

Special Issue: What if...

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“Everything we do is done by invitation. That invitation comes from oneself or from another person.” (John Cage)

This is a special issue of *Dance Theatre Journal* responding to *What If...*, an event which took place between 7-11 April 2010, throughout the Siobhan Davies Studios in London.

What if... began as an invitation in the form of a fellowship awarded to Lucy Cash by South East Dance to explore the space of screen dance practice. It then became an invitation extended by Lucy Cash to fellow artists Becky Edmunds, Chirstinn Whyte and Claudia Kappenberg, to share this exploration in the form of a curatorial collaboration. This exploration in turn was invited by Gill Clarke and Independent Dance to be developed as the second in a series of festivals looking at current choreographic thinking (www.whatiffestival.co.uk). After that the complexity of invitations took on the form of Fischli and Weiss' 'The Way Things Go', but it's important to mention and extend thanks to Cheryl Pierce and Artsadmin; Jamie Watton and South East Dance; Siobhan Davies and the Siobhan Davies Studios and Independent Dance. As well as, of course, to all of the artists and writers who took part in the event and who made it possible.

What if... took place from 7-11 April 2010 throughout the Siobhan Davies Studios in London. It was a hybrid event: part exhibition, with installed film video work, and part festival, with timed selections of screenings and live performance programmed throughout the day. As curators, we took the very particular invitation extended by *What if...* as an opportunity to take liberties – in the form of the event itself and in the associative ways in which we juxtaposed works. We did this in order to reflect our interest in the idea that the choreographic is a process that can be separated from dance and dancing and that involves unique ways of thinking to do with structure, form, and a sense of embodiment. We also think that choreography, although derived from structuring movement in space and time, could be used as a way of thinking about time and space in relation to non-dance works clearly containing structured human (and non-human) movement. Certain choreographic devices were visible in our curatorial decisions: a delight in varying the scale and placement of works, and the possibility for a re-viewing of works through change of context. As an insert to this journal, we've included an edited transcript of the e-mail dialogue between the four co-curators in which these ideas are articulated more fully as the curators trace the personal and artistic influences on their practice.

Unsurprisingly, all of the works in this hybrid festival, whether or not choreographic in their origin, were acutely rigorous and sensitive in their use of space and time. This sensitivity applied to the spaces depicted by the works as well as the space of the frame itself, and to the internal rhythms of the work as well as the durations of experience that they offered. We often felt when looking at the works that space had a sense of embodiment and that bodies had a sense of their space and place. This led to a strong connecting element for much of the work, both live and film, which was the idea of translation. Translation from one thing to another, or from one idea to another, and in such a way as to be startling and unexpected, often causing us to question our perception. Alongside this, some of the works drew on unconventional approaches to narrative and the relationship between the camera and its subject. Yet others exposed a wry relationship to documentary and the construction of reality. Opening up the possibility of translation across forms, the live performances in *What if...* created spaces on the border of dance and live art and reflected the influence of image-based technology on choreographic thinking, as well as unique sensibilities that cross between borders.

As one more invitation, ten writers from diverse backgrounds were asked to respond to the work as part of the fabric of the festival. Each in his or her own way, the writers confronted the challenge of translating these choreographic ideas and provocations into different forms of text: as live manifestos, as circulated and projected words, as observations from the perspective of anthropology or evolutionary biology. Some of us are artists and filmmakers, some are critics and curators, and some are a combination of all of these roles. These writings have been adapted, transformed, and developed to produce this journal – which is not

intended to be a record or archive of the events in April 2010, but instead to be a living document, one that extends the questions of translation and choreographic sensibility into the domain of writing and reading. We are grateful to Rachel Lois Clapham, who was not at the London event, but acted as a kind of 'first reader', providing a further transformation of this writing into the 'index' that forms the postscript to this collection: a new text that speculates on performance/document and body/text in the performed act of writing.

As co-editors of this special edition of *Dance Theatre Journal*, we extend a huge thank you to the ten writers who accepted the invitation to respond to the works in *What if...* during the time-frame of the festival and to develop them for this journal. We are also enormously grateful to Martin Hargreaves and Thom Shaw for their generous support of this special issue.

Lucy Cash and Theron Schmidt

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A sprig of ivy observing a family go right and left.

THIS IS HAPPENING IN REAL TIME

A RESPONSE TO *BESIDE THE A SIDE* BY
GRAEME MILLER AND JOHN SMITH

Theron Schmidt



John Smith (left) and Graeme Miller. Photo: Theron Schmidt

This is happening in real time.

But when is this?

This is happening in two times, and they are both real.

In the time that doesn't exist anymore, I am laying out these words before me

each one at a time

finishing each one before the other.

And then in this time that is happening now, *your now*.

You are waiting to get to the end of these words

time at one each

other the before one each finishing.

These words reach backward, trying to capture what has happened over the course of a *today* that is slipping away, in which Graeme Miller and John Smith have made a work of art called *Beside the A Side*.

And these words reach forward, moving delicately through time, to the page you feel in your hands.

In my private time, it is taking me some time to put these words down

and now I am taking exactly *this* much of your time .

Thank you.

Let me rewind the tape.

It is Wednesday. I am sitting at a table opposite Graeme Miller.

There has been a brief pause,

and then Graeme Miller has pressed play on his thoughts and they are coming out, one after the other, a continuous stream.

