaking that pattern. It's swimming against the current. It's refusing a fixed place of reference. For some audience members, especially those who seek entertainment, this is really frustrating. Being entertained in a traditional way usually implies being able to settle into something, or being drawn along some particular way. *Run!*'s way is a particular way, but it involves hybridity, liminality, and so any 'settling into' is done with some difficulty. For the audience who respond well to the push-and-pull, who in fact find just such a place entertaining in the sense of a becoming being a place to be transported to, the work is deeply gratifying. It becomes an expression of beauty, or a reflection of something inside one that is seldom reflected or created by dance or choreography as we often see it in mainstream dance performance. It stimulates the emotions, sometimes without explanation. This can be the effect of the performance.

Then to return to a previous point: As I mentioned, I feel the hybridity relates to the 'feminist' reading of the work. I enter into what I am about to say with a great deal of hesitation as it involves some stereotyping; however, I find this reasoning useful when trying to make the piece more accessible to audience members who haven't before thought about presence as an end unto itself. Some audience members ask me why certain things occur on stage, why the work as a whole is so awkward (music being separate to movement, etc.) and what it all means. To start talking about presence is not useful here: if they haven't felt it then it didn't exist for them and I can't tell an audience member that they should have felt something that they didn't feel. The answer that is usually most effective is to say that archetypally speaking the feminine energy defies patriarchal categorisation. The feminine is ultimately unpredictable in our world because our world is patriarchally dominant. Of course, this answer is largely untrue: I did not create hybridity, contrast or disjunction in order to represent the feminine. The

hybridity is an effect and an awareness relating to presence. But if that effect or awareness didn't happen, then it didn't happen and another connection needs to be made in order for the work to be processed by the audience member. In order that they are not left 'out in the cold'. This is what we mean when we say that the work is 'open to interpretation' or 'you decide what the work means'. We mean that the experience of the audience member is never wrong. The reading or the interpretation or the understanding might be wrong, but their experience is always right. If their experience is to reach for representation, I think it is right to honour that. And from a perspective of representation, connecting the hybridity, push-and-pull or disjuncture (however it is experienced) to the reading of the work as a 'feminist' statement is not wrong. Archetypally and within a patriarchal structure, the feminine energy is unpredictable and uncategorisable. It is the chaos and the anarchy. So this is something that is offered by the work. However, the process of representation is not the (main) goal or intention of the piece.

**[AP] The performers in *Run!* do not move in any conventional or clearly discernible dance lexicon, but instead dance a rich vocabulary comprised of pedestrian and idiosyncratic movement, games/tasks, and deconstructed 'steps' and/or 'motifs' sourced from conventional balletic and contemporary styles. Can you comment on the language in *Run!* and your intentions in creating it?**

**[NE]** The movement language needs to bring into the audience's mind some areas of discourse – what Lepecki refers to as “ghosts” in his book, *Exhausting Dance* (2006). I mentioned earlier the need to find a 'firm foothold'. Part of it is finding firm footing in the territory of Dance with a capital D, and in the aesthetics of presenting the female body. Thus the movement brings into our mind, or refers to, Dance, sport, the animal/human difference, and womanhood. The movement does not necessarily accurately or completely embody these things, but points to them so that they exist in our minds: engaging them by referring to them.

Then, in a much more concrete way, the movement needs to create proximity, needs to engage space, and needs to stimulate and then undermine the transporting journey of imagination and representation that the audience is lured into every now and then.

The way I assembled the movement was to think of everything – dance movement, pedestrian movement, spatial formation, stillness – as activity. Everything has a basic function in the work. It is always activity. Somehow, and I'm not sure how to articulate how, this is a different mentality to thinking of movement as dance, because, I think, 'movement as dance' can involve 'movement as symbol' or 'movement as storyteller', and this pulls us too much away from the here-and-now; whereas 'movement as activity' is pure here-and-now, regardless of whether you're playing a game or executing a pirouette.

