Reflections on Stony Creek Collective

a collaborative project exploring multi-artform responses,



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OMEO DANCE www.omeodance.com

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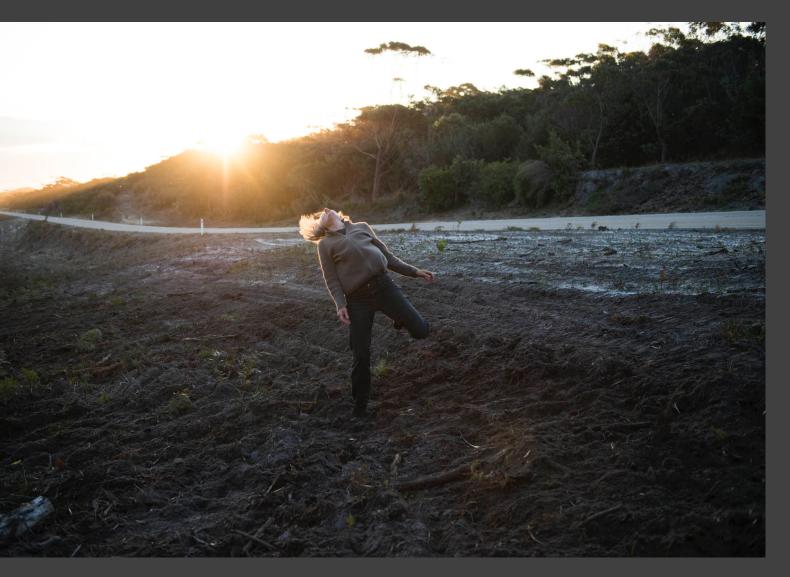
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I work in three local sites where rare flora and fauna are being destroyed: a logging field, a burnt forest and a road-widening construction. I walk the sites, investigate the exquisite remnant flora and document their destruction in notes and dances. I dance on site, sometimes for hours, often accompanied by Lisa. She photographs me. Or my partner Andrew comes and videos me.

The process is lumpy, the emergent dances are invariably unfixed. Three strands are emerging: a fade out dance of whiteness and oblivion, of erasure and extinction, where images arise from the dust as papery skin or a body full of sand, and where the body is comforted by its release to ground; a second strand is of perpetual horror, like The Scream of Edvard Munch, we are stretched to our limits, in permanent shock at the muscles, machinery and men; and there's an absurd strand, emerging in a playful dance I call, *going nowhere*, pathetic, hilarious, useless human striving.







Lisa moves in closer and closer, photographing me from behind, beside, underneath. A complicity develops, increasingly intimate. Tracked by her gives me an 'audience' to perform to. Unlike being held in place by a fixed camera, I am free to roam recklessly.

My dancing burns with our shared agony over the senseless, environmental destruction all around us, and yet holds itself lightly apart with a performative transparency. We are devastated at the result.

Back in the shed or studio I sink into the traces of materials gathered. In response, choreographic devices arise such as *prolonging* odd bits of movement, or *disturbance* to rupture the flow. These are not new choreographic processes for me but with *a body full of sand* they lead me to new dances. I notice images coalesce and imbue my body as I dance. I observe a palpable difference between holding a mental image with which to create a dance, and what I am enjoying here, which is creating the dance from *within* the image-sensation, where the devastated forest site is encountered within my dancing body. Perhaps this is to do with where the artist sits... The experience of dancing this way is almost without context other than the forest site itself. I'm not somewhere looking at it. This body is all there is.



December 2020

Stony Creek Collective is inextricably linked to covid 19. We are learning to let go of what was.

What happened? You may well ask. The most horrendous bushfires we have ever seen tore through the places we grew up in and have loved like family. This was not on our project plan. It changed everything. The poet/activist spiralled down, dragging me with her. Grenades and bombs were dropped, steel walls erected, until, once safely barricaded inside her concrete bunker, she could proclaim the one close to her, an ambitious, extractive colonial industry.

Have we identified the processes required for multiple creative outcomes? The answer to this is bound up with the processes required to live here now in the full and undeniable knowledge that we ourselves have ruined this once beautiful land. The bushfires are ours. The deforestation is ours. The virus is ours. Our land-use practices are ours, inherited, transplanted here. Similarly, our artistic practices are built on our own and others' practices, forming foundations for the journey into one's own oeuvre. Processes accumulated and transformed over a life-time act as a buoyant harness to step off once more into the unknown. But in 2020 the harness broke.

The processes required for living are now bleeding into the processes required for making art. There is no realisation, no object, no installation. Fluid, entangled, never ending, this *is* the outcome. Might this become a philosophical treatise on how the colonial born squander the rich bounty they plunder, and in a few short generations, turn it all to ash? 85% of Australia's south-east forests burnt in the summer of 2019/2020. Billions of plants, animals, birds, insects, lizards burnt to death. Yet clear fell logging, removing all living things from the forest, resumed 6 months later. We are exhausted. Nobody has the energy to do anything. Am I unwell or is this covidnormal? Ideas are easy to have, but every time we attempt to realise them, they fizzle. And yet, opportunities are endlessly popping up if we notice them, are ready to shift, lightly, easily. No baggage. Herein might lie the process required for today's creative outcome.

My flat surfaces all laid down in the cool dirt not thinking not managing not inventing How to write about being in the dance?

When I am able to write it, it no longer interests me, it has already happened. So, I try to write from within the dance-as-it-is-occurring, catching each new dance concept by its slightly familiar shape to a previous dance that I have succeeded in wording.

I was practicing being present by attending to each and every minute change occurring in the body and delaying every movement until my attention was seated in behind its unfolding.

But even this process, might limit the artist now...

As these words fall out of my dancing body, I realise I am in a perpetual process of opening to the new - that which asks for perpetual, unplanned disruption. This morning for example, I find myself sustaining extreme, angular positions, something I would never do, and launching into large arcs of movement without attending to their beginnings, also something I would never do and yet my 'choreographer' delights in pursuing the circus, her thick layers of practice relishing the sting of rupture. Dancing might not be what we thought it was, or what I thought it was, before 2020.

This morning I heard her say 'technique is false'. I inquired further... 'technique is a false friend to the artist'. There is no perfect technique. We (my choreographer's guide and I) are not interested in perfecting a technique, even and especially, our own techniques. Our artistic satisfaction is in going beyond them. Yet, I need my techniques in order to go beyond them. Techniques such as: radically changing the tone during a movement; delaying responding until that part of the body is saturated with the imagination; sinking gently then be followed; maintaining a continuous flow without stopping so that materials continue to arise; etc. I am busy adding on to these tools and then they need to be expanded, distorted, prolonged, inhibited... Stretched and recombined they continue to lead me to new ground.

This is where the artistic pleasure is for me

Adding to tools and techniques this way is like domesticating the new from the wild. This leads me back to nature. How we white Australians are continuously incorporating the wild into our domestic order, folding it in, mowing it back, packaging it up, burning it down. Perhaps this is what it is to be 'white Australian'.

It is what it is to dance here.



