

## **Australian University Theses on Dance 1990-2005**

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In a special issue of the international *Dance Research Journal* in the year 2000, several articles were dedicated to a reflection on the current status of dance research in the United States. The keynote speaker to *Rebooting the Grid: Australian and New Zealand Dance Research Conference* (Deakin University, 2004) and noted dance critic Ann Daly argues there for a rethinking of the role of theory, in particular that of feminism, in dance scholarship.<sup>1</sup> In her view, new dance research trends might have two characteristics that change the relationship between theories of representation and historical or contemporary modes of viewing dance. She argues for a return to a research approach that might utilize theoretical analysis but that will pay attention to close reading of choreographic works or events, particularly those that have been overlooked or given arbitrary readings in the past. She suggests that while the focus on theoretical interests has been seductive that often ideas overpower artistic works thus preventing either artistic appreciation or politics to emerge from the choreography rather than from an outside frame or context. She proposes that a revised concept of poetics could be more intellectually productive than ‘theory’ per se, since ‘poets are immersed in issues of subjectivity and representation without sacrificing the sensuousness of language or observation’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed she suggests that the consideration of emotion, or affect, in dance studies is as important as ideology or critique. Her keynote address about the ways in which dance contributes to an ‘experience economy’ appears to follow this line of argument in the context of advocacy for dance in public policy.

In Australia the theory revolution arrived much later in the humanities and has in many respects not dominated the discourses of the creative arts, such as dance, since the focus on practice has been so much more influential. But in order to develop a picture, or indeed a theoretical understanding, of how dance research in Australia has been constituted, I examined what recent Australian dance research in universities has been produced by graduate students. A literary review of university archives for the period 1990 – 2005 uncovered 49 doctoral and masters research degrees as listed below (plus two relevant research honours degrees) and some comment on the context for this expanding body of knowledge is necessary.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1980s dance has been established in the Australian tertiary sector or academy. During this period much time and effort has been spent establishing institutions, designing teaching programs, nurturing dance artists, writing dance reviews and lobbying governments for recognition and support for dance. This activity constitutes in itself one field of dance, that is the domain of artistic achievement recognized as such within official discourses, such as educational or government public policy. Not until the 1990s however have graduate students begun to enter dance studies in significant numbers. Indeed the development of university programs that allow dance scholarship to be recognized whether theoretical or practical has taken place only in the last decade. Much of this work has focused on fostering dance artists who wish to develop new modalities for creative work in dance and who have begun, perhaps as Daly suggests, to study the specific practices of choreographers, dancers and their intimate and immediate communities. There is however another body of research which is less concerned with the individual creative process and more with the ways in which dance, and dance representations, have been important to cultural history or embody cultural values. To a great extent, dance research undertaken by graduate students appears to straddle the humanities, social sciences and the arts although it is less clear what intellectual traditions or theoretical resources it is drawing upon.

Most notable is the number of unpublished dissertations that represent extensive historical research on many different aspects of aesthetic dance in Australia. These are

largely unavailable to all except the most dedicated dance scholar or library user. For instance, Amanda Card's 1999 study of modern dance history in Australia, *History in Motion: dance and Australian culture, 1920-1970* can only be read in the Mitchell Library of the University of Sydney. While some excerpts have been published in journal articles, and the Greenmill Papers, it is disappointing that her research is not more widely known. Last year I had the irony of providing information about Louise Lightfoot whose archive is located at Monash for the *Dictionary of Australian Biography* only to realise, two months later that Card's thesis provides an extended discussion of the complex crosscultural dance negotiations that Lightfoot pioneered in this country between ballet and Indian classical dance.

Other unpublished doctoral theses that could contribute to the field of historical scholarship include Raymond Robinson's (2000) history of the National Aboriginal and Islander School of Dance in Australia (NAISDA), Garry Lester's (2000) study of Kai Tai Chan's work, Lynn Fisher's (1992) history of dance teaching in Western Australia. Not all theses should be published nor do they all make good books but some of this knowledge needs to be reworked into publications. In fact, without good writing and comparative analysis, dance research cannot be sustained. In 2003, the *Australasian Drama Studies Journal* put out a special volume on 'Physical Theatre and Dance', and the quality of submissions received from the field of dance was very poor. Other journals such as *Double Dialogues* and *Practices* published by Deakin University also suffer from limited high quality contributions on dance. Publishing the titles of this collection of graduate theses draws attention to the fact that dance research in Australia could be advanced by a more rigorous comparative and methodological analysis of what dance academics and graduates have already researched and some reflection on what methods and paradigms they are adopting to analyse dance, whether practically, historically or theoretically. In this way, the poetics and politics of dance discourse in Australia might become more nuanced and provide future dance research conferences with their own provocations for advancing debate about dance.