He is telling me about the acquired skills of hunting for lost tape, like being a trapper or a hunter, learning where magnetic tape lingers, where it finds refuge, where it is discarded and where it collects itself. Glinting in the corner of the eye, caught between cracks in the concrete, wrapping itself around trees and signposts and anything that stays still for more than a little while. He is telling me about the excitement of discovery, about the great gift of mystery that the found tape presents, those delicious moments before it has been respooled onto a cartridge and when it still could be anything: songs from another culture, the secrets to getting rich quick, a letter-by-tape to a distant family member, the secrets of the universe or the private thoughts of someone about whom we'll never know anything more. He is telling me about little narratives: someone is driving. they are stuck in traffic. and while they are stuck, their tape jams in their car stereo. they're stuck in traffic, and they're going to be late, and now the tape has jammed too. and it's just not playing, or it's warbling out of pitch, or it's constantly jumping back and forth on auto-reverse, first the A side, then the B side. and there's nothing the driver can do about it, until they get to a traffic light, or until they're waiting on a slip ramp, and then they roll down the window, grab the tape with their free hand, and hurl that goddamned tape out the window. at least they can do that much.

and then, years later, maybe decades later, Graeme Miller comes hunting along the slip road, cars speeding by him, breathing carbon monoxide all morning, and he finds them, one after the other, all huddled there.

And now he is telling me about the biology of the tape, the way it wiggles and clings like a living thing, the way the city acts upon its ferrous oxide or chrome oxide particles and breaks them down, makes them something new. The way the city fucks them up. The tape is memory and thought and experience and history all in a very material form: iron filings on sella tape, arranged once through its close proximity to an electromagnet, and then rearranged again by time and friction and sunlight and rain and temperature. It is purely melancholic, says Graeme Miller.

But Graeme is talking about the last time that he and John Smith undertook a project like this, a decade ago, when cassette tapes were already fighting, and losing, against CDs and voicemail, let alone against ipods and cell phones and skype and youtube. What if? What if we don't find anything? Then there will be a blank screen, a silent room, an imaginary tape.

Fast forward.

It's Thursday night. For me, this is 'last night'. For you, it is one of any number of indistinct nights in April 2010. I am trying to go to sleep early, trying to ready myself for a long day ahead. I have prepared my walking shoes, and a water bottle, and an apple for emergencies. We will start at Siobhan Davies Studios SE1,

Graeme has told me, and then work in an outward spiral until we find a fragment of magnetic audio tape. Graeme and John will set up a static camera shot and film the tape wherever it is: wrapped around a drain, tangled in a tree branch, drifting down the pavement. Then they will take the tape back to their studio and carefully extract whatever audio recording remains on each 'side' of the fragment of tape. This audio will form the soundtrack for the film installation they will construct in which the film of the tape in its found environment is projected onto both sides of a suspended screen – one side as the original film, the other as its mirror image. The length of the film is determined by the length of the fragment. The audio is on a continuous loop, from A-side to B-side and back again; each time the audio switches, the two sides of the film (normal and mirrored) are also flipped.

I am trying to get to sleep, but I keep wondering about where we will find the tape. Maybe it will be somewhere in Elephant & Castle Shopping Centre. Maybe down one of the stretches of the Old Kent Road. Maybe somewhere I've never heard of. I am trying to get some sleep, but I am imagining myself in a precarious scenario. Climbing up into a tower block to investigate something glittering from a railing. Stepping my way through broken glass behind an abandoned shop. Lying on my stomach in a traffic island, cars and fumes swirling around me. Or grabbing, exhausted, at flapping and frayed ends of plastic, only to have the delicate magnetic coating come off as dust on my fingertips.

Friday morning. (*'This morning.'*) I am waiting inside the studio when I see Graeme and John arrive. I come outside. And the hunt is already over. Before it began, it's already over.

There is tape hanging from the branches above the gate to Siobhan Davies Studios. Go look. There might still be some there.

This is what happens when you work with chance.

Suddenly we're all three wide awake. They want to make the most of the low morning light before it moves past the building. They want to make the most of the still-quiet day, the shifts between the traffic whirring by and the quiet snatches of birdsong, the quality of air and presence, the rare good fortune of two beautiful English days in a row. I am thinking of Wonderland, of Oz: 'If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own back yard.'

This is what happens when you work with chance.

And this is what happens when you work with deliberate composition. When you work with careful, painstaking exhaustive attention to detail.

The arrangement of the ladder. The clamping of the camera. The framing of the shot. The timing of the record period. Waiting for the wind to make the tape dance. Waiting for a pedestrian to pass; waiting for a bus; waiting for the light.

Chance is something we wait for.

This is what happens when the chance comes. This is what happens in the real time of filming:

Move the ladder.
Place the clamp.
Turn the clamp.
Loosen the clamp.
Move it to another spot.
Tighten the clamp.
Adjust the camera.
Look at the sun.
Look at the frame.
Move the camera.
Climb down the ladder.
Loosen the clamp.
Tighten the clamp.
Move the ladder.

Adjust the camera.
Tighten the clamp.
Look at the sun.
Wait for pedestrians.
Look at the road.
Climb up the ladder.
Adjust the camera.
Look through the frame.
Plug in the mic lead.
Climb down the ladders.
Place the hands on the hips.
Cup the hands against the sun.
Look at the traffic.

