



Photo: Chris Herzfeld

construct

A dance theatre work by Tanja Liedtke

STUDY GUIDE

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construct could apply to many things, from personal careers and relationships, to larger matters. We build cities and destroy them. Great civilisations fall apart. Things increase and decrease. It's a universal subject, something that is inherent in the world.

Tanja Liedtke, 2007.

Each one of us has, somewhere in his heart, the dream to make a living world, a universe.

Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building*, 1979. p. 9

construct - v. to form by putting together parts; build; frame; devise. n. a complex image or idea resulting from a synthesis by the mind.

Macquarie Dictionary, 2001.

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HOW TO USE THESE NOTES

The notes will assist you in providing your students with information on the thematic material, content, creative process, artistic background of performers/creators, and the technical and design features of *construct*. The notes will also provide ideas for critical discussion about the production, and suggestions towards using the work as a starting point for further exploration of the ideas that stimulated the creation of the work.

From the student's perspective, critical appreciation of *construct*, related creative tasks, and further investigation of the themes can contribute to learning by developing the students own responses and ideas to the visual, textual and kinaesthetic layers of artistic work.

Some of the research resources used in the making of *construct* are provided, as well as suggested ideas and directions for extended research and creative learning.

PRESENTING *construct*

construct presents the viewer with the challenge to consider life as a matrix of constructions that are driven by human desire, imagination, capacity and ingenuity, and at the same time, limited by the ironies and inconsistencies of human nature.

The work is entertaining and provocative, engaging and unsettling. A language of physical, visual, spoken text and sound is used to tell stories, ignite emotional responses and stimulate thinking around the myriad ways we construct our lives. The work touches on, and echoes intellectual theories of structuralism, semiotics and discourse theory. The work is extremely accessible and engaging, and lends itself to viewing by a broad range of ages, backgrounds and experience of theatrical art.

Choreography, dramatic direction, design, and sound composition are all essential and mutually supportive disciplines of this production, and the production is of the highest quality.

We trust that you and your students will enjoy the experience of *construct*.



Photo: Chris Herzfeld

construct – THE WORK

construct is a dance theatre work that explores the concept of building:

- how an idea is built towards a reality,
- how people create, from their imagination and their cultures, the structures of their realities as well as their futures,
- how a relationship grows, and how it changes,
- how a dream is imagined and played out and how all these constructions are inherently vulnerable by the sheer nature of their contrived making.

A large part of the work uses the analogy of structural building, including the use of the tools and mechanical techniques, to serve as a literal representation of far more abstract and theoretical concepts of how our world is constructed and how the power of the individual is the 'maker' or the 'breaker' in these constructions.

construct also takes the viewer on a journey through many of the tangible and routine structures that people put in place in order to live their lives. These structures involve power, gender, institutions, and status to name but a few. Yet they are punctuated by emotional motivations and responses, like fear and love, and the forces of individual rights.

construct illustrates the challenges that human nature creates and tackles in order to satisfy desire, and how the objectives of these desires can be quite different once achieved.

In *construct*, the choreography creates a movement language that depicts the literal and the sensorial aspects of a construction. For instance, starting with an empty space, the three overall clad performers introduce the central theme of how we construct our world. With facial expressions that depict a state of being programmed, one performer tries to make a structure from the other two performers. He struggles, succeeds, fails, struggles, and tries again. He then finds a power tool and his dominance increases, demonstrating the kind of power that requires less effort but executes more action. This power soon overwhelms his initial simple task, corrupts his intentions and his construction is in ruins.

construct also explores the narrative of building a relationship. As attraction becomes seduction, bodies speak to each other. Then as love deepens, the vulnerabilities start to surface. The body language changes as conflict gathers. The construction of the relationship is tested as this conflict ensues, the cracks deepen and a changed relationship is constructed as histories and experiences take over.

The 'dream' life is a central theme of the work. Building the dream involves a complex structure – the dream family, dream home, dream child, dream relationship, and so on, yet the 'dream' life is often glued together by a façade, constructed to protect the dream.

