

**Title page:**

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Seeing futures in ballet: The storylines of four student ballet dancers

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**Title:****Seeing futures in ballet: The storylines of four student ballet dancers****Abstract:**

This paper explores the storylines of four student ballet dancers who attend a specialist performing arts secondary school and who, in differing ways, envisage futures which ‘look straight at ballet’. When decisions about schooling intermingle with long-held imaginings of futures in ballet, thought is provoked about ways young adolescents embody and express notions of becoming. A Deleuzian lens is employed to explore assemblages of the self through the deterritorialisation that is provoked when unforeseen images emerge and imaginings are challenged.

The data discussed in this paper include interview transcripts and pictures participants have drawn of themselves. The analysis uses notions of rhizomatic becoming and positions students’ decision making in oscillation between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation as new languages make sense of how a future in ballet is configured from different perspectives. Themes of being in love with ballet and identities of dancers/non-dancers are negotiated through the data. As talented ballet students are compelled to move away from schooling in order to move closer to their future, concepts of schooling are problematised. Understandings of rhizomatic structures offer insight into the working out of desires, particularly in the context of a specialist performing arts school.

**Keywords:**

becoming; ballet students; middle years of schooling; young adolescents; decision making; Gilles Deleuze

## **Main text:**

*Along rhizomes – en avant (movements travelling forwards), en arrière (movements travelling backwards)*

This paper offers an exploration of ways that rhizomatic structures, as detailed and dissected by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, can lead to new understandings of how young adolescents make decisions about future directions. The rhizome provides a way of looking at how ideas about the future self are imagined and can be spoken aloud and mapped. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 21, italics in original) write, the rhizome ‘has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows’, and it is in the space of the overflow (and attempts to contain, direct or release it) that my inquiry is located. I will be applying concepts of rhizomatic thinking and becoming to data generated by conversations I shared with four student ballet dancers of a performing arts high school.

Highly talented ballet students, and especially girls, are typically encouraged to leave school early in order to pursue fulltime ballet, rather than complete their schooling (Roncaglia, 2008). Questions about how this expectation is embodied is a key concern for the four ballet students whose stories I will discuss. Only two years into their secondary studies, the students are engaged in pressing and pragmatic questions about how they would like their futures to unfold; a perspective which establishes an important difference with the ways most young adolescents engage in schooling and activities at this time of their lives. In contrast to the tightly envisioned world of ballet, early adolescence, or the middle schooling stage, is typically framed as a site of exploration and identity construction with students encouraged to engage in an extensive range of subjects and co-curricular activities to broaden their experiences. Middle schooling approaches advocate an intentional focus on relevant,

challenging and authentic pedagogies and curricula to resist students' 'disengagement from schooling ... poor achievement and behaviour' (Pendergast, 2005, p. 3). The students in my study do not appear at risk in these areas, however, at times they have all had, or are currently experiencing, ambiguous relationships with their schooling journey.

One of the core concerns to have arisen from analysis is how individuality in a performing arts school is spoken using enmeshed territories of school and ballet. As I work the data, I query how young adolescents with dreams of a very specific future respond to the 'precarious relations of composition and decomposition' of the ever-changing self (Roffe, 2007, p. 42). As Jonathon Roffe elaborates;

We meet with people, eat, change our minds. We are moved by books and by cars. We encounter the world innumerable times in our everyday lives ...

This continual inter-relation of self and society demonstrates, in terms of Deleuze's position, that there is always room for the current state of a subject to be changed.

(2007, pp. 42-43).

As the above quotation suggests, imagination, language, encounters and visualisation constitute ways by which we play with questions and ideas about who we might become in adulthood. Our meanderings trigger lines of flight which link our desire for self-actualisation with our engagement in daily happenings to eventually bring about change. The journeys I will be examining are drawn from two types of data; transcripts of interviews and pictures students drew depicting themselves in the future. The data are themselves the result of 'meeting with people' as participants engaged in conversations and activities for the study. The data establish an interplay between desired imaginings and the possible realities, and highlight how knowledge of oneself as a subject is never certain or secure, but always

connected to lines of flight which intersect events such as injury, body changes and interest redirections to cause rupture and redirection of the rhizome that is becoming. Living out Deleuze's belief of there always being room for the current state of a subject to be changed, the students spoke simultaneously of who they would really like to become and the 'Plan B/s' they were also willing to accept.

