

JAMES BATCHELOR & COLLABORATORS

'SHORTCUTS AND LOOPS' BY ALICE HEYWARD

A shortcut is an alternate route from somewhere to elsewhere. Time travel, timesave. A hack across inferred pathways to a chosen destination.

How do the journeys we take lead us to the places we're going? How do these pathways and processes formulate both us, and where we go? What if where we're going are not fixed zones, but distant and familiar movements, shapes, feelings, times?

James, Chloe Chignell and Morgan Hickenbotham are dancing and sounding in circles, loops and curves, moving forward while looking back across the span of 100 years in speculation; backward toward movement felt and seen as emotion, spiritual reform and individuality.

Ausdruckstanz, a counter-movement to ballet emerging at the beginning of the 20th century in Europe, wanted to be more expressive, show more spirit and emotion and less virtuosity than the rigidity of ballet. Improvisational, uninhibited and provocative, the revolutionary dance emphasised emotional gesture and subjective expression. Gertrud Bodenwieser was a pioneer of the movement, and with her emigration to Sydney via Colombia from Vienna to escape the holocaust in 1938, a new wave of dance grew in Australia. She came to Sydney in 1939, the same year Margerat Lasica, mother of renowned contemporary choreographer Shelley Lasica, also emigrated from Vienna to Melbourne, where, over the next decades, she would found her studio 'Extensions' and the Modern Dance Ensemble, influencing generations to come of dance in Melbourne, where James himself would develop his professional choreographic practice in the early part of the next century. In Sydney 1939, Gertrud founded the Bodenwieser Ballet, a major influence on modern dance in Australia.

The shortcut James takes to Ausdruckstanz is not a linear route outside his body, but a subtle shift, a transfer from within, a breath, opening to a world of voices and histories connecting forward and back through time in loops. The shortcut to these capricious places/times is to listen.

The act of dancing connects us powerfully to the ground we're on, the air we breathe and circulate, and others with whom we share the spaces we dance in. Dancing can 'cut' us to an embodied and conscious experience of another kind of here and now, altering the overwhelming, blinkering experience of our social and political contemporary existence. It can also conjure other times, places and people, and bring about what lingers, haunts and invisibly moves us. Dancing gestures identified in Ausdruckstanz—waves, curves, loops—is how James consciously reaches outward, back, around and ahead, to make contact with—listen to—those from whom he's inherited moving, dancing knowledge. Dancing with Chloe attunes both them, and us as spectators, through and beyond an individual experience of presence, or 'the solo' (a common format in expressionist dance), into relation.

There are different directions and degrees of expression and connection at play in this project. James' long standing personal relationship with Ruth Osborne, his childhood teacher in Canberra who studied at the Bodenwieser Dance Centre in Sydney when she was a child, and his meetings with elderly Bodenwieser dancer, 108 year old icon Eileen Kramer, and the

current head of our former school (The Victorian College of the Arts in Naarm/Melbourne), Carol Brown, who's done extensive artistic research into Bodenwieser's work and legacy, compose and illuminate a complex web of embodied transmission and dialogue. These living Australian and New Zealander dance legends, women who have dedicated lifetimes to pedagogy and development in dance, recall their diverse lived experiences of Bodenwieser dances in their bodies to express them outward, and James extends toward them to receive their ideas and stories from past contexts. James' physical encounters with these women and what he gleans from them weave into his artistic process in the present moment.

It's curious to observe these passages of knowledge and movement production in 'Shortcuts to Familiar Places', and how other contexts and histories become visible. James, Chloe and I studied at the Victorian College of the Arts together in Naarm/Melbourne in the early 2010s. Our 'contemporary' dance training was a conventional Western inscription of ballet, postmodern American techniques like Cunningham, and early 2000s Australian dance culture, much of it informed by teachers-cum-independent artists who danced in New York in the late 80s and early 90s, making movement whose philosophies and styles continued postmodern dance lineages with abstractions and aesthetic shifts. This dance history is visible in the movement quality, performativity and aesthetic choices in STFP, even as the subject matter of the work sits earlier in the historic timeline and it's 2022, whatever that means (post 90s, post post-internet, 'post' pandemic, still wartime). Chloe and James, with technical precision, dance choreography developed through James' interest and research into expressionist dance with Ruth, Eileen and Carol, yet they perform forms drawn from this dance culture with relatively reduced emotional expression (a postmodern trait that leans toward a more 'everyday', unspectacular energy in performance than the expressivity of modern/Ausdruck dance), a relationship to the audience that is less exhibitionist than 'worklike' with a lack of direct eye contact (an awareness of being witnessed by an audience rather than performing 'to' them), and relatively plain clothes, a clean and simple 'smart casual dancer' look, as costume.