The idea of signage is also explored. Signs (signifiers) represent meaning (signified) and these symbols and their associated rituals are also constructions of human nature. They speak a language of meaning that is universal. Signs are often functional on the surface, but often carry deeper political and social meaning, and their subliminal messages are quite often based on stereotypical expectations that lie at the heart of our social and political worlds.

And of course, the work itself, as an artistic creation, is a living construction that serves as a metaphor for the subject matter by providing a stripped back theatre space that evolves and is built as the ideas around construction are played out through the choreography, the theatrical direction and the performance.

ACTIVITES POST VIEWING:

- Write a critical review of *construct* noting and commenting of the elements of the work – themes, structure, performance, scenes, design, sound, etc.
- Discuss the work's exploration of external systems dictating the private world.
- Identify an aspect of lived experience that is a construction and depict this through an artistic interpretation – poem, painting, photograph, street art, animation... or choreography...

CONSTRUCTING *construct*

...BEGINNING *construct*

The creation of *construct* began with a great deal of general discussion about 'construction' and how the concept of building - of constructing - things, identities, ideas and systems has a universal relevance.

With the larger concept in mind, other investigations were more basic and technical. The choreographer researched books on practical woodworking, and simple construction. Wood, as an element of both building and of nature was to become an integral part of the work as it developed. Wood became a symbol for a foundational resource, something simple and everyday, yet something that became very sophisticated and meaningful as part of a structure.

Other early investigations were around the language of signs and symbols, and the shapes that are used in these signs to depict things like gender, danger, function, emotion and rules. For example: the signs for men and women's toilets, danger signs, street signs, or signs that signify love (the heart) or the end of life (the cross). The shapes that are inherent in signs provided a language that could be explored for its power to sell an idea, or an identity.

...WORKSHOPPING

Using the concepts and ideas that flowed from the early research and discussion, choreographic tasks were set, which developed into dance phrases. At first, Lego blocks were used to explore simple constructions that could also be representational of life, and the complex construction of experiences, hopes, dreams and actions. In order to explore these ideas to different scales, planks of wood and carpentry tools were brought into the studio to inspire movement that would embody these ideas. Then the dancers experimented using their bodies to build things, and to animate the mechanics of building. Observing and using real tools, they teased out the character of the tools, their precision, their power and their ability to fix a problem, and make something that is desired.

The dance phrases that emerged were based on different ideas that flowed from experimenting with these initial tasks - showing lines, pointing and drawing, directions, architecture, measuring, dimensionality, collapsing and destruction of structures. They also took on the character of meanings that were drawn from signage - sexuality, compliance, caution, familiarity.

...IMAGES

Images of homes (in particular the McMansions that have evolved in some suburbs of western society) were viewed to observe and illuminate the meanings and relationships between the construction of a material home and the related identities that are constructed within.

Images of shapes - in particularly the triangle - were investigated for their ubiquitous use in the constructions of social systems. The triangle is related to the typical life tripartite relationship.

For example: the mother, father, child relationship.

The perfect picture - picture perfect. The image of a house, a picket fence, a perfect family - the whole package - just like the IKEA catalogue, was used to explore perfection, locating it as a set of indicators that could be sold, bought and exploited for commercial value. *construct* treats the 'happy family' with suspicion, and questions the role of the female within.

...WEAVING THE STRUCTURE OF *construct*

Notionally, *construct* consists of two semi distinct halves. The first half is a framework of concepts and ideas and is deliberately abstract in content, positing the ideas about building and the social relevancies. There is no narrative and characters are only implied. The second half focuses in on aspects of the construction of a family, heavily informed by gender and relational aspects of the family that steer the dream to be 'perfect'. While characters are not explicit, they are indeed illustrated to the point where clear role making and role playing is evident.

In structuring the work, it was important to let foundational ideas be present, but in the task setting and workshoping stages, more specific ideas were used to make the most of spontaneous developments.

The work ends on an ambiguous note. Does it depict the construction of a life as an inevitable constraint or does it imply faith in the freedom to choose?