This paper's significance lies with its inquiry into lines which run counter to those framing more conventional forms of schooling. Futures in the performing arts are typically viewed as insecure and students may find their desire for perfection in ballet unvalued outside the ballet circle. However, by examining how the experiences of students who are situated right in the middle of their schooling, at a time when making key decisions about careers and deciding whether or not to leave school early do not usually apply, a contribution to the literature is made. The middle years vantage point from which I write presents a point of intersection between literature which appreciates both the importance of engagement, relevance and challenge during these years of schooling (Carrington, 2006; Chadbourne, 2003; Pendergast & Bahr, 2005) and cognisance of the position of schooling for students whose futures are focused elsewhere (Loch, 2012).

### ***Dimensions and directions - new territories to becoming***

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, p. 21) description of 'dimensions' of identity and the 'directions' in which people move situates becoming as a process which asks us 'to move and to pull in both directions at once' (Boundas, 1993, p. 39). Young adolescence is a period when many imaginings can seem possible, and multiplicities and dualities (such as hoping to do well at school *and* at ballet) can be expressed simultaneously. In zones of decision making (such as at times of subject selection or when deciding to stop an activity one has enjoyed for

a long time), the multidimensionality of individuals and their interests may trigger an ‘overspill’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21); delineating spaces where new directions emerge from points of breakage. The stories within these data suggest that although seemingly ensconced *in school* due to their age, some young adolescents are already working within multifarious rhizomes and assembling a heightened sense of their varied and competing dimensions and directions. Students who have connected strongly to a main vein of interest and whose academic schooling has come into line to support its growth face particularly strong experiences of change when opportunities and threats arise which could move them towards or away from their imaginings.

Whether the next step be towards a career in ballet or confronting the loss of this goal, students use language to reorientate themselves along the rhizome and stabilise their stance. ‘The movement by which “one” leaves the territory’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 508), described as deterritorialisation, echoes how speaking the self out loud leads to displacement/replacement through change. Then, as imaginings are employed to express the changes, re-configured desires settle along new rhizomes and a reterritorialisation takes place. Cycles of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation thus reflect how, for the continually re-imagined self, ‘the Deleuzian subject is able to avoid being forever stuck in the infamous vicious circle because it is free to break things open’ (Semetsky, 2006, p. 21).

Wanting - then changing one’s mind and no longer wanting to be something – or wanting, then being rejected – dynamically positions discourses of decision making as ‘a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialisation ever further’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10). In this space of reaching across areas of interest to redirect trajectories, the notion of the rhizome conveys potently the resilient and creative qualities of decision making as ‘anti-hierarchy, not an imitation or tracing, but a mapping and a connection’ (Flieger, 2000, p. 55). This Deleuzian urge to push through to new lines of flight, Alecia Youngblood

Jackson and Lisa Mazzei (2012, p. 86) write, is driven by ‘the productive force of intensities and connections of desires’. It is when opportunities arise, sometimes through something else fracturing, that space is claimed to speak the mapping lines and make lucid connections between what we like, what we are good at and what we wish to avoid.

*The expression of themes – développ  (to unfold the leg; to front, side or behind the dancer)*

Two central ideas emerged which facilitated entry points to the students’ stories; ‘being in love with ballet’ and ‘identity’. In building an understanding around these areas, data were analysed by listening to audio-recordings and creating transcripts, reviewing pictures and becoming sensitised to recurring narratives around which participants’ ideas could be clustered. My heightening awareness of the ways we draw meaning from the power of hindsight, the dynamism of the present and forecasts of the future has contributed to the layered ways in which I recognise participants speaking of themselves. My use of visual data aims to take a step towards Mazzei and Jackson’s (2009, p. 4) suggestion to ‘question what you ask of voice, what you hear and how you hear it [in order to] deconstruct why one story is told and not another’. With a copy of their drawing in front of them, participants were encouraged to describe what they found interesting in their own pictures (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). The replies sometimes forced me to acknowledge my misreadings and precipitated quick changes of direction when my trajectory was off course. However, this type of sharing in the interview also facilitated opportunities for participants to adopt more empowered stances in the construction and telling of their own stories (Gee, 2005; Priyadharshini, 2003), an important element when undertaking research with young people (Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kellett, & Robinson, 2004; McLeod, 2000).