Look at the tape.
Climb up the ladder.
Put on the headphones.
Wait for pedestrians.
Climb down the ladder.
Shake the branch so the tape flaps freely.
Plug in the headphones.
Loosen the clamp.
Adjust the camera.
Look through the viewfinder.
Tighten the clamp.
Pick up the microphone.
Press record.

And wait.

.
.
.

Graeme and John are a team of two, learning to look, learning to listen. Learning from the tape. Learning from the passers-by. What kind of place is this? What kind of dance happens here? What is there to see if you only stop to look? What is there to hear if you take the time to listen?

I close my eyes. I hear:

a motorcycle
a heavy lorry
an alarm signal
an airbrake releasing
high heels on the pavement
a drill working its way into concrete
a man who says 'I'll honour my side of the agreement but you honour yours'

I hear:

the squeak of the gate
the flap of the tape
the break of the day
the turn of the dial
the tip of the tongue
the depth of the field
the corner of the eye
the hope in the step
the knock of the wood
the length of this time

I hear:

every so often, when the traffic is held somewhere, birdsong and whistles, music from another time, still hanging about in trees

I hear:

the erecting of scaffolding. the knocking of metal pipe against a hammer. I hear the hammer holding still and the whole world swinging upward to meet it. I hear the scaffolding staying level and the world sinking downward away from it as the scaffold grows longer.

I open my eyes.

I see:

the shadows of three men on the pavement.

the 53 via New Cross

the metallic sheer of a woman's leggings

the 12 via Oxford Circus

a tuft of old growth caught between the paving stones

the Demerstee via Leuven

This has been carefully framed and prepared: what you can hear, what you can see, and the words I use to describe them. move the ladder one foot to the left. move the ladder six inches back to the right. I change my mind and write something else. This next bit you'll never hear.

[. . .]

This is the moment full of potential. I open my eyes. I see:

The spinning wheel inside the camera. The tape going round it. I see the wheel staying still while all of this spins around it, wrapping itself tightly around the wheel, all these moments layering on top of each other. The bus, and the boy running for the bus, and the delivery van that we waited to move out of the shot, and the swaying trees, and the cyclists, and the bus stop, and the old church with the St George's cross waving, and John behind the lens, and Graeme keeping watch below, and me, writing away in my notebook. All of us, spinning around and around, whether we're in the shot or not, some trace of us has reflected off a surface onto another surface and into the shot, that blink on the bus mirror as it goes by, that spinning of the bicycle spoke. Some flashing trace of us is reflected down the lens, and onto the sensor, and encoded into digital information, and laid down in strips of ferrous metals on a spindle going round,

and round,

and round

and round.

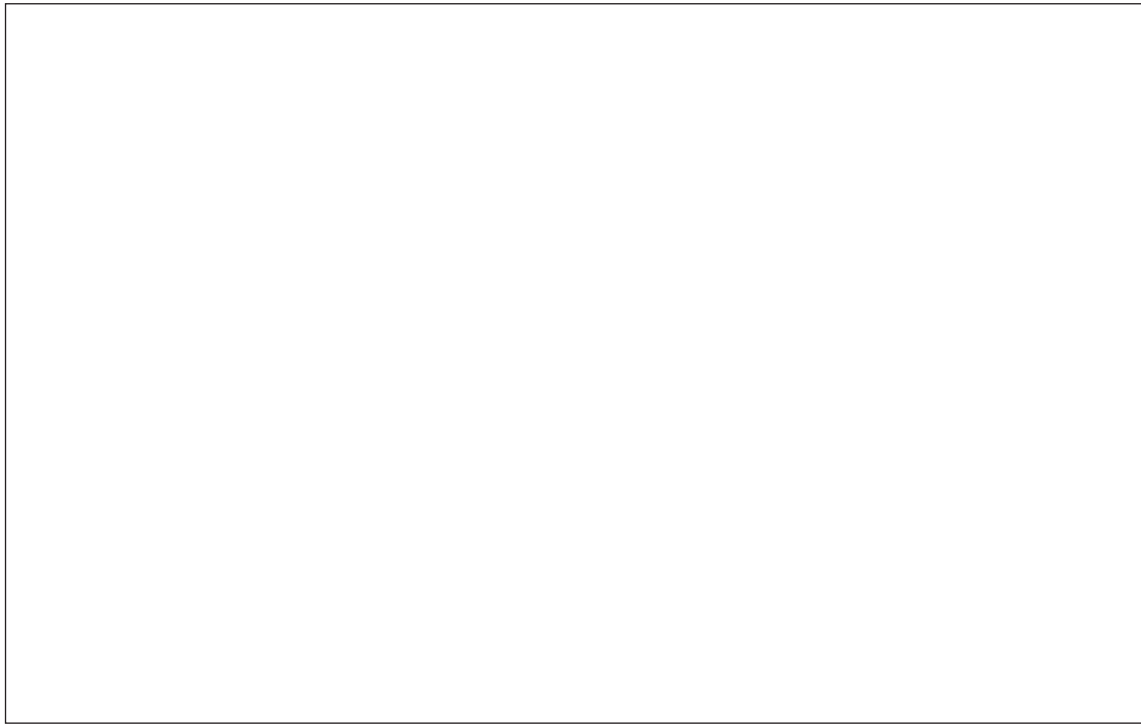


Ditching his video-job in lieu of
texting with a friend, he smiles.

