

# FIELD NOTES



## *Something Beneath the Surface*

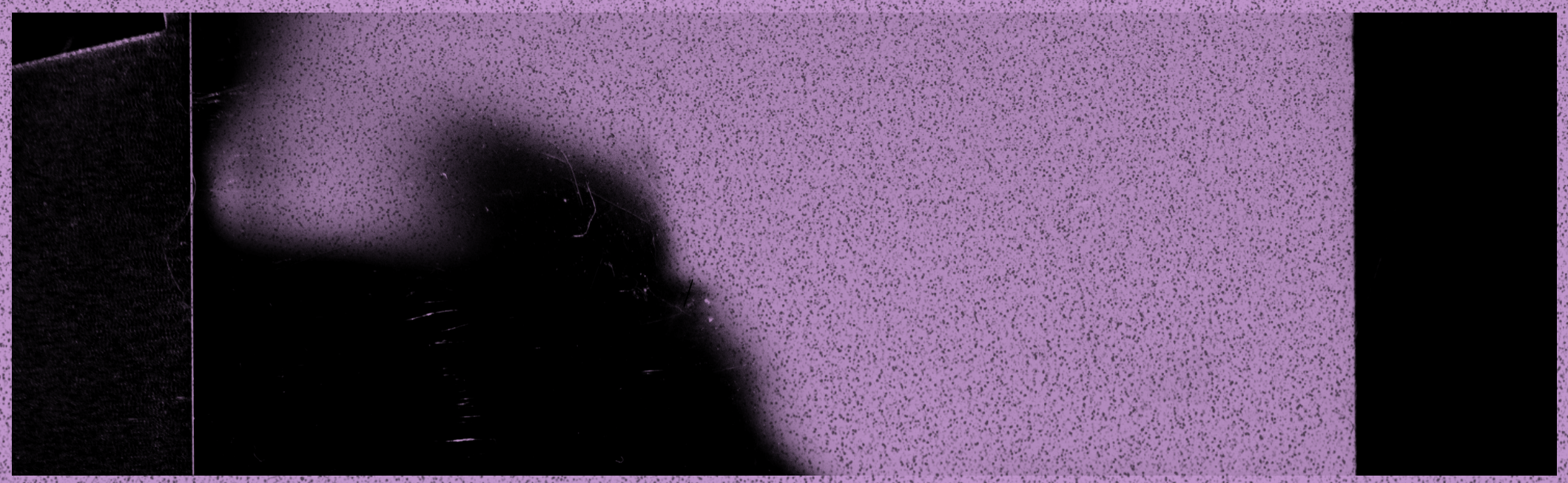
by Noemie Huttner-Koros

reflecting on

## *Pool*

by Alex Dobson

*Presented as part of Dancehouse  
Season 1, 18–21 Feb, 2026*



Field Notes is a Dancehouse initiative that commissions writers, academics, and artists to produce in-depth reflections on works within the Dancehouse program. Moving beyond conventional reviews, these texts aim to extend the life of each performance and contribute to a broader conversation about contemporary dance and choreographic practice.

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In *Pool* we witness two dancers, Alex Dobson and Madeleine Bowman, sweat, slip, expel liquid, leak, create and transform physical substances over the course of forty-five minutes. They invite us into different layers of intimacy; their intimacy with one another, the intimacy created between performer and audience and the specific intimacy, associations and memory that water creates for each one of us. As the dancers chart a journey from the back of the stage towards the audience across three discrete acts, each with their own distinct aural atmosphere and choreographic language; water, gesture, sound and speech accumulate, build and fall away. Reaching out. Yearning. Attempting to find connection.





In *Anthropocene Poetics; Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones and Extinction*, David Farrier (2019) explores a poetics for thinking through humanity's role as a geological agent embedded and enfolded within deep time.

Drawing on Elizabeth Bishop and Seamus Heaney's concept of "thick time", Farrier expresses the lyric's capacity (and I am including the poetic and the ephemeral of which the practice of dance is a part of) "to put multiple temporalities and scales within a single frame, to 'thicken' the present with an awareness of the other times and places" (Farrier, 2019, 9).

