

## CALGARY: City of Animals

Edited by Jim Ellis

ISBN 978-1-55238-968-3

**THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK.** It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at [ucpress@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ucpress@ucalgary.ca)

**Cover Art:** The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

**COPYRIGHT NOTICE:** This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

**UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:**

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

**UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:**

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



**Acknowledgement:** We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>



**becoming insects**  
a new universe





## kimberly cooper

*decidedly jazz dance works*

Jazz was born in North America of African and European parents as a result of the slave trade. In Africa, all aspects of life were celebrated and ritualized through dance and music, including farming and hunting. We can see how the frequent animal mimicry in these rituals eventually evolved into early twentieth-century African-American social jazz dances such as the Turkey Trot, Bunny Hug, Buzzard Lope, and Grizzly Bear.

Maybe it's the African parent of jazz that inspires me to create movement that has an animal or creature-esque source. Maybe it's my insatiable curiosity about movement, keeping my eyes open to the world of 2, 4, 6, 100-legged creatures, that drives me to explore different ways of approaching gravity, the spine, and relationships. Creatures inspire a distinctive approach to emotion in performance, and tapping into instinct, rather than emotion, can sometimes inspire a more compelling performance.



**I never liked bugs**, but they seemed to like me. I get five mosquito bites for every one of yours. My mother always said we had sweet blood. Spiders, ants, roaches—when I'm somewhere they are, they always come to, well, bug me. Then I met a praying mantis.

It was the most beautiful bug I'd ever seen. It was night, in a small town in northeastern Brazil in 2013. It flew like a fairy and it fascinated me, so much so that I wanted to touch it, which I never want to do. It let me pet its back and it hung around for a long time, posing for photos, eating other bugs. It changed things for me. I began to imagine the universe it lived in.

Then I started looking at more bugs. I watched countless films and videos, including *Microcosmos*, the 1996 documentary showing the lives of insects in a field in France. Seeds were planted with its images. I watched bugs and other creatures in my own backyard, squirmy worms that magically seemed to move, spiders with their amazing strength, dragonflies with their wild flight patterns. I became fascinated with all of these little worlds, these communities of anthills and spiders' nests, that we humans often barely notice.

This research led to *New Universe*, a piece I created in 2016. The movement was highly informed by insects. It was part nature show, part comment on society, part Hieronymus Bosch painting. There were five sections in the piece, each with its own flavour. There was a sense of evolution and expansion throughout, starting in a condensed claustrophobic setting. As the piece progressed, everything, including the space and the dancers, became more open and naked.

Though the movement was inspired by insects, *New Universe* was often quite human. At times the dancers were insectile with human characteristics, at times they were the reverse. For example, the piece began with a woman finding a giant piece of bubblegum, chewing it, and becoming high from the sugar. As this section continued and more dancers were introduced, the scene became a madhouse of scrambling and fighting for sugar, exactly what happens if you drop something sweet beside an anthill, which in fact I did as part of my research (although in our version the dancers erupted into the jitterbug). Through one lens it was quite comical, watching these greedy, cockroach-inspired characters fighting and responding to the sugar rush; through another, one could see addicts fighting to get high.

[previous image](#)

**a new universe** by Kimberley Cooper (DJD), photo by Noel Bégin  
**caterpillar**, from left: Kaleb Tekeste, Natasha Korney, Audrey Gaussiran, Shayne Johnson, Sabrina Comanescu, Julia Cosentino, Catherine Hayward