WHEN ONE WINDOW OPENS (ANOTHER WINDOW OPENS)

WRITING ON WHAT IF...

Kyra Norman

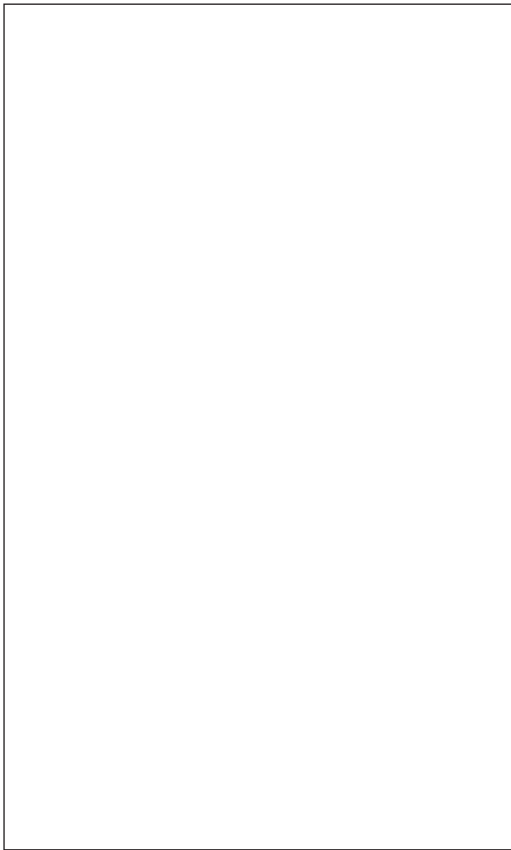


First photograph: a collection of paired shoes on the landing. We have all taken off our shoes to go into the studio and watch this film, *The Gold Diggers*, together. Notice the temperature of the floor. The quiet footfall. If context is everything, does the fact that we've taken our shoes off make this screendance?

Whilst writing at **What if...**, I wanted to open up the process of doing so, to work as openly and responsively as I could, and to find ways to draw other people into conversation and collaboration as I went along. Each day I spent time hanging out in the space, watching and re-watching works, listening, asking questions and scribbling notes. Each evening, I informally presented a draft of what I thought would become this paper, so that people could track the deviations, the contradictions and the gradual development of lines of enquiry from day to day.

Whether in the course of research, teaching, or curating for *The Light Fantastic*, in recent years

much of my viewing experience of screendance has taken the form of watching dvds and online video alone at a laptop, fiddling with the volume, adjusting the aspect ratio and so on, so from the outset the prospect of **What if...** had three big attractions for me. Firstly, to see both new and familiar works on the big screen, or on particular, considered screens by way of installation; secondly, to see these works not as isolated incidents but acknowledged as a body of works in dialogue with one another; thirdly, and most importantly for me, to be able to watch these works in the company of other people. So from the outset, context was a big consideration for me.



Second photograph: a table in The Royal Festival Hall gallery area. A handwritten sign, reading *What if...*, empty paper cups, shared print outs of timetable and texts. Notebooks, a pair of sunglasses. Bright light.

And I wanted to make the most of the fact that, for once, I wasn't writing on my own, restless at a computer, but with pen and paper, in the midst of the curators, artists, audiences, other writers coming and going. To reflect this, I wanted to incorporate others' opinions and be swayed by overheard phrases, chance remarks opening up whole new areas of awareness and curiosity.

The time came for me to start writing, or become very unhappy. In order to write, I needed to find a way to make writing more like reading. (Matthew Goulish)¹

For [Yvonne] Rainer, reading is a practice, a discipline, a way of approaching an idea, a person, an emotion, as complex as an artistic practice. (Peggy Phelan)²

How to make the practice of writing more like the practice of reading, or more like the practice of making work? Each evening as I gathered my thoughts together, I found that what I wanted to

say about the same works and their relationship to each other had changed, sometimes significantly, whilst some threads and connections began to establish themselves – principally for me, these were around 'site/ location', 'sound & image' and 'memory', and here I'd like to share three starting points for discussion on these themes:

Site/ Location: on seeing it again, here...

Rose English hadn't seen *The Gold Diggers*, a film she co-wrote with director Sally Potter, for twelve years until it was screened as part of a retrospective of Potter's work at the BFI. And now here, during *What if...* In a discussion with co-curator Lucy Cash after the screening, Rose says she is struck by how many locations in the work are used as *if they are sites* (my emphasis). Prompted by Rose's observation, the nature of this distinction became a theme for me in addressing the works of *What if...* In traditional filmmaking terms, a location is anywhere outside the studio, a space to be approached with caution and planning, and where one works to secure access, contain action, focus light and limit sound. A location is chosen, scouted out, to represent an already imagined place. A site on the other hand, I would argue, is somewhere you start from, perhaps fulfilling a particular requirement, but in itself the raw material from which ideas or images arise.

Sound & Image: on sound inhabiting space...

From *The Gold Diggers*: Two figures on horseback, in an otherwise white screen. We see and hear them gallop away from us, the sound of galloping hooves is gradually replaced by the sound of distance, the sound of the wind blowing across an epic space. The retreating figures on horseback show us the depth of the screen space, open it up through their receding, and eventual disappearance.