WHO DOES WHAT



Photo: Chris Herzfeld

THE CHOREOGRAPHER

Every choreographer will have a particular way of approaching a new creation and each creation of any choreographer will be inspired by different ideas and require different pathways of research and approach. As ideas develop, investigation meets imagination, and starts to ignite the shape of the work. Different discussions with collaborators infuse the choreographer's ideas with ways to support and guide the work. The choreographer will experiment with the dancers, setting tasks to draw out physical interpretations of the ideas. Quite often, a type of script is developed, highlighting character, narrative, or message. The choreographer will make decisions as this process travels forward which serves to frame the work and strengthen the content. Together with the creative team, decisions are taken to construct order, linkage, beginnings and endings. Even after the work has premiered, the development of the work continues as certain aspects strengthen in performance and other aspects require adjustment.

THE DRAMATURG

Dramaturgy for dance is about helping the choreographer achieve their vision. The dramaturg is the 'objective eye' who understands the themes and ideas of the vision and can see if the work is moving off course as it develops during the workshop/rehearsal stage. The dramaturg works with the choreographer and the dancers as they develop the material, feeding in information or resources in order to enrich the creative process.

THE PERFORMERS

The performer's role is central and pivotal to the work. It is their bodies that are the repository of skills and information about the work once it is performed. They do far more than simply learn the choreography and deliver it to the stage. They work closely with the choreographer to create the physical language, test the ideas as embodied, and they are delegated the responsibility to communicate the work in the way the choreographer has imagined, directed and constructed.

THE DESIGNERS

The designers of sound, lighting, set, costumes and any other technical support to the work are integral to a work like construct. Designers are involved in the creation from the earliest point of the process and work to provide the visual and aural textures that will compliment and supplement the choreographic and dramatic directions. Design elements evolve alongside the work and are often quite fluid until close to finishing the work.

THE CREATORS

TANJA LIEDTKE - DIRECTOR / CHOREOGRAPHER

German born Tanja Liedtke began her dance and theatre studies in Madrid, then continued her training at the Elmhurst Ballet School and Ballet Rambert School in the UK. In 1996 she took up residence in Sydney, Australia, and in 1999 joined Australian Dance Theatre (ADT) under the directorship of Garry Stewart.

Tanja danced with ADT for four years, touring across Australia, Asia, UK and North America. In 2003 she joined Lloyd Newson's DV8 Physical Theatre for the award winning Channel Four film and European tour of *The Cost of Living*, and the 2005 creation and international tour of *Just for Show*. Tanja also developed her distinctive choreographic voice and was commissioned to create works in Australia, South America, Europe and Asia. During her career she received several notable awards, including Dance Australia Critic's Choice for most promising choreography in 1999 and 2000; the Australian Dance Award for Outstanding Achievement in Choreography for her work *Twelfth Floor*; and Best Choreography in the 2008 Helpmann Awards for her work *construct*. Tanja was the newly appointed Artistic Director of Sydney Dance Company at the time of her accidental death in August 2007.

Life in Movement (Closer Productions) is a documentary film about Tanja's creative journey and the journey of those close to her in life and in work. It was produced in 2011 and is available through Closer Productions and other distributors.

lifeinmovementfilm.com

The Tanja Liedtke digital Archive contains a broad selection of items that tell the story of Tanja Liedtke's remarkable professional life. The reviews, articles and other documents in the digital Archive illustrate the considerable contribution that Tanja Liedtke made to dance not only in Australia, but also in Europe and other international centres in Asia and the USA.

tanja-liedtke-archive.org

The Tanja Liedtke Foundation was established in 2008 to preserve the artistic legacy of Tanja Liedtke, support the development of contemporary dance theatre and foster Australian/European artistic connections.

tanja-liedtke-foundation.org

KRISTINA CHAN - PERFORMER

Since 1999, Kristina Chan has performed throughout Australia, Canada, UK, USA, Asia, Israel and Europe working with Australian dance companies, choreographers and directors: Force Majeure, Kate Champion, Australian Dance Theatre, Garry Stewart, Chunky Move, The Australian Ballet, Gideon Obarzanek, Lucy Guerin Inc, Stephanie Lake, Sydney Theatre Company, Theatre of Image, West Australian Opera, Opera Queensland, State Opera South Australia, Tasdance, Michelle Mahrer, Bernadette Walong, Narelle Benjamin, Anton and Tanja Liedtke.

