

A review by Rosalind Crisp of her WAG/Chunky Move residency, 23 June – 9 July 2019

What did I explore through this residency?

The Wag/Chunky Move residency has been an extremely valuable time for me to continue the exploration of a danced lecture dealing with the ecological peril Australia faces and how dance might respond to this.

I met and exchanged with a number of local artists and community members in conversations, open studio practices, planned showings and spontaneous exchanges.



I alternated dancing in the studio/gallery with dancing at local sites of environmental significance and undertook research into local environmental issues. I deepened development of processes for dancing that invite a responsiveness to the place I am in, both at Warrnambool Art Gallery and at Chunky Move studios. I investigated historical facts about the materials of the respective buildings and the histories of the surrounding sites that have endured significant ecological rupture, fragmentation or restoration since colonisation.

What did I gain from partaking in this residency?

The gift of this residency was paid time and space to fully focus on my artistic work, free from the distractions of making a living. In Australia, this is precious. The generosity of Ren, Antony, Kristy and the other South West artists who spent time with me, was profound. Sensing that my dancing touched people, was wonderful. Being in another regional area, in a sense bypassing the city, was exhilarating. Melbourne has pull and power as the centre of Victoria's arts, so to jump over this and go west and meet deeply caring and engaged people was extremely affirming as a regional artist myself. I am left with a very strong desire to continue this dialogue.

This residency has nudged into existence some powerful new thoughts and ideas in my eco-dance practice. They build on my recent research in East Gippsland and thirty years of dance experimentation. Most significant are the deepening links between my eco practice and my arts practice.

FORGETTING

Where are we? What was already there? This is a question I can ask equally of a place and of my body. What first flickers of movement sensation are already occurring? What plants are covered over by this urban dance studio or beginning to reappear in this decimated swamp?

DISTOPIA

There are more domestic cows in SW Victoria than native animals

DISTURBANCE

a deadly force, or a regenerative one? Interrupting my own process with a "visit" to Antony in the next door studio dislodged and stimulated us both. The jumble of disconnectedness at Tower hill and the powerful work of visual artist Hobie Porter and his *The Tower Hill Project* inspired me enormously. Juxtaposing Porter's work, exploring the actual sites, dancing, talking, writing... led me into the geographic depressions that wetlands are and the enduring colonial attitude to wetlands as dumps for unwanted consumer junk, chemicals and cowshit.



*Suburbia rings the wetlands
clings to the soft lip
greedy for a view*

*This swamp was a tip
severed at the neck*

Shit runs downhill

How did my research relate specifically to SW Vic?

In 1788 the first 9 dairy cattle arrived in Australia, 2 bulls and 7 cows. They soon escaped into bushland. By 1794 they had become a feral herd of 61. By 1891 there were 1,000,000 cows in Australia.

99% of native grasslands in the South West have been replaced by English pasture.

I made numerous visits to Tower Hill and other wetlands around Warrnambool, sometimes led by locals I'd met, sometimes following my nose.

I danced in some of these sites, at times videoed by Ren.

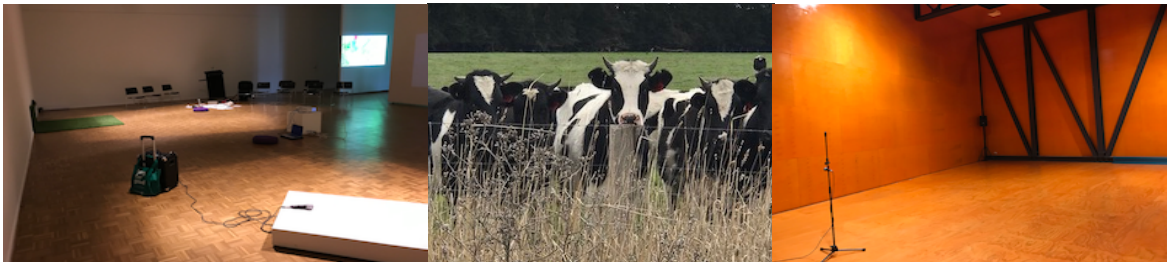


<https://vimeo.com/350226643>
(password: Tower Hill)

I remembered that it takes time to develop a responsive relationship to a site. I noticed a shift in my orientation, towards places of restoration rather than desecration. Perhaps an indication of my own eco-fatigue. Fortuitously other weary eco-warrior women came my way, bending their eco attention to heal themselves along *with* the land they love.

My process of dancing in SW sites was similar to the SE but the feelings were very different. I didn't grow up in the SW, so I don't feel the same deep wounds in my body on discovering the deep wounds in this side of Victoria.

This place is not yet sedimented into my body...



Rosalind Crisp
July 2019