**[AP] In many ways the work challenges its own viewing and spectatorship by challenging the expectations of the audience. The performers are overtly aware of the audience and of the audience watching them, of the stage space and theatre context in which they are performing. *Run!* does not give the conventional dance viewer what they expect when they watch a dance work. It seems to acknowledge this expectation but then offers something else instead. In what ways do you play with, challenge and entice the audience in the work and what is it that you aim to offer the audience in experiencing the work?**

**[NE]** The work proposes a different way of experiencing dance to the traditional Western way. It asks for active engagement from the audience and it basically backs up the opinion that you can have a different experience to the person next to you. We allow you to have a subjective journey. We are not going to pretend that sitting in row 10 is the same as sitting in row 1. It's not the same experience. It's the same source, but not the same experience. (Incidentally this work only works in an intimate venue in which proximity can be felt and the gap between the audience and the stage is only imaginary, as opposed to the stage being elevated).

Possibly one of the things the work does offer is to find remarkable, even wondrous, the construct of theatre. It is to wonder at how a material experience – not only a transported one – can drive emotions. How self-aware, exposed, constructed experience is the story that moves us, without explanation. As I mentioned, those who are moved by the piece usually don't know why. I'm not sure that I know why in a definitive way. I know that it has something to do with this becoming, and with having the becoming happen to you, with you, in your presence in a way that is self-aware or at least unmasked in its constructedness. It's easy to understand why people may not like the piece, but it's trickier to explain why they do. I think that perhaps we don't have the vocabulary in mainstream dance appreciation to be able to explain works that function in this way.

So, to answer your question, the work can be explored at several levels, including presence, an expression of (an untraditional) beauty, and representation. Any and all of those levels are fine places to find oneself, as far as I am concerned. From my perspective, the work has failed when it is only experienced as subversive, and that sometimes happens. When that happens, I feel like a chef who has not been allowed to ask how a patron likes their meat cooked and it is sent back because it's over or under cooked: If I knew I was creating for you in particular, it would be a different work, and I can only feel sorry that we missed each other.

**[AP] Your choreographic process is so much more than making movement and turning ideas into physical form. What does 'process' mean to you when making a work? What were some of the key or fundamental aspects of the process that led to the creation of *Run!?***

**[NE]** Yes, choreography might involve and include making movement but I certainly don't restrict it to that. Perhaps, by illustration, I can talk about three points that are fundamental to my process, namely practicality, immersion and collaboration.

I'll begin with the idea of practicality. The realities of where one is working, with whom and for how long, what aspects of the project are supported (usually referring to budget), where and how the project is going to culminate – these aspects are very influential in the work. I don't mean this from a quality perspective, but rather from the perspective of content, form and tone. The practicalities surrounding the work influence the work itself. This is something to be embraced.

That's one of the reasons why I don't seek out a company or permanent collaborators. I think it's valuable to create a new set of circumstances for each project. Of course, this also has its drawbacks and one sometimes finds oneself reinventing the wheel. I highlight this idea of practicalities because it's often overlooked. It's important to consider where one works (what is the ethos of that environment), with whom (what instruments are you bringing to the orchestra), when one works (spread out or intensified, daytime or evening), etc. Sometimes one has control over these things and sometimes one doesn't but the point is that they influence the work.

The second point is to be able to create a time for immersion in the work. The nature of my job as a freelance artist and dance educator is that I wear many hats in one day. If I am making a work, I need to create a space to be immersed by an idea or a feeling. This is a real balancing act because my other jobs often require a different energy to what I might be exploring creatively. When I get into rehearsals, I prefer several weeks of full-day rehearsals. Before and during that time, journaling is also effective. I feel the most secure in what I'm making when I've made time to really just think and think about the work, to plan and to scrap those plans and to plan again.

The other side to this idea of immersion is that, inasmuch as I need to create time for thinking about it, the piece is actually also always with me. I have a little notebook that I carry around with me where I can scribble ideas as and when they come. There is a sense of unblinking, which is important: Anything can be inspiring, not just what you think should or will be inspiring.

Onto collaboration: Rehearsal is not about executing premade ideas but actually about discovering and creating them. Most of my works come from a feeling that I personally experience, a sense of an aesthetic world, maybe a few images, and crucially, the cast members as I see them in the work in my mind. If I start a work from scratch I will assemble a cast with a great deal of care, thinking about the different qualities that I feel each individual brings. If I'm commissioned by a company, I ask to have pictures and names and hopefully to speak to the company members before I start. People are like instruments and a group is like an orchestra – the ultimate overall sound is made up of all the different, particular sounds from all the different, particular instruments.

