

Alison Currie - 42a: The Dance of the Home (pages 71- 80)

42a refers to a street address, a residential dwelling, a home. The work is generated from and inspired by the home space and how we exist in relation to it. How an architectural structure can adopt such meaning in our lives. Home is where we store our lives and is to many it is a point that anchors us, places us in space. In creating 42a I have been influenced by ideas of habitation, body in space and subconscious action, imagined spaces; of dreams, sickness, and escape, and perceptions of your home and how these change dependent on mood or circumstance.

The choreography has been directly derived from and influenced by the architecture of the space, and the general function of the body within it. Dancers inhabit the gallery during the durational performance and interact with audience as though in their personal homes. 42a is interactive on many levels. The dancers are waiting on pre-determined cues from general audience behaviour to trigger specific movement sequences. There is not a loop of an hour that repeats itself; rather triggers appear randomly due to the interactive (audience/performer) nature of the installation. The audience influence which incarnation of the work they see by direct interaction with performers, and objects within the work. This randomisation causes a completely different experience and outcome for each viewer, and the impression of improvisation within a highly structured choreographic environment. The environment in which the performance occurs always remains fresh and responsive to the space and the people in it. Through these triggers in the dance, video and sculpture components of the work the audience directly influence their own experience of 42a this refers to the way a guest in your house will influence their experience of your home by their actions within it; what they touch, look inside and which rooms they enter.

The body in space is the most fundamental consideration of dance; at a reductionist level it is what dance is. The studio space is intentionally neutral. When making a dance work I would usually work in a studio space, working with the visual consideration of the dancers body and negative space. Conscious, or not, I will take in the space surrounding me if something has changed, what is on the walls, and what people are wearing effects how the choreography is made. This quote from Douglas Dunn talks of how much information there is in every space and how the body absorbs it in order to create dance. *Each Morning I drink a most feared view. I let in EVERY VIEW. My body fills, absorbs, distils. Is Still. I'm going to be an uncontained container, a transparent vessel, an invisible mist. Everyman. I'm going to dance a new, fuller-bodied*¹ I feel this is true of the way I generate choreography and why I have worked in relatively neutral spaces, the information is clear, there is less to sift through. When I started creating in my home there was so much more to take in; layers of lived in experience, memories, a knowing of a space that we don't consciously acknowledge. I became far more aware of how the environment in which you are creating greatly influences the work being made.

As a dance artist I am often generating movement in my lounge room and imagining it was the studio, stage, gallery or other space. 42a surfaced the accumulation of history in this space all of that physical movement; ploughing away in my space creating, reading, eating, thinking, sleeping, crying, jumping up and down, getting fit, getting drunk, laughing, loving, hating and missing. We can fully inhabit our homes, a house is a truly lived in space. This space, the home holds all of this, all of the accumulated memories, objects, dents in the walls, stains on the carpet, reminder notes and aspirations. The home space is a necessary one, in which vital functions occur, things we think nothing of, and can't live without. It can be a place of solace or a front for entertaining, it contains the grittiness of our lives, and can feel so different in each of these situations. This change to a domestic perception of space was one of the things that interested me the most when directing 42a.

¹ Deborah Hay, *My Body, the Buddhist*, (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 54
– internal quote Douglas Dunn, Choreographer

When you have lived in a house long enough that you don't realise it's there any more, it is so familiar that you no longer need to think or even notice where its physical boundaries are, this is what I call home. In this complete familiarity the tangible structures of the space appear to dissolve. Walls become malleable, instead of needing to remind your body of how to navigate the space, it becomes automatic, a habit freeing your mind and so changing, for you, the practical parameters of the space.² Automatic action lends the mind to focus on emotion or other thought but the feeling of the space remains.³ Ever noticed how when you are in a rush the walls jump out, or if you are angry the room becomes smaller, if you're alone you may feel your bed stretches on forever, and if feeling trapped the doors are heavier to lift. *"The limits of possible spaces are the limits of possible modes of corporeality: the body's infinite pliability is a measure of the infinite plasticity of the spatiotemporal universe in which it is housed and through which bodies become real, are lived and have effects."*⁴ The physical presence is influenced by emotion and thought to the point that we believe it has changed. It is this malleable space that forms the dance of the house that is most interesting, a space created for solid structures to become active. There is something different about this dance to that of the buildings in a darkened alley, the structures which suddenly throw more shadows or get taller as the hairs on your neck stand a little straighter. There is something about the home, this thorough knowing of a space that you KNOW it can't move but somehow it has, or you allow yourself to see that it has. The idea of malleable space influenced a majority of the choreographic generation, as well as the scale of sculptural objects within 42a. This physical representation of objects and choreography aims to mix the tangible, true, and mundane with the imagined and forgotten; all realities that are present in the home space.

