

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Chichester
Unit of Assessment: Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
Title of case study: Yael Flexer 'The Living Room' and related choreographic works (2005-2012): Impact on choreographers and the UK contemporary dance profession
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study charts the specific impact of <i>The Living Room</i> (Yael Flexer, 2010-11) to determine the impact made on the UK contemporary dance profession (professional and emerging choreographers as well as organisations who support those choreographers). <i>The Living Room</i> constitutes a seminal moment in Flexer's choreographic development and career and was made just prior to the culmination of twenty years choreographic work. Her earlier performance research, for example <i>Doing, Done, Undone</i> (toured internationally 2007- 2010) through to later pieces such as <i>Weightless</i> (2013) have made a significant impact on the UK contemporary dance profession. It is Flexer's long and sustained career in a sector known for its emphasis on young and emerging choreographers along with her depth of research into choreographic methodologies that has made a difference to this professional dance sector.</p> <p>Flexer's choreographic style and methodology is the research that underpins this impact. The pathways to impact involve direct engagement by professional and emerging dancers and choreographers, apprentices in Flexer's choreographic process and via workshops delivered by Flexer for young people and emerging dancers, and her commissions for national dance organisations seeking change. Flexer has been developing creative methodologies that question the socio-cultural diversity and hybridity of the dancer (specifically in <i>The Living Room</i>, 2010-11). This provides a unique pathway to impact as the beneficiaries become invested and able to critically reflect on the choreographic process and its application to their own signature style and feminist artistic/choreographic voice.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Flexer's research since her 0.5 appointment at University of Chichester (2005) has been to develop a unique choreographic style and methodology. This is most strongly seen, and the impact charted here, in <i>The Living Room</i>, a small to middle scale professional choreography and practice-as-research project for 6-9 dancers. Developing notions of choreographic 'portraiture' (Albright 1997, Marks 2003) and the 'in-between' (Briginshaw 2001) of dance and 'the everyday', was a means to explore the performers' contribution and ownership in the formation of their onstage representation. Flexer (Choreographer) developed notions of <i>in-between</i>, primarily between dance and 'the everyday' and dismantled the 'fourth wall' to engender an informal mode of presentation. The research explored, in practice, a continuum between formal/complex movement language and everyday gesture/behaviour to highlight a concrete performance register and a 'matter of fact' aesthetic that draws on post-modern dance practice and extends previous contemporaneous investigations of the nexus between audience, performer and choreographer such as <i>The Song</i> (2009) by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, <i>A Series of Appointments</i> (2010) by Siobhan Davies, <i>The Quiet Dance</i> (2005) by Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion. This approach asserts dancers' agency and extends interrogations of the notion of performativity within theatrical performance (Burt 2006; Briginshaw 2001).</p> <p>The work also questions other <i>in-betweens</i> such as the notion of the 'unhome' and hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994) in order to reveal autobiographical information/asserting socio-cultural difference. As choreographic strategy this makes reference to the liminal experience of migration and brings a political dimension to the reading of a work made by an Israeli choreographer working in the UK. This then deepens the investigation of choreographic portraiture. In turn, this furthers interrogations of the notion of performativity within theatrical performance (Burt 2006; Briginshaw 2001) and asserts the performers' agency. The process enables young and emerging dancers and choreographers to critique and create alternative female dancing representations in performance and so change their own choreographic signature and approach to making work developing their own feminist artistic/choreographic voice and results in more articulate dancers, choreographers and future dance audiences.</p>

3. References to the research

Website: <http://flexerandsandiland.com/archives/yael-flexer/>
<http://flexerandsandiland.com/archives/yael-flexer/performances/the-living-room/>

Article: Flexer, Y (2012). 'Revisiting a dance history: traces of the 1960's and 1970's in current contemporary dance' *Dance Now*, Israel.

Performances: 24 performances of TLR nationally and internationally (2010-11, audience 4179)

Reviews/Documentation: Performance documentation: The Place Theatre 8.3.2010, 8 National/International Previews/Interviews, 3 National/ International Reviews

Grants and Awards:

Flexer has received a total of £293,800 from Arts Council and other charitable organisations during the period of the REF. Funding for *The Living Room* is outlined below:

University of Chichester Research Facilitation Fund and Departmental funding: £5500

Woking Dance Festival: £5000

West Sussex County Council Commission: £10,000

British Council - Bi Arts: £5000

Arts Council England: £99,982

Hextable Dance- Support in-kind

Greenwich Dance Agency- Support in-kind

TOTAL: £125,482.

4. Details of the impact

The pathways to this impact are engagement with professional and emerging choreographers, emerging professional dancers and young dancers hoping to become professional dancers/choreographers and organisations that both programme and develop dance and dance makers. Through engagement with Flexer's choreographic methodology individuals have changed their views about choreography, how they approach their own practice and how they position dance in the professional dance world.