Kristina worked closely with Tanja Liedtke creating the works; *Endstation Wunderkind*, *To My Suite*, *Defiled*, *Figures Fragile*, *Twelfth Floor* and *construct*.

Kristina has also developed her own choreographic work. In 2011 she presented a short solo work *Carnivorous* at the Solo Festival of Dance and *Lost and Found* as a part of iOU Dance at the University of New South Wales and the 2012 Spring Dance Festival at the Sydney Opera House. iOU Dance is an initiative for a small group of Sydney based Independent dance artists. In September 2012, Kristina premiered her first full length work *Kingdom Mourning* for third year students at the Adelaide College of the Arts.

Kristina was awarded the 2011 Helpmann Award for 'Best Female Dancer in a Dance or Physical Theatre Production' for Narelle Benjamin's *In Glass* and two Australian Dance Awards - 'Outstanding performance by a Female Dancer', for both of Tanja Liedtke's full length works - in 2006 for *Twelfth Floor* and in 2008 for *construct*.

PAUL WHITE - PERFORMER

Paul White began his professional dance career at the age of thirteen in Queensland, Australia. In 2001, he joined Australian Dance Theatre under the directorship of Garry Stewart. During his time with ADT, he performed and toured in numerous productions choreographed by Stewart, including *Birdbrain* and *Held*. He also choreographed two works for the company's annual Ignition Season. In 2004, Paul joined London's DV8 Physical Theatre, for the development and touring of Artistic Director Lloyd Newson's *Just For Show*. In 2006 he performed as a guest artist in *Exodo* with Venezuelan dance company Danzahoy at the Joyce Theatre, New York. Also in 2006, Paul returned to Australia for the *Honour Bound* project, directed by Nigel Jamieson, and to perform in the Australian national tour of Tanja Liedtke's *Twelfth Floor*.

In 2007, Paul worked with Liedtke on the development of *construct* and performed in its premiere season at the Southbank Centre, London. He performed in the Sydney season of *construct* at the 2008 Sydney Festival. Paul also worked on the development of a new work, *The Red Room* for David Hughes Dance, Edinburgh, choreographed a short piece for Quantum Leap ACT, and collaborated with Meryl Tankard on a solo work *The Oracle*, which has subsequently toured throughout Europe, the US and Australia. In 2012, Paul premiered a new solo work *Anatomy of an Afternoon* in the Sydney Festival, which he co-choreographed with Martin Del Amo. In 2013, Paul joined Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch as a guest performer.

For his role in Liedtke's *construct* Paul won the 2008 Helpmann Award for the Best Male Dancer in a Dance or Theatre Production, and for his role in *Honour Bound* he received the 2008 Australian Dance Award for the Most Outstanding Performance by a Male Dancer.

ALESSANDRA MATTANA - PERFORMER

Born in Belo Horizonte Alessandra began her dance studies in Brazil. She danced with Companhia de Dança de Minas Gerais and was a member of Grupo Corpo Brazilian Dance Theater for four years touring across Europe, USA, Canada, Israel and South America. She studied Communication Sciences at the University Católica de Minas Gerais before moving to Europe in 2002. Since then she has performed with DV8 Physical Theatre where she and Tanja Liedtke were colleagues, with Alias Cie. de Danse, and Volksoper Vienna. In 2007 her work included performing with David Hughes Dance Company (Scotland) with guest choreographers Rafael Bonachela and Tanja Liedtke.