Then there are imagined spaces that we choose to create. I know, for example, that I will imagine a little world for myself within a crack in the laminate kitchen, a world that I inhabit to escape an argument. I remember as a child scaring myself often by making myself believe that I could see witches standing in front of my wardrobe, it was horrible but I also secretly loved it. I will still find giant trees to climb on my dinner plate, if the conversation loses my interest. This generation of imagined space is most obvious, for me and I'm sure others can relate, when trapped at home sick staring at the ceiling. Worlds begin appearing, not often feverish hallucination, usually chosen imaginings and morphing of the space; cracks in the floor that people would abseil down and bridges on the joins of the ceiling that lead across treacherous lands. Home can be the very essence of a creative space, if only by way of containment. These imagined worlds appear in 42a as sculptural installations and video projections; a world within the freezer of a fridge, a car crash in the bottom of the cupboard, a giant lamp projected to fill a whole room. This imagined space is also apparent within the choreography. I have spliced together movement generated from mundane action and architecture with movement generated from the evocative imaginings of the home space; both the physical reality of the architecture of the home as well as a of imagined home space are present within the choreography.

The architecture of the home space formed a starting point for the generation of choreography. How can you fit into the parameters of your bathroom what movement does this space hold, do these shapes and forms evoke. Unique and personal relationships to particular spaces were brought into play as instant source material. The shape of my bathroom generated movement material, both through remembering the space later in the studio and through dancing in my bathroom at home. I am interested in how the body exists

² Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the outside: essays on virtual and real space* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), 31

³ Elizabeth D. Hutchinson, *Dimensions of human behaviour: Second Edition* (California, SAGE Publications, 2003), 294

⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the outside: essays on virtual and real space* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), 33

in this the most familiar of spaces. Also it is fun, research and potential choreography to slide your feet along wet tiles in a pattern that is comprised of and for the space of your bathroom whilst brushing your teeth.

A consideration in the presentation of 42a was how the dancers would perform the work and convey the feeling and appearance of being at home within a very large gallery space. The initial consideration is that of comfortable, relaxed interaction. The audience experience the work from the inside they share the same space as the performers, the dancers engage in everyday conversation with the audience. This conversation reinforces the ties to home and is a method for breaking down the forth wall that is generally accepted in theatre performance: a barrier separating the audience and performer. An aim in my work is to find ways of dissolving this separation whilst retaining the interest of the viewer and the potency of the work. Another consideration to this 'performance' or presence in the work is that you are not always friendly, relaxed and welcoming; there are times in your home when you experience a plethora of emotional extremes. A challenge was to include these extremes through movement quality, and relationship to personal interaction with audience members. To address this challenge I set up triggers; notified cues viewed in audience behaviour, which the dancers would respond to. These triggers determine which movement sequences the dancers perform as well as the attached emotional instruction within the performance. For example Carlie's bedroom sequence is triggered by someone checking the time, she will perform this movement (bedroom) with the attached instruction of solace. The solace instruction will affect the way Carlie performs this movement and how she reacts to others within the space until this instruction has come to a natural end.

The body that is present in the home is different to that in any other space. Often it goes unnoticed, unacknowledged action and fully inhabited presence are existential elements of home that interest me when making work. The conscious, and subconscious action and reaction in relation to space. The learnt and forgotten, why you bang your head on a new cupboard for the first few months. The performance of choreography is strongly influenced by the idea of scales of physical awareness and "auto pilot". Dancers know the material so well that they can multitask, as though at home, moving objects, chatting to people who enter the space as they execute highly choreographed remembered and forgotten again movement. Movement that is as ingrained as where the kettle is in your own kitchen and how a cup of tea can appear before you have realised you've made it.

Architecture, dance and sculpture are intrinsically connected. This connection has influenced all of my work, and is most apparent in the development and presentation of 42a. The home space is a place that is rich in information, overwhelmingly so, a white box gallery has the opposite architectural presence. To take the home space into the gallery highlights points of interest within the home, making them more viewable than in an actual house. The dancers within 42a, the inhabitants of the work, have the task of representing and creating the natural feeling of the home yet their presence is also carefully selected, performing highly choreographed movement that is a derivative of, but not exacting to that of the home. I was most interested in ideas of space, habitation and the relationship between the two when creating 42a. A sort of physical phenomenology, dance as a perception of space and how that changes with subconscious thought and action and how we generate spaces in our own imaginings.⁵

[42a is the product of three years of funded physical research into house and home, Funded by Arts SA and The Australia Council for the Arts. Performance research at Downtown Art Space 2007, premier at the Experimental Art Foundation 2008 42a and tour to three states of Australia in 2010. Persons involved directly in this research: Alison Currie, Solon Ulbrich, Annemarie Kohn, Kel Mocilnik, Adam Synnott, Alisdair Macindoe, Carlie Angel, Veronica Shum, Rachel Fenwick, Ana Grosse, Kate Skully, Lewis Rankin (Adelaide, SA, 2006-2008)]

⁵ Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/phenomenology/>>.



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