From the 60s into the 2000s, in contemporary dance as I've known it in American, European and Australian contexts, there's been an emphasis on shunning self expression, influencing many artists such as James, by moving toward an aesthetic experience in and of dance that's away from individuality. By not 'self'-expressing, allowing oneself to simply 'be' a subject in performance, made up by all that has formed them, thinking of one's body and subject as a flexible 'container', dance can be thought to pass through a dancer to become material (dancing): a dancer as the medium for dance to appear, rather than dance as a medium for oneself to appear. Dancing by emptying oneself to be filled by a movement phrase, an impulse, an idea, rather than 'presenting' them by dancing. Such approaches and practices produce specific aesthetic and performative characteristics in live performance, just as the philosophy of expressing one's feelings through dancing in Ausdruckstanz last century produced particular energetic, stylistic and performative qualities.

Then and now are different times, and to work with an archive is, among many things, to try to understand how work was seen when it was made. James does not try to reproduce the same relationship between the dance and the dancer from the past, but finds his own conscious relationship to the material underpinning his work, thus transforming the dance and how he might approach performing it now in his personal way. The 'personal' was at the heart of expressive dance at the start of last century, and to remain true to this value now means for James to acknowledge yet stay historically beyond certain attitudes and tones of time past that are not relevant, or are incongruous, to his personal, contemporary interests in creating this new work, even though they were inherent to, and very much the point of, Ausdruckstanz in

its time. At the outset, Ausdruckstanz centred women with few men dancing, which at the time was very radical. Today, gender fluidity is grounded in the communities we're part of and much contemporary performance, especially in Berlin, where this work premiered, as well as in Melbourne where it will soon tour. The way James and Chloe inhabit expressionist dance forms and vocabularies doesn't raise the same questions or generate the same impacts as expressionist dance did in the past that it comes from.

James and Chloe share a particularly intimate personal history. They grew up together in Canberra dancing in the youth dance group Quantum Leap, with Ruth Osborne as director (she still is today). They moved to Melbourne to study at the Victorian College of the Arts, where I met them as fellow students, and for the last several years James has lived in Berlin and Chloe in Brussels. Chloe often collaborates in James' works as a dancer. Needless to say, the dance history underpinning the education we absorbed as young dancers in Australia and the work that our generation has created at home and internationally till now, has developed in response, either directly or less consciously, to happenings in previous eras, locally and globally. Just as Ausdruckstanz emerged as a counteraction to ballet, postmodern dance developed in response to 'modern' and Ausdruck dance, rejecting its expressionist qualities and focus on individual expression and presentation, opting for more stripped-down choreography and casual and spontaneous performances. Yvonne Rainer's 'No Manifesto' states tenets of the Judson Church movement and the dominant vibe of the 60s, such as "No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer."

Seeing James and Chloe's dancing, inscribed with postmodern and early noughties Australian logic and their diverse experiences in Europe over the last decade (things like 'style' and 'seduction' have of course returned from their rejection in the 60s, yet differently to pre-postmodernism), while consciously looking to a previous and contradictory chapter in Western dance history—Ausdruckstanz—produces a time loop, a cut, a glitch through histories and countries, and sheds an interesting, contemporary light on Ausdruckstanz, our present moment today, the spaces between then and now, and a subtle speculation about the future, through a collision and merging of styles, histories and values. What is 'naturalness' or 'freedom' in movement? How are these qualities and ideas experienced and performed now? What is the dominant mode of affect today? What are we rejecting and reaching toward? How do we produce subjectivity now? What, and how, are we 'expressing'? How are we feeling?

James and Chloe don't try to shield or hide their own lived histories of dance as they reach back to a time before themselves as individuals, nor do they turn to 'acting' movement as a performance mode, but rather, they meet what came before them with what they have, what makes them up, recomposing themselves in connection to Ausdruckstanz and the women they've learned from, and through all this, ask questions about now. "No to transformations and magic and make-believe" is still alive and kicking in this work, lending to an honest, gentle insight into James' study, yet Yvonne's 60s declarations "No to virtuosity" and "No to style" are not, with technically skillful dancing and conscious image production clearly important. Each era of history is produced by a response to what came before, and in dance history, time is always curving, collecting, reappropriating, recycling and regenerating dancing; our bodies and subjectivities as processes themselves, making and sharing knowledge.

To shortcut is to turn toward, and hear the resonant echo of generations and genealogies in our abundant bodies.

Alice Heyward is a dancer, choreographer and teacher from Australia living in Berlin. Alice's practice develops through diverse collaborations, as author, co-author and interpreter, constructing different situations for exchange and connection. In 2020 and 2021, she collaborated with artist Fanny Gicquel making 'do you feel the same', a performance installation in gallery (Hua International) and public space (Uferstudios). This year, she created a new work in the format of a performative workshop called 'Tributary' at Klosterruine in Berlin, in collaboration with Maciek Sado and Oisín Monaghan, as well as premiering 'Tirana' with Luisa Saraiva as research partner and performer, in Essen and Porto, 'Cancelled' with Maria Hassabi in Arles, Cleveland and Dresden, and touring 'Here' with Hassabi to Torino. She is currently pursuing the creation of a project titled 'Make Me Dance', a multi-channel video installation that will examine the power dynamics between photographer/camera and subject/object, through the lens of artist-muse/choreographer-dancer relationships, made in collaboration with artist Ella CB. Alice teaches Klein Technique™ and movement research regularly in a variety of contexts.