From *Drum Room* (Miranda Pennell): An opening sequence of shots show empty spaces, bare white brick walls, carpet tiles, ventilation units. The hard cuts between these relatively long takes gradually makes apparent the contrasting 'empty' sounds of each of these spaces.

From *Musical Piece #2* (Augusto Corrieri):

Opens window, the sound of rain. Opens a door, the sound of rain. ...

Opens hands, the sound of rain. Turns out pockets, the sound of rain.

Takes off shoe, the sound of rain. Slowly opens mouth, the sound of rain.

Removes lid of bottle, the sound of rain, drinks, the sound continues.

Sound fades as Augusto empties the bottle.

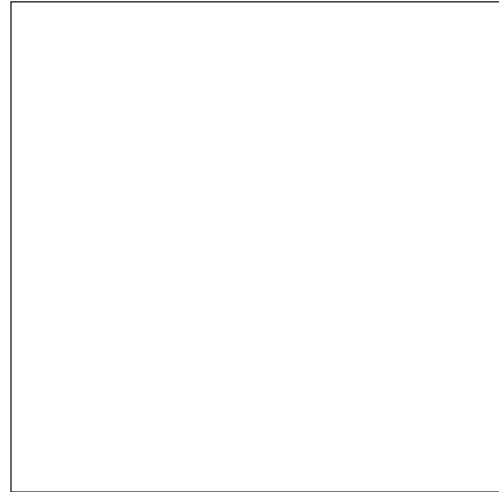
Memory: on the mind's eye...

Hilary Westlake, who plays The Mother in *The Gold Diggers*, hadn't seen the film for many years. She said: 'It seems to me as if its been completely re-edited... but it hasn't... has it?' It was something to do with the structure, she said; she remembered it as more linear, but saw it now as more circular. This observation prompted me to speak to the various members of Goat Island present at *What if...* about their experience of watching *A Last, A Quartet* (an installation on four monitors, drawn from their last live work as a company).

Karen Christopher (one of the company members) said that she had a sense of the film version as terminal, where the live show had seemed inscrutable, carrying on possibility. Having said this, she told me that when filming they were working with the idea of the single take as the live take, and only shot it twice - each shot determined by the length of tape. The feeling of being in it is totally different to seeing it on film, Karen said: 'it's hard as a live performer to see yourself stuck in time'.

* * *

A common thread through many of the works, whatever their focus or format, was the implementation of strong formal, conceptual frameworks, combined with what Rose English described as 'fluidity allowing space for the improbable'. I suspect that this fluidity comes from the experience of improvisation and live performance that many of these artists share, and an interest in allowing space, time or events to call forth action (or inaction).



Third photograph: a corner, windows fill the space with light. Two girls sit side by side on a sofa, facing away from us, into the corner. Each has long dark hair, and is silhouetted against a window. Both are wearing headphones. Through the gap between them, we see a monitor, and we can just make out the image, a head-and-shoulders shot of Steve Paxton. The work they are watching asks the question, *Have You Started Dancing Yet?* How will these girls respond?

And how to respond to *What if...*, a programme that prompts a host of ideas and questions? In his 2008 essay, 'Curating the Practice/ The Practice of Curating', written for the symposium of the same name at the American Dance Festival that year, Douglas Rosenberg writes:

What does the curator want from you, the audience?' It is a complex question.

Curating dance film and video is a way of constructing narratives about the field of screendance that may be otherwise invisible or absent. It is also a way to interrogate individual works of screendance, collective, individual or group practice, and to actively shape and comment upon the field in general.³

At *What if...* we saw this in the way that some works were arranged together over time, in short, focused screenings, and others were grouped together in space as installations. In the screenings, we saw, for example, Marisa Zanotti's *Being Norwegian* – a split-screen account of an encounter between two people, where the action moves back and forth through time, suggesting different versions of events and alternative interpretations of those events – next to *Joy* by Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor

– where a voiceover tells us that we are witnessing a young girl re-enacting the disappearance of another: together, these works invite our reflection on identity and on narrative structures. We saw *Strange Lights* by Rosie Pedlow and Joe King – a documentation of the shifting lights in a forest near to an RAF base that creates poetic imagery from everyday objects and movements even as it references supposed otherworldly sightings – next to Simon Aeppli's *In Case I Disappear*, a highly personal and engaging documentation of some of the objects, stories, sounds and textures that make up his memory of his home town. And in John Smith's *Hotel Diaries #3: Museum Piece*, the director takes us on a late night meander around his hotel, his reflections roving between the minutiae of hotel décor and unfolding world events. Together, these works open up a wealth of ideas around representing place on screen.

Other juxtapositions given by the installations included Shiftwork's beautifully measured pieces for iPod, together in a room with Claudia Kappenberg's *Moebius* – a work made of projections within projections in which found footage of a group of children rolling an enormous ball in a field appears on the artist's back as she moves along pathways learnt from the image. The same room contains the four monitors and multi-faceted mirror ball of Lucy Cash's *A Last, A Quartet* – a work that documents, responds to and carries on the final live work of Goat Island. Together, these works invite us to consider the different screen spaces being created, explored, and contrasted, as well as the content of each individual piece of work.

