

## Notes on *Niche* – Sue Healey

### 1. Key Concept – Space and Spatial relationships

The word 'niche' informs the work.

I wanted to create a small, confined space that a dancer could dance within – it is not a public space or a real space – but rather an abstracted, imagined space constructed from a wall (which we painted), and another constructed wall of paper that the camera could see through at times.

The space defines what the action could be – I choreographed this in situ – using the space to determine what the movement would be. It starts with the image of a line, which is an edge (of the wall), which part of the dancer's body is revealed behind. I am then interested in the space of the flat surface of the wall, which the dancer moves along and down. She then moves into the volume of the space and fills that with her movement - but the small space still confines her.

The small niche-like space then becomes filled with other people, who don't seem to notice her presence - she is still separated from them. It as if she cannot communicate with them even though they are very close.

This idea came from a story that the dancer Shona Erskine had told me - Shona was studied her PhD in psychology as we were making this work - and she told me about a case study of a woman who believed that the walls of her house were inhabited with people. She underwent psychoanalysis and the people 'disappeared' from her house - but she committed suicide because she couldn't live 'without' them. The feeling of emptiness in the space is palpable, once the other people have gone and this is exaggerated by the moving lines of light and the shadow of her face against the paper screen.

You don't need to know this information really to consider the work - as I am more interested in creating an abstract dance - but it reveals how I sometimes use an idea of a narrative to construct the flow of ideas in a dance - from solo dancer in a small space, to the space becoming filled with bodies, to then returning to solo dancer with flickering light (which is in fact super8 film projected into the space) - which to me is like the remnants of energy of the 'ghosts'.

The motifs I use in the choreography are all derived from these ideas of space - look for lines, angles, and corners in the movement. Look for the angles in the wrists, the elbows, legs, spine...there are no soft curves in the material – it is mostly linear and angular.

Also the hand 'writing' down the wall is another motif (which recurs in *Fine Line* as well) - as if she inscribing the space with her thoughts, her actions.

Spatial relationships occur between the solo dancer and the small confined space. Look carefully as to how the dancer dances with the edge, the wall, the floor, the volume between the walls, the other people, the projected film.

Discuss how the camera allows us to see her movement sometimes very close. The camera is at times like another character, a voyeur in her small space.

## 2. Time and Dynamics:

The movement has odd rhythms – subtle, ever changing patterns – it is not dancing to a beat, instead its timing is quite irregular and asking the audience to experience the subtleties of timing within a gesture, or a simple movement.

Dynamically, the dance has small sudden shifts of contrast, but usually returns to a quiet introspective dynamic mode. The most dynamic section, when she dances in the corridor space, sees her movement build in pace and sharpness before falling again into introspection and into the world of moving light and lines.

## 3. The Elements of Production

Music: The music is an electronic score by Darrin Verhagen - you can read about him on my website...or google him! He is an amazing composer for dance and has worked with many Australian choreographers.

<http://www.suehealey.com/collaborators3.html>

With electronic music there are infinite layers of sound possible – I love the subtle whispers in this soundtrack, the menacing nightmarish qualities to the sound, the quiet introspection of the Satie-esque piano at the end...the music to me, creates an atmosphere of a melancholic personal space.

Lighting: The lighting is very simple – often just one soft light to illuminate the dancer in against the wall or in the niche space and create shadow and light contrast – creating a ghostly atmosphere. The light sometimes creates small zones to light only parts of her body.

Importantly I also used super 8 film as another lighting design element near the end of the work, which is actually projected onto the dancer as we film her. The super 8 is by filmmaker Louise Curham – a long standing collaborator of mine (who inspired me to make film many years ago). To create the film – she hand scratches the actual film, which makes lines of colour and texture which I love to project into an environment. It fills the space with moving textures of lines and shapes – which visually assists my exploration of the volume of space.

Set: A wall was painted a mottled green and another wall of paper was created, so the camera could, at times, observe through holes in the wall – as if peering

into the niche-like corridor.

Costume: The colour of the costume, a burnt orange is the exact opposite to the green and was chosen specifically for this reason – to create contrast. Simple costume with stretch fabric allows the shapes of the body to be seen clearly - to see the lines and angles of the dancer's body.