Critical methodological engagement with voice, however, is not ameliorated simply by utilising a number of platforms. Another point into the data comes through querying ‘the conditions under which something new is produced (*creativity*)’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. vii, italics in original) as the stance of the researcher, initially as a dispassionate yet attentive listener, has her own role to play in the texts produced. It is problematic to register the extent to which my study/questions/presence shaped the responses I received, but to the fore moves my task of working with ‘dislocated mapping’ and my sensitivity to ‘the stories that have been cast aside as unimportant, that have become lost in the cracks, that are lying on the cutting room floor, and that don’t make the reel designed to appeal to a mass audience’ (Mazzei, 2009, p. 59). Together with stories of the self which are told more often and sit in well-worn grooves, I aim to stitch in less spoken/less depicted utterances so that more faceted planes of meaning may emerge.

### ***Pieces of the study***

#### *Researcher identity*

Locating this study at ‘Australis School’ (a pseudonym) returns me to my own high school ‘to seek answers to long submerged questions’ (Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, & van Dyke, 1990, p. 13) about how dimensions of becoming are influenced by experiences at school. After a childhood of ballet classes, I received an academic scholarship to Australis School and attended for my final three years of school. I survived a week in the dance program then switched to acting after acknowledging that my body and ability would never be at the level of my dancing peers. Acting better suited my evolving interest in language and performance but, beyond involvement in a university theatre group, I pursued no further opportunities on the stage. For a number of years more recently, I was a member of Australis’



school board; a role which re-engaged my contemplation of how trajectories emerge and the impact school structures have on students' lives and futures.

### *The school*

'Australis' is an independent, co-educational performing arts school located in the suburbs of an Australian capital city. A founding aim of the school was to produce educated ballet dancers who would be in a better position gain further qualifications, employment and training once their dance career was complete; a concern highlighted in literature exploring the careers of ballet dancers (Nieminen, 1998; Roncaglia, 2006). Thus, as well as studying the state-endorsed curriculum leading to matriculation, students undertake training in specialisations which include dance, music and drama. After school work in the morning, performing arts classes with industry specialists take place each afternoon. Many students, and especially ballet dancers, attend additional classes into the early evening. The model used by the school is similar to that of a small number of other performing arts secondary schools in Australia where instead of promoting diverse curricula and multiple future directions through school achievement (Bryce & Withers, 2003), the less secure world of the performing arts is placed at the hub of the educational event.

### *The participants*

Four student ballet dancers participated in this study, coming from a pool of nine students (actors, dancers and musicians) who had returned the required consent forms and completed a visual instrument called 'Draw Yourself in the Future', which all Year 8 students were invited to complete. Of the four ballet dancers; three are female, Virginia, Primrose and

Caroline; and one male, Andy (names are pseudonyms). Virginia and Caroline commenced at Australis in the associated primary school and Primrose and Andy in the first year of high school. Primrose only participated in the first phase of the study as she left to move to a school closer to home. The student body is diverse with students commuting from many suburbs and boarders coming from interstate and overseas. Andy and Caroline live over an hour from the school and Primrose commuted from the rural outskirts, almost two hours each way. Many students attend Australis on scholarship. It is known as a welcoming school and often attracts students who have not matched well with conventional schooling or who have been at risk of dropping out of school, but it also attracts students who wish to focus intensively on their chosen art form. The participants in this paper fall into this latter category.

### *Procedures*

Following completion of the 'Draw Yourself in the Future' instrument (mid 2009, Year 8), three small group interviews (involving 9 participants) took place. Follow up interviews were held in early 2010 (Year 9) and at the start of 2011 (Year 10), when students were asked to bring along a second drawing using the same template (Andy, Caroline and Virginia did so). Caroline, Andy and Virginia were interviewed twice over the course of the study and Primrose once. All interviews included some prepared questions and were initially focused on the decision making processes used to select elective subjects for Year 9 and 10. Planned questions included, 'What was it like to make your subject selections?' and 'When you look at your future, is the image clear or foggy?' Students were less engaged in discussion about elective subjects than about their performing arts pathways which lead to greater emphasis being placed on the second question. This led to an exploration of ways

students discursively and visually constructed an understanding of becoming and how they incorporated change and loss into their stories.

*Of love and identity – ouvert, ouverte (open, opened)*

The following focal points move between the narratives of different participants. The first focal point outlines what it means to be in love with ballet and the relationship between love and success, and the second considers identity in a period of uncertainty alongside the notion of having ‘an idea to fall back on’.