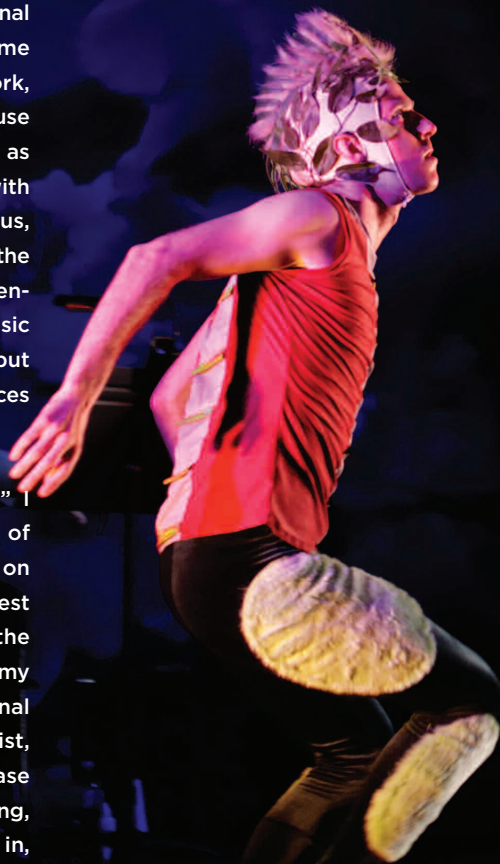
a new universe by Kimberley Cooper (DJD), photo by Noel Bégin  
 garden of earthly delights from top: Kaja Irwin, Catherine Hayward



The creative process is always an adventure; for me, there is no formula to art making. In my practice, I spend a lot of time in the studio, dancing and generating movement that feels and looks a certain way. The different parts of this piece came together in a variety of ways. For example, there was a section in the piece that we referred to in the studio as “rhythm bugs.” The process for creating the movement went like this:

I chose a piece of music. The music was being written (and played live) by William Parker, a composer and bassist from New York. It’s often tricky to be creating a dance piece with original music that is being composed at the same time in another city, especially when, as in my work, the two are so deeply connected. Often I will use found music (recordings that exist already) as source material to have something to work with in the studio until we have the band with us, which is usually much closer to the opening of the piece because working with live music is expensive. For *New Universe*, the majority of the music was composed specifically for the piece, but some of it was re-arrangements of various pieces from William’s huge collection of recordings.

After I chose the music for “rhythm bugs,” I learned the drum pattern of the first couple of minutes and started making movement based on the rhythm. I was interested in using West African-inspired movement and making the music of the drum pattern come through with my feet on the floor. Instead of using traditional West African posture (quite bent at the waist, wider than hip-width legs), I narrowed my base and stood up taller, lifted my chest to the ceiling, took my gaze down my nose, shrunk my arms in,





wing-like, and accentuated my wrists as I made my arms move forward and back with the movement. A kind of haughty, self-important character started to emerge. This eventually developed into the marching-off-to-war dance, with the dancers representing army ants. When we learn movement sequences that are very musical, it's easier to learn the "music" of the dance, rather than trying to count it out, so the dancers are singing the rhythm in their heads while they dance the dance. Of course the drummer didn't learn the rhythm, he improvised based on the feel, so the dancers became another instrument and added another layer of rhythm.

Another dance we called "caterpillar": there were nine dancers, each a segment of the caterpillar. They snaked around the stage and eventually the body split in two and the head and tail of the caterpillar danced a mating duet, part of which was manipulated and echoed by the other dancers. This was inspired not only by watching caterpillars move but also by watching slugs mate. They circle around and around and almost become one animal.

These are just two examples from *New Universe*. I took inspiration from cockroaches, dung beetles, scorpions, spiders, dragonflies, caterpillars, moths, butterflies, ants, wasps, stick insects, flies, and, of course, the praying mantis.

Now when I see insects I view them differently. I respect them and I actually feel that I owe them something. The creeps they used to give me have pretty much disappeared. As clichéd as it might seem, if you really take time to learn about something you can learn to appreciate it, empathize with it, and admire its beauty. I'm sure there are some bugs that I will always prefer to only see on film, but there are so many incredible creatures out there, it was lovely to be inspired by them.

a new universe by Kimberley Cooper (DJ), photo by Noel Bégin  
mating dance 2, from left: Shayne Johnson, Natasha Korney