SOLON ULBRICH - CREATIVE COORDINATOR & REMOUNT DIRECTOR

Sol is an Australian independent director, choreographer, teacher and arts producer. A graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, Sol's performance career features engagements with Australian Dance Theatre and Ricochet Dance Productions (UK). Sol's choreographic career has been recognised by a Choreographic Fellowship from the Australian Choreographic Centre. The short film *Restoration* which he co-choreographed and performed with Narelle Benjamin won the Australian Dance Award 1999 for best dance on film. Sol was Artistic Associate in a partnership with choreographer Tanja Liedtke, providing artistic collaboration and project management and is director for her repertoire. Having completed a Graduate Diploma in Management (Arts) from the University of South Australia, Sol held the position of Dance and Performance Event Co-ordinator for the Southbank Centre London, Rehearsal Director for Australian Dance Theatre and is Associate Director at QL2 Centre for Youth Dance.

JOSHUA TYLER - DRAMATURG & SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

Joshua Tyler has been a working dramaturg for over five years in both Contemporary Dance and text based Drama. Working with established choreographers such as Tanja Liedtke, and emerging playwrights such as Duncan Graham, Joshua's breadth of experience has ranged across all forms of live performance. With a Masters in Screenwriting from the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) and an Advanced Diploma in Acting from ACArts Joshua has spent the last ten years working in both stage and screen. His short films have screened at major festivals around the world, his plays have won various awards and his theatre productions have played to audiences around the country. Joshua worked on both of Tanja Liedtke's two major works *Twelfth Floor* and *construct* and as researcher, writer and performer on various other projects. Joshua has worked with other choreographers including Solon Ulbrich, Anton, Kelly Alexander and Ros Warby. Joshua has recently been working with Lisa Griffiths and Craig Bary and guest teaching at the NIDA Playwrights Studio in Sydney.

DJ TRIP - SOUND DESIGN

DJ TRIP is an independent electronic musician who creates and composes for an eclectic range of arts projects. TRIP performs his music live & also works as a DJ, remix artist, workshop tutor and composer for theatre, dance, film & radio. He has performed & collaborated under many aliases such as The New Pollutants, Echelon & Cooperblack. With The New Pollutants he rescored Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, which was performed live at the Adelaide Film Festival, Perth's Revelations Film Festival & Melbourne's Next Wave Festival at ACMI. As a soundtrack composer he has written for companies including the State Theatre of SA, Australian Dance Theatre (Ignition Series x 3), Adelaide Fringe Festival, Kurruru Indigenous Youth Performing Arts, Tasdance, & Restless Dance Company. In 2006 he created a music score for the Dream Seed Projects live Installation at Federation Square in Melbourne on New Year's Eve. He had a strong relationship with choreographer Tanja Liedtke, collaborating on many award winning shows, including *Twelfth Floor* (Australian Tour 2006) and *construct* (U.K. Tour 2007 & Australian premiere at the Sydney Festival 2008). His upcoming work includes music for Windmill, Zephyr Quartet & Kage Physical Theatre. He was most recently the Australian support for John Foxx (Ultra Vox) & was a featured guest in Melbourne at ACMI's Game On (Video Game Exhibition from the Barbican Art Gallery London), where he performed his own 8-bit set before the Australian Premiere of (US) Documentary 8-Bit. He was also part of a Game On panel, talking about some collecting & the use of outmoded computer & console technology in his composition. In 2003 & 2004 he won dB Magazines Reader Awards for most popular DJ.

BEN COBHAM & GEOFF COBHAM: BLUEBOTTLE - SET & LIGHTING DESIGN

BEN COBHAM

Ben established Bluebottle with Andrew Livingston in Melbourne in 1991 to produce design in creative and unconventional ways in theatres, galleries and museums. Bluebottle has worked with Arena Theatre Company, Chunky Move, Circus Oz, Flying Fruit Fly Circus, Helen Herbertson, Legs on the Wall, Lucy Guerin Inc, Melbourne Theatre Company, and Playbox Theatre Company, amongst many others. The company has won several Green Room Awards, a John Truscott Award for Excellence in Design and an Australian Dance Award for Morphia Series (with Helen Herbertson).