*Focal point 1: Being in love with ballet - looking to lines of flight*

Making the commitment at a young age to prioritise ballet above all other activities is typical of highly successful dancers (Roncaglia, 2006). The allure of joining a company fulfils the dancer’s desire to be surrounded solely and purely by ballet which makes the step of formally joining others who share this endeavour one of ‘intensity’ and ‘density’ (Sutherland, 1976, p. 43). Andy explains his desire to become a professional dancer in linguistic cycles of deterritorialisation. He leaves behind one way of describing his desires to reterritorialise another dimension of his identity. Andy’s comments on his drawing (Figure 1) suggest a shift towards more authentic self-expression;

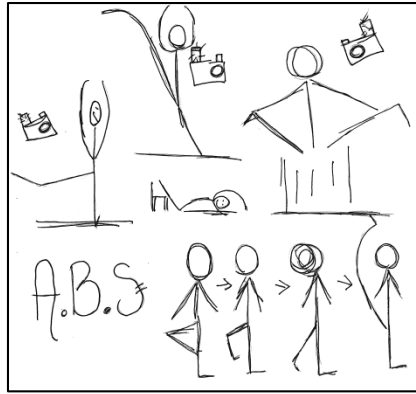


Figure 1 Andy Drawing 1 (2009)

*Andy: I kind of mean fame. I don't want that anymore.*

*Sarah: Did something happen?*

*Andy: Just so over people talking about fame ... I just feel like I want to be the best I can, umm, at what I do.*

(Andy, group interview, November 2009)

Andy's desires used to make sense to him but by encountering an overflow of identity which has been forced by limited connotations of the word 'fame', he has moved to new ways of describing his desire. The interview itself becomes a site of deterritorialisation as Andy shifts the focus of one of my questions to answer a question he has asked of himself. This has, perhaps, been playing on his mind as his response powerfully writes himself into a future for which he has the language;

*SL: How will you make decisions about what subjects to study, or whether to stay at school, or not?*

*Andy: I decided because, umm, at first I only liked ballet. I didn't love it. But now, when I actually - the reason I love ballet is because it's challenging and because I really want to do it. What made my decision is because we do more ballet and more classes and that gets you better on that core strengthening and flexibility and that's what I really want to work on. Umm, and what helped me make my decision was because I really want to be better at it and be the best I could.*

(Andy, group interview, November 2009)

Andy's second drawing (Figure 2) depicts landmark events in linear sequence. The planned lines of flight, towards university courses in marketing and sociology, appear magnetic enough to see Andy through years of hard work as a dancer and represent a coming home to the territory (Australia and schooling) he must leave in order to fulfil his dancing dreams.



Figure 2 Andy Drawing 2 (2011)

Andy's language between the two interview periods reflects transition from 'loving ballet' (group interview, 2009) to talking about 'focus', 'really wanting to do it' and 'looking straight ahead at ballet' (group interview, February 2011). This suggests the solidification of lines of flight into new rhizomes along which Andy sees himself continuing to move. By situating himself purposefully in imagined spaces, such as winning the Prix de Lausanne (a prestigious ballet award), attending the American Ballet Theatre School and then joining its company, Andy speaks with authority and in a mode of 'self-authoring' as he regards the reterritorialisation he has experienced. No longer a novice, Andy moves from 'ballet as a hobby' to speaking about ballet being 'like a profession';

*Once you get to an older stage, it's more like you want to do it as a career. For me, in Year 10 I realised the focus you have to have and only people that really want to do it as a profession do it in those years. From Year 7 to 9, it's more of a hobby. I did it as a hobby to start off with but then I realised it was like a profession.*

(Andy, group interview, November 2011)

*From periphery to centre*

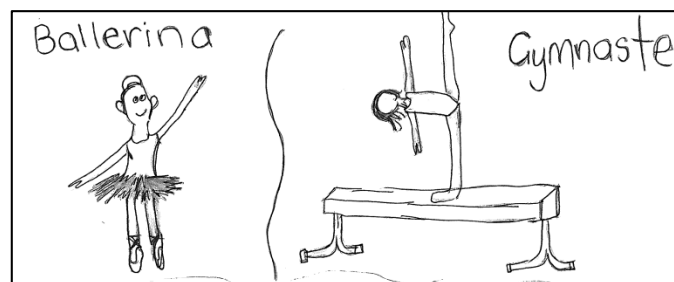


Figure 3 Caroline Drawing 1 (2009)