Asker, Don. "The Body in Question : New Dance Production in the 90's." Thesis (M.A.), University of Melbourne, 1996.

———. "Personal Meanings and Artistic Processes : A Study of Multi-Modal Improvisation." Thesis (Ph.D), University of Melbourne, 2001.

Barbe, Frances Anne. "Physical Movement in Collaborative Theatre : Australian Dance Theatre and Integrative Theatre Practice in an International Context." Thesis (B.A.Hons), University of Queensland, 1993.

Bollen, Jonathan James. "Queer Kinaesthesia : On the Dance Floor at Gay and Lesbian Dance Parties Sydney, 1994-1998." Thesis (Ph.D), University of Western Sydney, 1999.

Boughen, Roxanne Elizabeth. "Raqs Australia : A Comparative Study of Danse Orientale ; Examining the Pedagogy and Practice of Middle Eastern Dance in Australia." Thesis (Ed. D.Hons), RMIT University, 2002.

Bourchier, Randall. "Australian Multicultural Policies, the Arts and Traditional Music and Dance within the Cambodian Community of Melbourne." Thesis (M.A.), Monash University, 1991.

Brannigan, Erin. "A Cinema of Movement: Dance and the Moving Image." PhD. UNSW, 2004.

Card, Amanda. "History in Motion: Dance and Australian Culture, 1920 to 1970." Thesis (Ph. D.), University of Sydney, 1999.

Carroll, Jacqui. "Changing Lanes: An Exploration of the Journey from Dance through Choreography to Directing and the Spoken Word." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 1998.

Carter, Keryn. "Performing the Feminine: Women, Narrative, Dance." Thesis (Ph.D), LaTrobe University, 1995.

Chua, Poh Yi Joey. "Dance Curriculum for a Renaissance Singapore : A Framework for a Dance Elective Programme in Secondary Schools." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 2003.

Clarke, Suzanna. "Being Isadora." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 2003.

Crisp, Rosalind. "Solo Work." Thesis (M.A), University of Western Sydney, 1998.

Cullen, Katharine. "The Document, the Dance and the Family." Thesis (M.F.A.), College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, 2004.

Cunnington, Maree. "Inside the Power Station : Allegory and the Dance of Represented Ideas." Thesis (Ph.D.), Queensland University of Technology, 2004.

Dempster, Elizabeth. "An Embodied Politics Radical Pedagogies of Contemporary Dance." Thesis (Ph.D), Monash University, 2002.

Denning, Sally. "I Just Went to Buy a Felafel Sandwich : The Middle Eastern Dance Experience of Six Australians." Thesis (M.Ed.), University of Melbourne, 2001.

Denton, Margaret Abbie. "Joanna Priest : Her Place in Adelaide's Dance History." Thesis (M.A.), University of Adelaide, 1992.

Felber, Joe, Elliott Gyger and Lucy Guerin. "Collaboration : An Audio-Visual Performance with Elliott Gyger and Lucy Guerin." Thesis (M.A.), RMIT University, 2000.

Fisher, Lynn Margaret. "Dance Class : A History of Professional Dance and Dance Training in Western Australia from 1895-1940." Thesis (M.A.), University of Western Australia, 1992.

Fox, Sue Maree. "The Thinking Dancer : Practical Evaluation Strategies for the Classroom." Thesis (M.A.), Queensland University of Technology, 1995.

Galea, Nicole S. "Wings of Gauze : A History of Dance in Her Majesty's Theatre, Brisbane, from 1926-1960." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 2002.

Gard, Michael. "Aesthetics, Athletics and Art: A Study of Men Who Dance." Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Wollongong, 2001.

Gardner, Sally. "Lying Down in the Air: Feminism, (New) Dance, and Representation", Thesis (M.A.), Monash University, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Dancing Together: The Choreographer and the Dancer in Modern Dance (Ph.D.) 2004.

John, Chrisilda. "Fusion of Dance and Painting in Kathakali." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 1999.

Koepke, Bruce. "Religious Dance Traditions in Dardistan (Northern Pakistan) a Preliminary Analysis of Selected Dances of the Kalasha, and of the Burushaski- and Shina-Speakers." Thesis (M.A), Monash University, 1996.

Long, Julie-Anne. "The Leisure Mistress Dances: An Investigation of a Practice Where Fact and Fiction Collide." Thesis (M.A), University of Western Sydney, 1999.