The installation programme also developed over time. During the night, Oreet Ashery's *Oh Jerusalem* – a looping black and white projection that binds the artist, now dressed as an Arab, now as an Orthodox Jew, to repeat his actions and references both slapstick and geo-political historical contexts – was projected onto a windowlike space high above the entrance space, at eye level with the mezzanine. During the day, this same space was used for Lucy Cash's study of falling bodies, *Falling for You*.

Spending time with the works over the five days of the festival also allowed those present to make their own connections between disparate works, to create our own path through the almost overwhelming array of material on offer, and to start to form some sort of sense of what these works, together, might have to say about dance and about choreography.

Choreography and dancing are two distinct and very different practices. (William Forsythe)⁴

Taken as a body of works, the programme for *What if...* articulates in practice one of the central propositions that the curators raised in their talk on the Thursday evening: that we might consider choreography to be something separable from dance. A way of interacting with the world; an approach that is to do with embodiment, to do with structure, with strata; to do with responding to space, time and other people. To borrow a term from Forsythe, a form of 'physical thinking': 'What else, besides the body, could physical thinking look like?' Forsythe asks in his essay on 'Choreographic Objects'. The screen provides a defined space for exploring this question, a space for those who, as Gilles Deleuze writes of cinema directors, 'think with movement-images and time-images instead of concepts'.⁵

Such a definition allows the choreographic to be applied both as a lens for viewing works in a wide range of media, and as an approach to making work in a similarly broad range. Clearly, this proposition requires us to think beyond video as a tool for recording dance, or of dance as subject material for video. It also opens up rich possibilities in terms of where a choreographic training might take us, and to what subject matters and in what media we might choose to apply this training.

In Rosenberg's essay, cited above, he proposes the following model for curation:

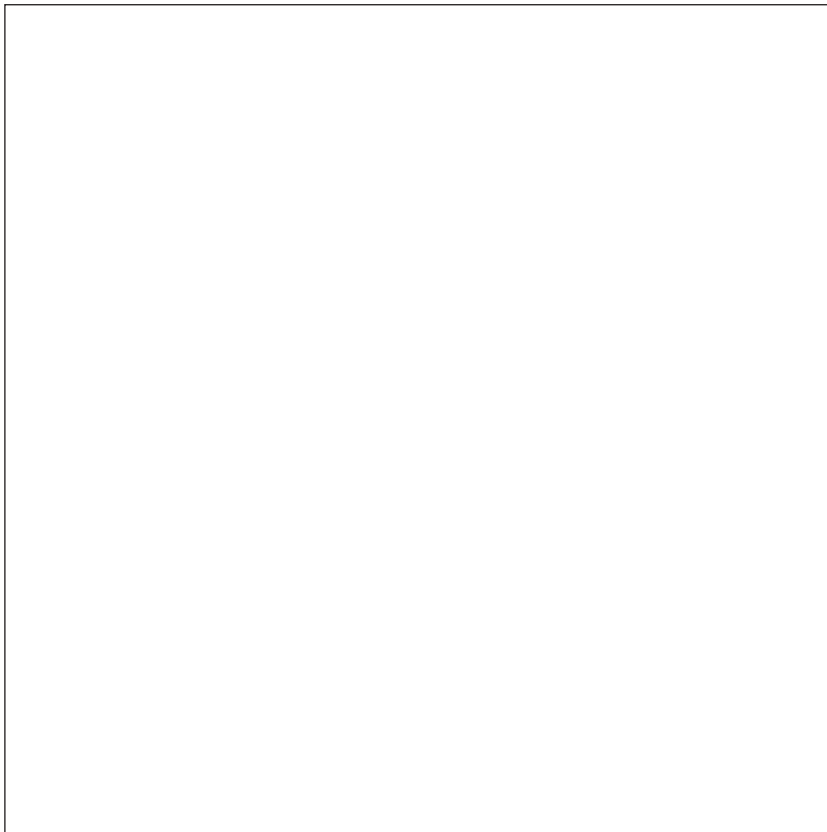
So, what the audience might offer is a kind of feedback loop in which the efforts of the curator or programmer are reflected, considered and responded to in a thoughtful and focused manner. The audience embod-

ies the work and moves it out into the larger culture ... into their own practice and into their social situations through discourse and reiteration. In this model, there is a partnership implied, a relationship between makers, curators, festivals and audiences that if undertaken seriously by all might move the field forward in a way that elevates both the work and the critical discourse surrounding it.

What if... was a thoughtful, adventurous and very welcome realisation of the ambition for screen-dance curation that Rosenberg voices. Through bringing these works together, the curators have 'amplified possibility' for serious engagement

with the questions they raise, an engagement that will hopefully extend and ripple outward from the works and people present at the festival, through screendance as a field of enquiry, and on through choreography as a practice.

- 1 Goulish M 2000 *39 Microlectures: In Proximity of Performance* Routledge London p. 18
- 2 Phelan P in Rainer Y 1999 *A Woman Who... Essays, Interviews, Scripts* John Hopkins University Press Baltimore p. 3
- 3 Rosenberg D, 'Curating the Practice/The Practice of Curating' <http://dvpj.net/screendance2008.html>
- 4 Forsythe W 'Choreographic Objects' <http://www.williamforsythe.de/essay.html>
- 5 Deleuze G 2009 *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* Continuum London p. xix



Fourth photograph: When one window opens (another window opens). It's been hot all weekend. I'm standing in the Research Studio, where a number of works are installed, next to Lucy Cash's *A Last, A Quartet*. One of the monitors shows a woodland scene. To my left, the large Victorian window is open. Inside this opening, another, smaller window, is open too. From outside, a welcome breeze. From inside, birdsong.