Another aspect of 'being in love' with ballet is explored by language detailing a casting off of competing interests to be left with only ballet. Recalling an earlier stage of her life when she liked both gymnastics and ballet and could not choose between them (Figure 3), Caroline now speaks of her loss and return to ballet as 'going through a phase' and feels that by returning, she is more deeply committed;

*When I drew this I was going through a phase of completely hating ballet and I watched a movie called 'Stick It' - it's like a gymnastics movie. And I started practicing some of the moves and I found that I started getting them real well. So I was going through a phase of wanting to quit ballet and go onto gymnastics, but now I'm like, I don't think so. I think I'm over that phase.*

(Caroline, group interview, November 2009)

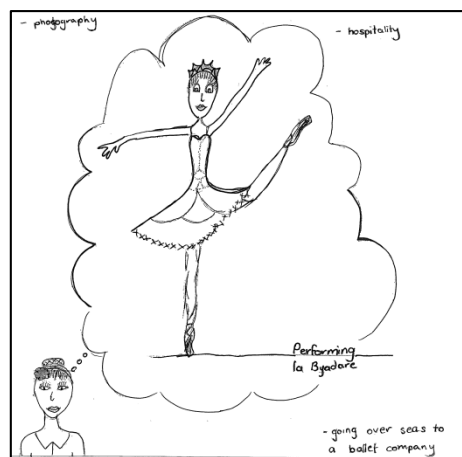


Figure 4 Caroline Drawing 2 (2011)

Moving on a couple of years and finding exciting challenges along the rhizome of ballet, Caroline can see herself (Figure 4) as an accomplished soloist in a glamorous tutu and headpiece. Outside the bubble, though, a smaller Caroline wearing ordinary clothes dreams of

becoming the ballerina. Both figures gaze directly ahead. Caroline's interview comment and Figure 4, her second picture, reflect the patterned process of becoming as different possibilities of the future self are considered. Caroline takes incremental steps to position herself at the centre of her ballet narrative, having experienced the disorientation of moving back and forth before arriving at this point;

*OK, so that's me now and then that's me in the future. So, I am like performing 'La Bayadere'. I'm performing one of the solos ... the solo called 'Three Shades'. It's amazing. I was looking it up on YouTube and there were all these girls and they have the most amazing control and it was freaking me out because I thought I'd never be able to do that because they have the most amazing control.*

(Caroline, group interview, February 2011)

Caroline must soon emerge from standing by and watching her own success as if it were happening to someone else and find voice about herself. Speaking amidst overflow, Caroline tries out a narrative possibility of how she would like to be seen by referencing others who inhabit the professional ballet space. This provides perspective on the identities she already *has* and models for the rhizomatic structure she hopes to *become*.

#### *Focal point 2: Identity amidst uncertainty - falling back to 'Plan B'*

No matter how deeply set the desire to be a dancer, references to the necessity of fall-back plans are often made. The second focal point to be discussed draws on ways that once-strong rhizome-like roots can be weakened by factors beyond the individual's control and



offers consideration of how individuals live with such multilayered positions. Caroline has been haunted by the spectre of injury; her story demonstrating ‘it is by speed and slowness that one connects with something else’ (Deleuze quoted in Semetsky, 2006, p. 4). Being separated from ballet owing to injury or bodily factors can be anticipated but injury sets forth a painful and slow route to reterritorialisation and triggers deep rupture in the dancer’s sense of self (Turner & Wainwright, 2003);

*I think you have a 50/50 chance of making it cause the future is not set in stone.  
Like, one day, you don’t even know when, but something might happen which  
changes your course for the future; so like, getting a bad injury and you’d have to  
stop ballet completely and like completely go back to something else.*

(Caroline, group interview, November 2009)

Needing to ‘stop ballet completely’ to ‘completely go back to something else’ causes violent rupture of anticipated lines and whilst Caroline can appreciate that from this new space something else will emerge, her use of the phrase ‘go back to’ suggests that fall-back ideas need to not only exist, but that they must also be continually maintained and constantly in motion if they too are to remain relevant.