- A total of 4179 people watched TLR.
- 246 young people took part in dance works created by Flexer as youth commissions relating to TLR. 917 young people and students took part in workshops led by Flexer based on TLR.
- 8 guest artists danced in Flexer's company and were enabled to develop their choreographic career. 500 artist and teachers took part of professional development workshops led by Flexer.

1. Professional Choreographers

Flexer was commissioned to make new works for four emerging companies/artists as part of 'The Living Room' project, which were integrated into touring performances in different regions (and one international performance). Engaging with Flexer's choreographic approach as part of this unique scheme has opened up new ways of working for all eight artists involved. For Lila Dance, Flexer's approach to developing and incorporating conversational text within performance as well as her focus on the relationship between performer and audience provided new choreographic insights, which are influencing their own practice. Aya Kobayashi, choreographer for Angali Dance Company began her career as an apprentice dancers with Flexer and has gone on to become a full company member and a choreographer in her own right. She has been exploring the dancer's individuality as an onstage presence which she says is informed by Flexer's approach to working with dancers and this has made a difference to her own dance making practice. Her new work for Anjali Dance Company premiered at the Clore Ballroom, Royal Festival Hall, London in 2013, <https://vimeo.com/71567814> (See testimonial and emails from Abigail Mortimer and Carrie Whittaker, Lila Dance; FreeFall Dance; Aya Kobayashi).

Apprentices (emerging professional dancers)

Flexer has provided an effective apprenticeship scheme for post-graduate dancers to transition into professional practice. Often these apprentices, such as Hannily who worked on *The Living Room* rural tour as an assistant and workshop leader, go on to make their own work or to successfully develop a career in dance (she is now rehearsal director for Hampshire Youth Dance and teaches dance at the University of Chichester and Bath Spa University). The scheme has afforded two graduate dancers from the South-East the opportunity to become full company members – Aya Kobayashi for 'Doing, Done and Undone' (2007-09) and Hannah Martin for *The Living Room* (2010-11). Both apprentices developed personally and artistically through the process and subsequently secured employment in dance roles. Martin is now teaching and making her own work for her company FreeFall Dance. Kobayashi is a company member for Flexer most recently performing in *Weightless* (<http://flexerandsandiland.com/archives/yael-flexer/performances/weightless-2013/>) and choreographer for Anjali Dance Company (See email testimonials from Hannah Martin, Aya Kobayashi).

Organisational impact (on staff and the young dancer participants)

Within 'The Living Room' project alone, Flexer created 13 commissioned works for youth dance companies involving a total of 246 young people across the UK. These works were based on the research themes in TLR and were performed as curtain raisers. For some youth companies this was about a first engagement with dance, and for others it was about shaping their performance/choreographic skills and nurturing an aspiration to pursue a dance career.

Flexer worked with young dancers and emerging choreographers at Swindon Dance and The Place as part of the Centre for Advanced Practice programmes. McCluskey (Swindon) says she watched Flexer work and witnessed several young people change their approach to choreography and some change their minds about a career path, choosing contemporary dance rather than hiphop or musical theatre. She has also run workshops for young people and dance teachers throughout the SE and is considered to be a valuable asset to the region and valued for her choreographic contribution and her ability to transmit her knowledge to a wide range of people (see email from Sacha Lee, The Point) Cuming (Ludus Dance) says Flexer's approach has helped her reposition Ludus Dance from one perceived as dance in education to a professional dance organisation. Flexer was employed to create work for Ludus specifically to help them change programmers' perceptions about Ludus Dance. *What if?* toured successfully as a triple bill alongside work by Nigel Charnock and Ben Wright. It was made with many of the same methodological concerns and during the same time period as *The Living Room* (see emails from Marie McCluskey Swindon Dance, Di Cuming Ludus Dance, Sacha Lee The Point Eastleigh).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Interviews with professional and emerging choreographers:

Carrie Whittaker, Lila Dance
Abigail Mortimer, Lila Dance
Aya Kobayashi

2. Evidence from Apprentice Dancers

Hannah Martin: email response to questions
Hannily: transcribed and collated telephone discussion
Grace Sellwood, Freefall Dance: email response to questions

3. Evidence from organisations

Di Cuming, Ludus Dance Chief Executive: transcribed and collated discussion
(contact details: di.cuming@ludusdance.org)
Marie McCluskey, Executive Director, Swindon Dance: transcribed and collated discussion
(contact details: Marie.McCluskey@swindondance.org.uk)

4. Testimonials and reviews from Flexer's website and archives

5. Flexer's ACE confirmation letter and evaluation for The Living Room and The Living Room Outside