Dobson's use of water as the principal material element of the work creates this thickness, evoking the relationship of water to memory, the body and gender but also to deep time, planetary forces and ecosystems. The eco-dramaturgy of the work engenders a confluence of different time scales, with "the thick time of the lyric...allows us to imagine the complexity and richness of our enfolded with deep-time processes and explore the sensuous and uncanny aspects of how deep time is experienced in the present (Farrier, 2019, 10)."

As we make our way into the performance space, the work begins with Dobson and Bowman situated at either ends of an open space, each of them slowly turning in a circle with their arms wrapped around, cradling their bodies. At times their gaze lifts gently before slowly journeying back along their bodies.

Throughout the work, the intimacy of the dancers' gazes and the way their hands move brings about a swell of memories and associations. I think about the tenderness and intimacy and love present in the ways we hold and touch the hands of those we love. How holding my dad's hand in the hospital differs from holding my partner's hand while cooking which differs again from holding my friend's hand as we navigate our way across a crowded dance floor.

If Act 1 is a looking away from the audience, Act 2 interrogates us directly – two pairs of eyes forcing us to look back and witness the puddles of sweat and water and ice cubes. And Act 3 feels like a request for us to look within, to look inwards.



*Pool* (2026), by Alex Dobson. Photo by Gregory Lorenzutti.



Hudson Macushla's composition adds yet another element, starting with lush piano that envelops us in a droning, textural cacophony. At times I am unsure what sound is coming from the speakers and what sound is coming from the dancer's mouths. By the third act, their mouths are open, wailing, cavernous and sound is spilling forth like the ocean is roaring, or a dam has burst its banks.

Several days later, when speaking with choreographer and dancer Alex Dobson, she talks about how the experience of moving through dynamic chronic illness and diagnosis in 2023-24 engendered

"a shift in how I lived in my body. I had a realisation I was existing between seeming able-bodied some days of the week and on other days being at risk of passing out. It felt like I had a big secret, that I was experiencing something on the inside that was completely invisible on the outside unless I told someone what was going on."



This duality of an insider–outsider status is present in the work, the sense that there is something beneath the surface, subliminal, subconscious and we can sense it without needing to logically or rationally comprehend why or how.

The secret water, the secret singing (microphones hidden in the set's fabric), the secret speaking and whispering between the dancers at the back of the stage. Alex speaks about the desire to “let go of performativity”, to inhabit somatically the sensations and “let something leak out of our bodies.” Sweat, melting ice and water pool over the stage and spill over. There is a feminist dramaturgy at work as the refuse and spill over of Alex and Madeleine's bodies refuses to be contained, their bodies refuse to “behave” neatly, they intentionally make apparent the messy, patient, unending labour of being in a body.

I am caught by the final image of the work; the two performers with water dripping out of their mouths, spilling over towards us with their hands joined together. I see the liquids and the goo and the constant doing and undoing of the body – everything we try to hide away and paper over, the messiness and unruliness of queer bodies, of female bodies, existing in a patriarchal society that tries to restrain us. I see the dancers linked together, the water, the sound, the voices.



As I leave Dancehouse, the outside world – its noises, its sensations, its images – are now heightened, a poetry revealed to me by the dance. The sunset is pink and a cacophony of corellas are shrieking, noisy, unrelenting, almost drowning out the sounds of the cars racing by along Princes Street. A light rain gently touches my skin, my lips. I realise suddenly that I'm thirsty and yet filled with water. Across the street, on a balcony two corellas are pressed up close against one another. They snuggle, bump heads and just like the dancers, come together and pull away. Alive, creaturely, completely dependent, utterly interdependent.



*Pool* (2026), by Alex Dobson. Photo by Gregory Lorenzutti.

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#### References:

1. Farrier, David. 2019. *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones and Extinction*. University of Minnesota Press.
2. Phone conversation between Alex Dobson and Noemie Huttner-Koros, Friday 27 March 2026.

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Noemie Huttner-Koros is a performance-maker, writer, dramaturg and community organiser based on Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung country.

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