The back and forth and speed and slowness of injury is also prevalent for Primrose as she grapples with ways to bring language to the reshaping of her interests and plans;

*I do ballet because it’s just ... it’s what ... oh, it’s just ... it’s what I enjoy the most  
and I’d like to become a teacher or an examiner or something along those lines, or  
a ballerina ... I don’t ... I’m sort of foggy because I have so many things I want to*

*be and want to do and there's just ... it's just ... I'm not sure where I should be going ... because I have that injury. It's just that my injury is also clouding my decisions.*

(Primrose, group interview, November 2009, ellipses in original speech)

The process of grieving for the lost imagined adult self can make new and alternate futures difficult propositions in which to invest (Turner & Wainwright, 2003). Feminist scholars point to cultural expectations of the 'self-made girl' to demonstrate fluent command of 'narratives of self-discipline and motivation' (Harris, 2004, p. 71) and to embody success through a well-planned, controlled and ordered life (McRobbie, 2007). This paradigm suggests that multiple narratives and constant sensitivity to one's other potentialities must run continually and in parallel with the ballet story in case they are needed. Primrose's imposed openness to futures other than ballet, however, sets her adrift as she struggles to find reterritorialisation in new areas. She does not yet have the language. As she speaks, she struggles to make whole her image;

*So, I'm not quite sure what I want to be and so it makes me go back and forth ... it clouds a bit ... I was always very clear, but now ...*

(Primrose, group interview, November 2009)

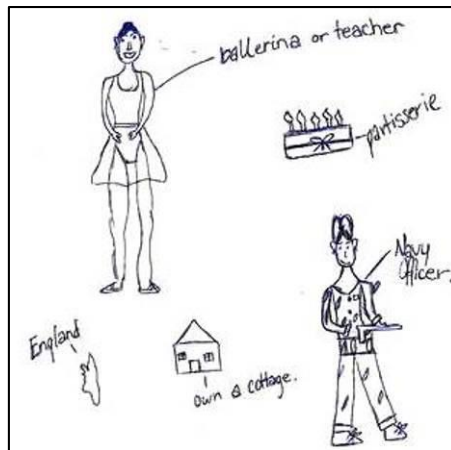


Figure 5 Primrose Drawing 1 (2009)

Career education theorists affirm it appropriate for young adolescents to be unsure of their career aspirations but suggest they should be engaged in the process of learning about careers and seeing themselves in relation to various options (Akos, Konold, & Niles, 2004; Super, 1990). Primrose’s picture (Figure 5) indicates some ideas. Her own interpretation of this drawing (private email correspondence, May 2010) describes the naval officer reflecting her boyish/outdoors side which contrasts with the highly feminised/interior world of ballet. She also writes of the mental toughness and leadership dancers need to show, relating this to militaristic metaphors. When deciding between the binaries represented in the ballet student’s landscape of possibilities - ‘ballerina or teacher’ - Primrose presents herself in the group interview as willing to consider ballet teaching. Such resilience may aim to distract from the significance of the loss of the dream *to be* a dancer (Stinson et al., 1990) as teaching ballet is a very different career to the one she had so vividly imagined.

*Multiple possibilities*

Multiple futures and possibilities evoke Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, p. 21) notions of dimensions and directions and provide a less vulnerable reading of uncertainty and indecision. In Figure 6, Virginia proposes an interconnected set of possible futures; 'ballet', 'write/author', 'UK & Europe' and 'teaching ballet'. Her second drawing (Figure 7), a written page, lists in a timeline goals for ballet, university, retirement, choreography, being a paediatrician and having a family. Virginia also includes a set of assertive declarations of whom she may become – 'a professional dancer, paediatrician (child psychologist, occupational therapy), choreography' (Figure 7).