The way I work with performers engages them collaboratively. The traditional model of the choreographer teaching dance steps to the dancers is not how I work. Making movement for me is much less about inventing steps and much more about inventing tasks. Together with the dancer, I make movement from improvisations and from giving the dancers tasks to respond to. I almost never dance in rehearsals. This is partly because of the injury that I had, but mostly it's because I find it much better to invent the movement on the body that will be doing it than on another body, because the way that the individual reads is part of the choreography. A different body with a different reading is a different piece. And also I can see things much more clearly on someone else than I can feel them on my own body. So, particularly in the material-generating part of the process, the performers inject an enormous amount of their own ideas and creativity, via tasks and improvisations, into the work and the work can really be influenced by what they bring to the table.

Part of the choreographic process for me is thinking about which task, process or rehearsal experience will create the necessary environment for interesting material to be generated. This can get quite particular to the individual. Jori, for instance, creates well during improvisation, so I tend to use more of that when I generate material with her than I would with other dancers.

What this basically comes down to is that the work and its process are interlinked. The process is never simply execution; it's always investigation. The process of making material for *Run!* was very layered and scattered, but ultimately divided itself into two different approaches. On the one hand, I worked formalistically, exploring task, space and rhythm in quite a dry and detached way. We would count things out, use a lot of repetition and strip movements to their barest, simplest versions. There was a lot of geometry, lines, numbers, repeating things and changing only one thing slightly, essentialising movements, instructions such as 'walk for 21 steps, pause for 5 beats, do phrase A, adjust clothing for 2 beats', etc. A lot of crafting, repetition, memorising. In this approach we didn't really discuss meaning, I was just looking for effective structure and the dancers were very absorbed in getting it right, and I was very absorbed in clarifying what I wanted.

The other approach was to explore meaning and symbolism. I brought along tasks, experiences or concepts that aimed to take us all through a bit of a journey of self. Sometimes the intended outcome was simply to create an interesting movement phrase that came from somewhere within the self (so it was really just about creating language), and sometimes it was about opening a door to see what would come through. In one of the first sessions we had I took them through a visualisation to 'meet' an imaginary animal and explore its being and way of movement and we ended up with animal-inspired movement vocabulary (bits of which are scattered throughout the work). Later on I played some stories from *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, for instance, and there was a session in which I took them through a process of creating movement explorations based on or inspired by women they know. We considered the female body and explored images and movements with that in mind. We looked at footage of animals in the wild and considered what we were doing in terms of their experience of space, interaction and proximity. (For instance, when the dancers run around the space and hit the curtains – that came from gorillas beating the trees to assert territory). None of this symbolism was intended to come through in a direct way to the audience in terms of representing a story, it was more about layering the performance language.



I kind of juggled these two worlds: on the one hand we were crafting dry language into intricate patterns, and on the other hand we were dipping down into some fairly archetypal reservoirs of knowledge, symbolism and awareness. This felt contradictory and I think it's central to the piece. In some instances of the final product, the two worlds overlap. So for instance, in the gorilla-territory example: the activity is both asserting a territory and drawing the audience's awareness to the real tools of the theatre: both representation and deconstruction in one activity.

The process felt instinctively or subconsciously right but there was certainly a lot of doubt in my conscious mind, and the performers also sometimes felt uncertain. I struggled to find the right words to describe where I was hoping we were going when the performers had questions. I remember Adriana was champing at the bit at one point, wanting to know more solidly what the piece meant, and I didn't have satisfactory answers for her. And Jori at one point felt trapped in the unison and didn't have access to the layered experience. I remember I kept saying to them that 'this is not a dance piece, it's not about reification' but it was hard to articulate what it *was* about. I knew instinctively that what I was aiming for was not simply reification or representation, despite the unison and the symbolic journeys. Even though they took my direction and trusted me, I'm pretty sure that they only understood what I really meant during the experience of the performance. The reason for this is that the piece needs an audience to interact with; it doesn't function on its own. During the process of making the piece I didn't have the vocabulary to articulate this properly. I just had to keep trusting that where we were going was where I wanted to go.

**[AP] Thank you!**