GEOFF COBHAM

Geoff has worked as a Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Set Designer, Event Producer, and Venue Designer. His work has ranged from many smaller innovative productions at the Performance Space, Queens Theatre, Belvoir St Theatre, Red Shed and non-theatre venues to large scale theatre/dance productions, Festivals, Art exhibitions, Events, Museums and Venue creation (Red Square, Squeezebox and The Club). Geoff was the Production Manager of the 1995 Sydney Festival, the 1996, 1998, & 2000 Adelaide Festivals, Womadelaide 1997 & 2001 and Come Out in 1999 and 2001 His recent set & lighting designs include *The Persian Garden* for Adelaide Festival 06; *Emily Loves to Bounce* for Patch Theatre; *Same Same But Different* and *Already Elsewhere* for Force Majeure; *448 Psychosis* and *The Caretaker* for Brink; *HELD* for Australian Dance Theatre; and *Future of the Species* for Vital Statistics.

He received a Green Room Award for his lighting of *Night Letters* and the 2006 Adelaide Critics award. Geoff is set and lighting designer for Kate Champion's *The Age I'm In*, also showing this Sydney Festival.

PERFORMING LINES - PRODUCER

Performing Lines develops, produces and tours innovative Australian performance nationally and internationally - across genres including physical theatre, circus, dance, indigenous and intercultural arts, music theatre, hybrid work, and text-based theatre. Performing Lines assists artists to realise their creative vision working with artists at every stage of their careers, from emerging artists to internationally recognised names. We work at all levels of the performing arts industry, at home and abroad - from the smaller contemporary spaces, to regional venues large and small, to flagship venues and major festivals.

Performing Lines has created opportunities for many of the major Australian artists of the past 20 years, including Meryl Tankard, William Yang, Kate Champion, Legs on the Wall, Sydney Front, Open City, Handspan, Chamber Made Opera, Wesley Enoch, Jack Davis, Margaret Cameron and Arena Theatre Co. We produced Nigel Jamieson and Paul Grabowsky's extraordinary collaboration with Indonesian artists, *The Theft of Sita*; and have toured a major body of Indigenous work, including Jack Davis' *No Sugar* (commissioned by Performing Lines), and the first Australian Indigenous production to tour overseas, Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man* (1982).

performinglines.org.au

RESOURCES

The following are examples of some of the initial inspirations used by the choreographer and the creative team to fuel their ideas.

FILM:

- *Neighbours*, Oscar winning short film.
Director: Norman McLaren, 1952
- *Tango*, Short film.
Director: Zbigniew Rybczynski, 1979.
- *The Mirror*, Feature film.
Director: Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.

WRITING:

- Alexander, Christopher, *The Timeless Way of Building*, Oxford University Press, NY, 1979

FURTHER EXPLORATION

FOR SENIOR STUDENTS:

STRUCTURALISM

Pierre Bourdieu and his key concept habitus.

- *An Outline of a Theory Practice*, (1972) English translation - Cambridge University Press, 1977.

SEMIOTICS

Roland Barthes' theory of woven codes/signs being a basis for understanding social construction.

- *Mythologies* (1957), English translation - Paladin, 1973.
- *S/Z* (1970), English translation - Hill & Wang, 1974.

DISCOURSE THEORY

Michel Foucault writings on discursive practices and the notion of history of the present.

- *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (1966), English translation - Vintage, 1973.
- *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), English translation - Allen Lane, 1979.

Examples of films that explore human responses to constructed realities.

- *Slacker* (1991)
Director, Richard Linklater
- *The Stepford Wives* (1975)
Director, Bryan Forbes
- *The Stepford Wives* (2004)
Director, Frank Oz

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

- Discuss the character of everyday buildings - a home, a church, a café - the physical building and the patterns of activity.
- Discuss everyday social constructs - a family, a club, a group of friends.
- Note and discuss everyday signs - things that construct the way we respond and act out daily life. Why are they effective?
- Discuss everyday rules, manners and regulations that limit and direct behaviour, and that we all acknowledge as setting benchmarks that provide guidance to how we live.

