

## Deborah Hay Solo Performance Project - Report Luke George

The things from the Solo Performance Project (SPP) that seem very present with me right now – although I'm sure these will evolve and more may come throughout the next 3 months of daily practice and then the performance: Noticing. Noticing what is happening in and from my dancing body. What my body is doing at any given fraction of a moment. What my body is doing in relationship to the space and time passing. Although it may seem obvious, increasing my attention to noticing has been quite a significant thing for me, especially when you're in a performance practice such as Hay's, where movement and relationship arises in the moment of practicing it. Throughout the 10 days at Bundanon and now onwards into daily practice, I am working on myself to really notice what's happening and unfolding in the dance, as opposed to being flippant, throwing anything away or being only concerned with my inner experience of it (the feelings, ideas and sensations I am experiencing).

This noticing feeds into the next thing, which is: my dancer and my choreographer are equally present in the practice. As a dancer I am attending to Hay's specific questions which are the framework for practice, continually juggling and addressing them – as they tend to sometimes flood you and can have counter affects on each other which means you end up dropping one or more balls! My choreographer is noticing everything and making choices – always making choices. This has been of great impact too; that my dancer isn't getting seduced by the inner experience and my choreographer is responsible for perceiving the dance that is unfolding and making choices at every moment.

This is quite different to how when I work as a performer for other artists and companies. There my choreographic creativity will definitely be called upon, but to actually perceive myself as having also being responsible for the choreography as much as performing it (as in Hay's work) is very interesting, it kind of works in with this sense of co-responsibility the SPP or Solo Commission Project, and perhaps much of Hay's work has to do with it. This is something I've always been curious about as a performer and in my own choreographic works, how the performer can be more than a highly trained, versatile yet blank canvas and vessel for the choreography, where they have vested responsibility in the transmittance of the dance and the art to the audience in the moment it is happening. There is something socio/political in exploring a dancer/choreographer/director/audience relationship like this. Watching Hay's *If I Sing To You* performance in Melbourne 2008, I definitely felt this set-up, space and relationship between these parties being reconsidered and in play.

In the longer term I don't necessarily see myself completely adopting Hay's practice as my own, but I can see the SPP having a resonance that will inform my ongoing work as a choreographer and performer and has planted curious seeds that will grow into their own unique species. Since returning from Bundanon, I've commenced work choreographing a new piece on an ensemble of emerging dancers. Of course I immediately find myself flooded

with Deborah's practice and language. But what's starting to happen is I am focusing on aspects of the practice that are working for me and the dancers I'm currently working with, or aspects that I still find difficult to grasp and have questions about, and I am finding my own language to articulate and address these. Something specific which I've already noticed having a strong impact on my own work, is Hay's method of the performers learning the score right at the beginning, and the work develops over the weeks of practicing the performing of the score. My usual creative process has involved creating and developing my work from the inside-out: making small kernels of ideas that each individually grows and then I develop a structure for them to sit within. The dilemma I've been struggling with for some time is that the work quite often ends up being a series of short ideas that are somewhat isolated from each other, run for a similar duration or dramaturgical arc, and the greater structure is very section-driven. I'm also finding this in other dance pieces I am in or have seen. I'm approaching creating my current new piece by developing a practice that me and the ensemble of performers share and develop between us, notions of ideas, and I am immediately drafting up performance scores which the dancers are practice performing with from the outset. This gives me a window to seeing relationship and possibilities in the dance very early on. I've then returned to developing specific ideas and then tried it out in a redeveloped score. It's such a new and beneficial thing for me. I am also interested to see how my SPP experience will support and inform my work as a performer in other artists' work in the near future.

In Hay's own words, she has been developing and practicing her practice to quite simply be a better performer. For me the things she values are about performers being conscious and alive in their perception of and relationship to space, time and the audience. Through this there is some kind of re-addressing of the values that we have for and seek in performance (which I find troublesome in life and dance) and creating a space that invites incredible potential for possibility.

I feel like after the 10 days with Hay, I am at the beginning of practicing this work. Some of the questions that we work with have felt like they are hitting home, some feel like they'll continue to unfurl over time. I thoroughly benefited from and enjoyed doing the SPP with the other performers from around Australia; the diversity was astonishing and made for immense learning. I look forward to continuing my daily practice and our performance season in June at Dancehouse.

Luke George