



Stretching Across The Urban Jungle

ONSITE Presents Katie Faulkner's *We Don't Belong Here*

By Julie Potter

This article was originally published in the September 2011 issue of *In Dance*, a monthly magazine published by Dancers' Group, serving the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. dancersgroup.org

ON THE HEELS of an ambitious four-choreographer collaboration with Kara Davis, Manuelito Biag, and Alex Ketley, Katie Faulkner is not only stretching herself as an artist, but is now literally stretching her work across city blocks. *We Don't Belong Here*, a new project presented by Dancers' Group's ONSITE series, will be performed by a robust cast of twenty artists in sites along San Francisco's Market Street corridor, September 29 and 30, and October 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9.



“Part of the mission of the Dancers' Group ONSITE series is to bring dance out of the theaters and into places where people are more likely to stumble upon it, so rather than making it yet another destination event where you have to pay money and know about and buy tickets and seek out—which concert dance is—I was interested in putting the work in a sector where people might be exposed to it who normally would not seek out a dance experience” says Faulkner. Tackling multimedia elements as a collaborator for *We Don't Belong Here*, San Diego-based artist Michael Trigilio met Faulkner at Mills College when the two were in graduate school. Trigilio maintains a hybrid practice—in addition to video, he works with sound, installation and guerilla radio broadcasting. Since studying at Mills, he was a founding member of the independent radio project Neighborhood Public Radio, a sprawling public project looking at radio as an artistic medium, which was included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial exhibition.

“The title of the piece, *We Don't Belong Here*, has many layers to it. The simplest and most obvious being that the dancers and theatrical performers don't belong on the street in the sidewalk” Faulkner says. “Then there are the other questions like do we belong in the cosmos? Do I belong in this marriage or relationship? Do dance and media belong together? Do art and commerce belong together? So allowing these potentials for collision and ways of highlighting the disparities of what should and shouldn't be there.” Work with Trigilio and two other dancers for *We Don't Belong Here* began during Faulkner's residency at the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography (MANCC) in December.

“In Florida we started to learn about how the other's process worked, so the first few days I got to observe and absorb the visual and choreographic vocabulary” Trigilio reflects. “From that I began to experiment with ways we could capture that through the lens, how we can frame these things in interesting ways and add another layer of meaning to what has already been made from the choreography.” At MANCC Faulkner's team worked with the members of the Florida State University dance community and gave them a prompt to describe a place they love but knew would deteriorate or disappear. Mining for a “future nostalgia” a number of students submitted poems, photographs and soundtracks about a place that they loved that will cease to exist someday, and from that material Katie and Trigilio generated a number of visual, choreographic, sonic ideas based on this crowdsourcing. In working with a public space, they are looking similarly with downtown San Francisco and the community there to listen to what people are doing in those spaces as another kind of crowdsourcing for inspiration.

More recently during Faulkner's residency at the ODC Theater, she's been working with a small group of dancers she sees as her think tank to prepare and develop movement material, ask questions, visit sites and lay the groundwork for rehearsals with the larger cast of performers. “I think its going to be a reciprocal process where we're in the studio to generate some material and ideas and then we'll take it to the sites and see if it makes sense in that location and how we might use that location. Then we'll take that back to the studio and generate more” Faulkner says, envisioning the rehearsals with the full cast. “Common for me

when I embark on a new process is to have a Rolodex of images in my mind—among them are static images, others are kinetic images. The ones that stay with me long enough feel like they have some kind of meaning to me that I can connect to the content that I'm exploring somehow."

For the media elements of the work, Trigilio is incorporating three categories of images: body-based shots, maps and diagrams and cosmic visuals. "The notion of *We Don't Belong Here* begins on the intimate level. Do we belong in our bodies, our skin, our families? This very intimate flesh relationship to belonging. Then the next layer out is do we belong in this public space, this architectural space, this city space? More utilitarian modes of understanding belonging.

Then on the cosmic level, do we belong in the milky way, on this planet, in this species, in the universe?" he says. In considering the planning of this project, Trigilio imagines the media to have a ripple effect from the intimate out to the cosmic.

"We've been looking at radio transmission in the most obvious ways: generating and presenting sound elements for the project, placing a radio transmitter at a nearby building and even onsite where the dance is and broadcasting that information, music or a sound score to boomboxes with a radio host so the dancers can use them and the audience can hear them." Trigilio said



regarding the ONSITE project. "Beyond that I'm thinking of the ways in which radio transmission can generate other kinds of material providing voices from the ether. When you tune into the radio you're picking up whatever is happening on the radio waves. I'm thinking about how radio content can define not just the sounds we listen to but offer cues for dance, video projection and light and how we can incorporate these technologies."

Faulkner and Trigilio are also working with the idea of creating satellite media interventions along a prescribed route so if people follow a map to get to the performance site, they will encounter small projections, emanating sound, single dancers, and even

broadcasted voices, allowing people to experience outcroppings of the performance at the main site. Video may end up directly on the bodies of the dancers as well as in the alleys of city blocks acting as a residual afterthought of what's happening at the center of the performance. Logistics are also obviously a key component of orchestrating such a large dance event and Faulkner is exploring the possibility of using cars on site as sources of power and light and sound. Additionally, since the anticipated timing of the performances will be night, versatile media surfaces, public accessibility and safety weigh on location selection.

While the actual sites for the work were still being finalized as this article goes to press, Faulkner's ONSITE project has been in development for about a year. "I thought of this as an opportunity to take my work out of the theater for the first time and I like the idea of being able to settle into a few places to really build a relationship with a site and space and see what I can do with it and how I can inform it or have the site inform the piece," she says. ONSITE was created to provide access to live performance and expand the current definitions of dance to help the form thrive in an environment with expanding entertainment and media industries. The multi-media and site-specific nature of the work not only reaches the general dance-going audience, but also an accidental audience that discovers the work because of its location and nature. For the past four years the ONSITE series has presented large scale choreographic work free to the public, such as Erika Chong Shuch's *Love Everywhere* in February, 2010 at the San Francisco City Hall Rotunda and Glide Memorial Church. About Shuch's ONSITE work, Faulkner comments, "I thought it was so beautiful and the least cynical piece of art I've ever seen. What a generous and exquisite thing to be a part of that shared experience."

Both Trigilio and Faulkner share a certain rigor and capacity for growth. To them, the artistic work seems the opposite of a resting place. "The language that's spoken literally or abstractly between choreographers and dancers reminds me of the ongoing process of learning and challenging as an art making process," says Trigilio. He is excited to learn new vocabularies as part of this collaboration. Faulkner, growing in university settings, residencies and as part of CHIME Across Borders last year, looked to 2011 as a time to tackle the types of projects she's never done before with an eye toward her past creations and what else is happening in the Bay Area. "What I'm excited about right now (and scared about for the right reasons), is moving in directions that are less familiar to me so I can become more deeply aware and clear about the artist that I am, what I have to offer and where I have to continue to stretch."

Julie Potter is a dance artist, writer, arts manager and yoga teacher based in San Francisco's Mission District. Her blog, DanceFeast.com, facilitates seeing, doing and digesting dance. Visit juliepotter.com.

All photos by Pak Han.