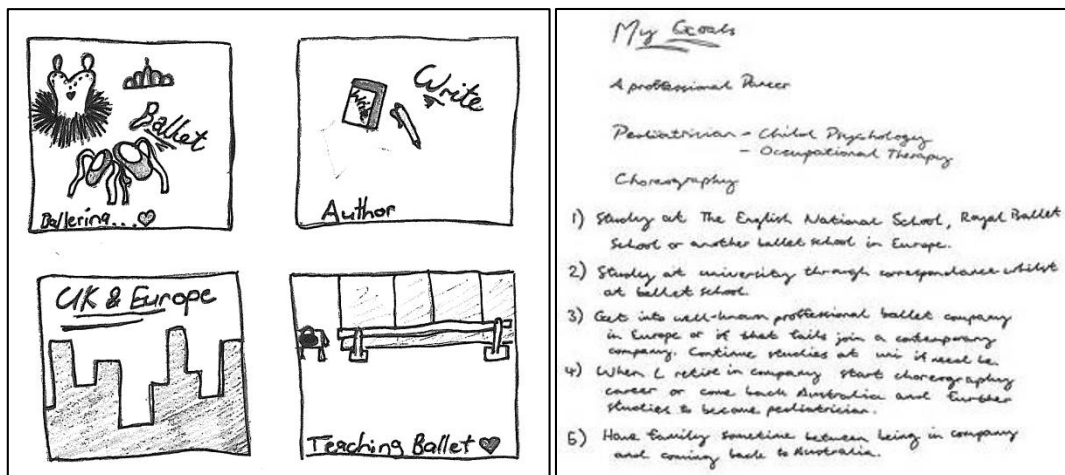


Figure 6 Virginia Drawing 1 (2009)

Figure 7 Virginia Drawing 2 (2011)

My inquiry questions interconnect with Virginia's rapidly evolving rhizomes to reveal a multifaceted narrative of the self;

*SL: Tell me about how you 'map out' [your future plans]?*

*Virginia: Umm, I have like a book at home that I write down all these different ideas ... And I kind of write down things ... I'm choreographing a solo which I'm auditioning today ... and I listen to all this different music. And, in some ways, I think it might be really good to be a choreographer ... Yeah, and I really like maths. And I used to, umm, want to be an engineer cause my two oldest brothers are engineers and my dad is very good at maths ... It came to the idea that I really wanted to help children because when I was younger, I got really sick and ... my child doctor was just amazing and I loved him ... so I thought, 'Oh, it might be really nice to help children'. But I don't like the idea of sitting in a surgery and working really late hours cause I want to be able to have a family as well ...*

(Virginia, individual interview, February 2011, ellipses represent my editing)

In spite of so many clearly articulated possibilities, Virginia describes her future as 'kind of foggy'. The nub of the complication is tertiary study as Virginia wants to go to university to study for a professional career, yet also recognises that 'being a ballerina, your career is kind of short ... when I finish my ballet career I will be in my thirties or so, so it's kind of hard to go back into university at that age' (group interview, November 2009). Not yet at a stage to 'resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves' (Davies, 2004, p. 1), Virginia appears buffeted and slightly flattered by the many careers of which she speaks. Her openness to movement between territories, however, is evidenced in her difficulty articulating a path as she cannot completely let go of any of the imagined territories in which she has lived and move anew.

***Discussion - pas de basque (a movement derived from the swaying of the skirt)***

*To become is never to imitate, nor to 'do like', nor to conform to a model, whether it's of justice or truth. There is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at.*

(Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 2)

From early adolescence until the dance career ends, those fulfilling their passion for ballet commit to a specialised aesthetic beyond the contemplation of most people. The preceding section attempts to sketch out ways that young adolescents with a strong vocational calling map and connect their pathways when their interests do not follow 'school lines'. Research into what young female ballet students say about dance suggests that opportunities which allow ballet students to speak 'of dance and of themselves' should be encouraged in order to 'give them a chance to develop their voices as well as their bodies' (Stinson et al., 1990, p. 21). The Deleuzian notion of desire reflects this process by showing how becoming is built up through experiences, relationships and connections and is continually uttered and ushered forth into new spaces to come to form (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). For example, Caroline and Andy speak with anticipatory pleasure about the possibility of being accepted into the professional dance world. In Andy's declaration of faith in both his and Caroline's potential, 'I think that we have decided to look straight at ballet and because of that we'll keep doing ballet' (group interview, February 2011), he positions himself in the middle of the movement towards his goals. Virginia's frenetic indecision, by contrast, reflects her need to move beyond imitation and pause in order to establish her own voice. Helpfully, during her interview, Virginia begins playing with languages of the self, the future and languages of the self *in* the future to talk through how things might be. For Primrose, acceptance that injury has brought on unexpected and unwanted deterritorialisation will require acknowledgment and exploration before taking up new lines of flight. Her non-dance options signify an

identity already on the move from dance even if she is unready to speak it. Her move to a new school may be part of her process of change.