He wonders if he could fold and cross his fingers
in that same way without previous training.



His whole face goes into a squint whenever
looking through his Nikon viewfinder.

MYTH AND LEGEND

Marisa Zanotti

The eye to the hand

How do you write about What if...?

*I was invited to take part in the festival as a filmmaker and also to produce a written response to the festival. This is an adaptation of the text that was performed on Saturday 10th April. I approached this as an improvisation, looking for a way into the performance space of **What if...** I found a gesture; firstly a gesture seen on screen: Julie Christie's hands drawn to her face (*The Gold Diggers*, 1985). The next day, a gesture seen off screen caught my interest: Sheila Ghelani covering her mouth and secretly placing an object there (*Give me land lots of land*, 2009). Finally, I discovered a gesture I might want to make toward the screen: my impulse to reach for miniature screens, the sites for work by Fiona Wright/ Becky Edmunds (*After Pocahontas and me*, 2010) and Chirstinn Whyte (*Playlist*, 2010). This being an improvisation I left something behind when I left the space with Simon Vincenzi taking up my gestural theme in the durational performance *The Ouroboros Recordings: an instalment between times* (2010).*

1. Rose English ⇨ Sally Potter ⇨ David Lynch ⇨ Rose English ⇨ Sally Potter ⇨ David Lynch

The relationship of performance, theatre, dance and film is reciprocal; they often reflect on each other and this relationship was articulated strongly in the *What if...* programme. Part of this project seemed to be asking us how do we meet a work, how much of the work have we already seen, performed or dreamt? So this is not a new thought, but sometimes it's a surprise when unexpectedly you recognise something across works through time. The night before the festival opened, in the mapping between alternative film practices of the 1980s and the screen practices of 2010, the curators screened Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* (1983) with a talk by Rose English. In *The Gold Diggers* I discovered resonances with many of the

films of David Lynch. In his work we find non-linear narratives, a play on the figures of the diva and the starlet, (*Mulholland Drive* [2001], *Inland Empire* [2006]) with the self conscious playing out of roles, along with, performances in theatre (*Eraserhead* [1977], *Mulholland Drive* [2001], *Blue Velvet* [1986]). As the film unfolded I realised that I had encountered *The Gold Diggers* twenty years before I saw it projected, in the performance work of Rose English in the 1990s in pieces such as *Tantamount* and *Double Wedding*. Later, English told me that the experience of making *The Gold Diggers* was inscribed in the script for *Double Wedding* (1991).

Here is what I found in both *The Gold Diggers* and *Double Wedding*:

a horse that appears indoors,
a chorus of crying men
the line of figures snaking its way across a space.
questions about narrative, linearity and the figure of performance
a question about the difference between being and acting, performing and acting
the onscreen staging of a performance in a theatre

The hand to the mouth

2. Lillian Gish/Julie Christie

In the images of screen performance in *The Gold Diggers*, I'm seeing a multiplicity of Lillian Gish moments through Julie Christie, along with a multiplicity of Julie Christie moments. Christie, her face a familiar landscape, plays out the legend of the screen diva, both her own divadom and that of Lillian Gish. Her hands fly to her mouth.

The gesture that Julie Christie made looks like this:¹



'The hand to the mouth.' Photo: Marisa Zanotti and Becky Edmunds

4. Julie Christie/Sheila Ghelani

The Gold Diggers has images of women moving away from us, into a big landscape, into a future together. A day later Sheila Ghelani, in *Give Me Land Lots of Land*, prompts me again to reflect on landscape and *The Gold Diggers*: ideas of legend, and myth, and epic scale. She is lying in the space under a camera focussed on her face, and a strong light is shining in her eyes. She covers her mouth, hiding an action. She appears on screen, in what's called a Big Close Up (BCU). Her face almost fills the frame and she is looking directly at you. The light on her face makes her eyes sparkle, and she is really glowing in a practised seduction. I am aware that she is putting things in her mouth, but what I can see in the space is a fiction, because it's the reality of the screen that I'm interested in, and she is now, quite serenely, birthing an epic: slugs, small people, palm trees, and cars drop from her lips. So, perhaps not a diva, but she is definitely a starlet, although not waiting for her close up. This is the screen test that she sets herself and she's no ingénue. Someone next to me says, 'I don't know what that last thing was, but it was quite big – I think it was an ambulance.'

Here, I have to be honest, I was relieved. In every screen epic there is going to be a disaster, so it's good that she's thought of the emergency services.

Like Sally Potter and Rose English, Ghelani is also playing with ideas about women on screen. Julie Christie and Collette Lafont rode fearlessly out of the ballroom and into the landscape, possessing the space. But Ghelani doesn't just take charge of the landscape - it's coming out of her. She has

ingested it: both Fae Rae and King Kong in her own movie.

She's not a screen legend but she is most definitely a myth.