Laffan, Carolyn. "When a Boy from Alabama Meets a Girl from Gundagai : Social Dancing in Melbourne, 1942-1943." Thesis (M.A.), University of Melbourne, Australian Centre, 1997.

Lester, Garry. "Kai Tai Chan : A Different Path." Thesis (Ph.D.), Deakin University, 2000.

Luckman, Susan Heather. "Party People : Mapping Contemporary Dance Music Cultures in Australia." Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Queensland, 2002.

McLeod, Shaun. "Chamber: Dance Improvisation, Masculine Embodiment and Subjectivity." Thesis (M.A.), Deakin University, 2002.

Morphett, Natalie. "Psychological Characteristics of the Adolescent Ballet Student, the Adult Modern Dance Student and the Ex-Dancer." Thesis (BPsych Hons), University of South Australia, 2001.

Neville, Sarah. "Choreographing Newmedia Dance through the Creation of the Dance Project Ada." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 2003.

Pee, Mary Teresa Lay Hoon. "The Development of Chinese, Indian and Malay Dance in Singapore to the 1970s." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 1999.

Postle, Julia. "Dancing through the Postmodern : Australian Choreography in Relation to Postmodernism." Thesis (M.A.), Queensland University of Technology, 1996.

Potter, Michelle. "The Russian Ballet in Australia 1936-1940: Sources for Modernism in Australia Art." Thesis (B.A. Hons), Australian National University, 1987.

Pratt, Angela. "Ask Dance Theatre : Christian Worldview and the Creative Process." M.A. (Research), Queensland University of Technology, 2004.

Prenzler, Elizabeth A. "Musculoskeletal Adaptation to Dance." Thesis (M.A. App.Sc.), Queensland University of Technology, 1998.

Rank, Katrina May. "My Story, Your Story : Identifying Narratives in the Performance of Dance." Thesis (Ph.D.), Deakin University, 2000.

Reid, Dianne. "Cutting Choreography: Redefining Dance on Screen." Thesis (M.A), Deakin University, 2001.

Richardson, Denise Christine. "Pirouettes into Parallel : How Classical Ballet Technique Informs the Training of Contemporary Dancers." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 2000.

Robinson, Raymond S."Dreaming Tracks : History of the Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Scheme, 1972-1979 : Its Place in the Continuum of Australian Indigenous Dance and the Contribution of Its African American Founder Carole Y. Johnson." Thesis (M.A.), University of Western Sydney, 2000.

Russell, Meredith. "The Danced Space, Ancient and Modern : The Role of Transformation in Classical Indian and Modern Dance." Thesis (M.VisualArts), University of South Australia, 2003.

Ryan, Susan Michele. "Life-Span Developmental Perspectives of the Professional Dance Career." Thesis (Ph.D.), Queensland University of Technology, 2002.

Sandhu, Holly. "Hip Movement Profiles : A Pilot Study Comparing Dancers with an Age-Matched Non-Dance Group." Thesis (B.App.Sc.Hons), University of South Australia, 1991.

Shrubsall, Gina. "The Dancing Body Makes Sense of Place", Thesis (M.A), University of Western Sydney, 2002.



Sietsma-Smith, Maggi. "Listen to Me Dance : An Analysis of Human Voice in the Construction of Meaning in Dance Performance." Thesis (M.A.), Queensland University of Technology, 1994.

Smith, Judith. "An Evaluation of Assessment Criteria in the Performance Area of Dance Education." Thesis (M.A.), Queensland University of Technology, 1997.

Stock, Cheryl. "Making Intercultural Dance in Vietnam : Issues of Context and Process from the Perspective of an Australian Choreographer and Her Colleagues from Vietnam Opera Ballet Theatre (Nha Hat Nhac Vu Kich Viet Nam) 1995-1999." Thesis (Ph.D), Queensland University of Technology, 1999.

Tregenza, Ann. "Older Women's Experience of Participation in a Multicultural Folkdance Group." Thesis (M.Geront), University of South Australia, 1998.

Vincs, Kim. "Rhizome / MyZone: The Production of Subjectivity in Dance." Thesis (Ph.D), Deakin University, 2001.

Whitelaw, Melanie. "Choreographic Strategies for Secondary School Dance Teachers." M.A.(Research), Queensland University of Technology, 2002.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Daly, 'Trends in Dance Scholarship: Feminist Theory Across the Millenial Divide' Dance Research Journal 32/1 (Summer 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.40.

<sup>3</sup> While every effort was made to be inclusive, if I have left someone's research thesis off this list please accept my apologies, perhaps you could provide the details to the Australia New Zealand Dance Research Society for future reference.