Further discussion suggests ways that the landscape of schooling is experienced by students who are ambivalent about its relevance. 'School' is usually a monolithic force in the lives of young adolescents, however, for these participants 'doing school' appears to cause neither great stress nor compromise. Rather, formal education slips to the side to allow desired futures to come closer, or in the case of Andy's timeline (Figure 2), to be given time and space after ballet is complete. Even Caroline, who describes herself as 'not really academic' (group interview, November 2009), is not frustrated by remaining at school as she awaits opportunities in ballet. Alternatively, even though she needs school qualifications for her tertiary plans, Virginia appears equally unconcerned if school were to recede and ballet take over. The petering out of discussion about school related topics in interviews was not fuelled by a rejection of school but rather by school's falling away, thus inviting questions about the role school plays when futures are under construction elsewhere. This notion invites a reframing of school as a grand (career) terminus which takes children in, gives them the tools they appear to need and sets them on their way. Schooling can alternatively be read as a site comfortably predictable and constant, while students with aspirations which do not directly require schooling experiment with different representations and territories.

By giving voice to four young adolescents 'looking straight at ballet', an understanding of the role of schooling as nurturing to the emerging self, but not pivotal in the process of becoming, is developed. Decisions made and credentials gained during the school years (Croll, Attwood, & Fuller, 2010) usually have an enduring impact on future pathways (Blenkinsop, McCrone, Wade, & Morris, 2005) but there should also be recognition that, at times, schooling can slip to the side to allow another part of the rhizome to move ahead, even if ballet's forward stance is later overturned. Success in professional ballet requires blinkered

vision yet, as all participants explain, also a set of ‘fall-backs’ to prepare for life after ballet. For this reason, continuing flexible and varied engagement with schooling is vital and must be considered when discussing the differing ways by which one can approach the future. In this paper, students express faith that the future will be flexible enough to accommodate their lines of flight, and schooling, especially in the middle years, ought to be robust enough to support the risks the students are prepared to take.

Specialist performing arts schools may indeed be the ideal sites through which to support students’ ballet trajectories, however, they also risk losing students completely when narratives change and ballet becomes an impossibility. Needing to make decisions at an early age, young adolescent ballet students may benefit from being encouraged to deconstruct the binary which positions ballet at one end of the frame and failure through a lack of fit at the other. A richer engagement with ‘the multiple’, a force which develops ‘in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has already’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21) may assist the individual to look at the decisions already taken in order to have confidence regarding the next set.

Claire Parnet (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 28), in conversation with Deleuze, writes of life moments existing along a pathway with people ‘always in the middle of a path, in the middle of something’. The notion of working in the present moment on threads of becoming which are not clearly formed, but sometimes messily stitched and overspilt, suggests the utility of poststructural engagement with the process of becoming in schools. This is suggestive of Deleuze’s notion of the body’s power to move anew to multiple sounds, rests, slowness and speeds as new possibilities of the self are recognised and taken up (Semetsky, 2006, p. 4). Whilst dance students may at times struggle to speak or contain the space beyond ballet, taking steps towards a reterritorialised articulation of the self allows for playfulness in the overspill and delight in the unexpected possibilities contained within.



### ***Coda (the concluding movement)***

Gaining insight into how young adolescents speak about and visualise their futures offers insight into the significance of schooling for students whose futures are taking them in other directions. As the data illustrate, passionate dedication to ballet does not immunise against unforeseen events and even when a professional dance career becomes possible the need for schooling and education does not disappear. Instead, those involved with the education of talented young performers must seek ways to shift the parameters of both schooling and ballet and foreground the veracity of flexible educational discourses so that a young person's education continues to grow amongst multiple rhizomes.

The Deleuzian notion of becoming foregrounds ways in which students are mindfully engaged in the creative, unique and individual process of moving into their possibilities and exploring spaces of reterritorialisation through new languages. Students with specialised future plans work within long-held imaginings of themselves and may require support to explore broader possible futures or to let go of long held imaginings. Hence, they may benefit from, and are likely to be receptive to, opportunities to explore notions of becoming in a creative sense as they come to express the history and potential of their own pathways and identities. It is hoped the data collection process for this study provided space for students to articulate their imaginings and experience the sound and movement of multiple possibilities, an aim recognised as a worthwhile research endeavour in the area of dance (Stinson et al., 1990).

### **Indication of figures:**

See accompanying file for separate copies of seven figures.

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