A creation myth on screen

A landscape in a woman

The hand to the screen

6. Reaching for the screen

The works made by Chirstinn Whyte, Becky Edmunds and Fiona Wright invite another kind of gesture, one towards the screen. This is work that is asking you to be physically close to it; but this is different from the impulse to enter the image, the fantasy you might still secretly harbour that if you stand next to the big screen, you might be able to walk into the world that is flickering beside you. In *After Thinking About Pocahontas and Me* (Wright/Edmunds 2010) screens are sited in six Swan Vestas matchboxes laid out on a table. You look down on the action, a match flickers, you hear it before you see it, and then the light fills the tiny screen. The intensity of the image and the sound draws you inside the screen space while at the same time you occupy a space outside it. This intimate encounter - picking up a matchbox, and holding it close - becomes itself a screen performance: there's you, in a moment of contemplation, framed in the sound that echoes up and down the stairwell at Siobhan Davies Studios.

Chirstinn Whyte's *Playlist* (2010) plays on an iPod mounted on a microphone stand. A series of richly textured micro-works in black and white,

Playlist feels a bit like a found black box that has recorded a path through different spaces and times. Fragments of dancing bodies emerge from or invade the blackness of the screen and then disappear. Whyte asks that you move toward the work, stand close up - and as much as she invites you to reach for the iPod, *Playlist* seems to also reach to you, to show you its moving image, like some kind of weird plant-life that has flowered a screen. This effect is accentuated in the film *Vector Paths*, where I feel like I'm looking at some kind of microscopic biological form that is evolving its own intelligence.

The screen to the body

The work of White/Edmunds and Whyte elicits your participation through the gesture that connects you to the screen, through the hand² you bring the screen to the body.

7. This has been an improvisation. Here's a little unfinished phrase that you might join in with.

the eye to the hand

the hand to the mouth

the mouth to the screen

the hand to the screen

the screen to the body.

- 1 Julie Christie's hands to mouth gesture appeared in Simon Vincenzi's performance installation *The Ouroboros Recordings: an instalment between times*.

A naked man is seated in front of a screen. He has a hood on his head; it's just him and me in the room. The film that is being screened has captured a group of men and women: they are staggering, reaching for something. Sometimes grotesque, they are held by something I cannot see. The camera records this and it seems that they have been there and will be there forever. Then I notice that the man in the room is drawing his hands to his mouth. It's like the ghost of Julie Christie's gesture - it doesn't even stifle sound but seems to point to the reaction that perhaps we should have to what we see on screens. It's like the moment of realisation in Lindy England's bad dream that me and him and everyone else are in it together now. (*We are only now what is seen and we can never be heard. Now here we are, but we've all ended up together. In your bad dream you are keeping us awake. You should never sleep again. How can we ever sleep again? How can we rest? How can we stop?*)

- 2 The work of videographer Lisa Nelson comes to mind, someone else from dance that makes work for the screen. In her workshops she uses exercises connecting the eye to the hand with the hand holding the camera - connecting visual perception to the body and the thinking that we do when we move, to the thinking that we do when we choreograph in the screen.

Sheila Ghelani, *Give Me Land Lots of Land*. Photo: Andrew Downs



Augusto.

PERFORMANCE NOTES: AUGUSTO CORRIERI, 1ST MUSICAL PIECE

Helena Blaker

Augusto Corrieri uses the Upper Studio at Siobhan Davies Studios to perform a new piece to a seated audience. The performance takes place at one end of the room. He uses the exit doors and side partitions at that end of the room (positioned at an angle to the audience) to assist his work.

You asked me to tell you what I could see.

As dance, it's preparing for performance.

White walls, a plane of geometric shapes, a clean studio.

How's your back, I wondered.
This is all about the body ...

The lights go down.
"Testing - 1, 2, and 3."

When you are hidden, you speak.
When your mouth is hidden, you speak.

Repetition.

The body can be in any place,
and can produce sound in any format,
but only if covered.

Solo.

The microphone.

The lights go up and down.

You are a magician.
You can produce it in a secret mouth.
This is not a reversal.

The moment of entrance.

"Testing ... ying, ying, ying."

The mic is not speaking.

Silence as the lights go up.
Very light eyes.

You have been preparing for this.

Does he have any eyes?

"Wow, wow, wow ..."
I could 'see' vowels.

"Ok it sounds good, let's end here."

Walking around 'doing work'.
Actually doing work — testing sound spaces.

I could see work,
and I could see the 'performance' of work
when the sounds suggested had been different ...

I can see you make sound whenever you are covered.

I can't see those spaces ...
but I can see you.

Testing your voice.
Grunts — sounds —

I see you playing with us.



Augusto Corrieri: Musical Pieces. Photo: Andrew Downs

LIE YOUR HEAD IN YOUR NECK.

14 WORKS-IN-PROGRESS: RESPONSES IN THE FORM OF 'PERFORMANCE DIRECTIVES'

Litó Walkey

A group of people, mostly artists, gather in the roof studio of the Siobhan Davies Studios. They sit on chairs assembled in lines facing a large white screen. It is late afternoon on the last day of the **What if...** festival in London. The room is half-dark. On a low table in front of the group of people, is a machine called a 'visualiser'. This machine shines a light down onto a white piece of paper, projecting a larger image of this onto the screen.

Lucy Cash introduces:

"... our next invited writer to present her response is Litó Walkey and the title of this presentation is 'Lie your head in your neck.'"

A woman stands in front of the group of people, with a notebook in her hand and introduces:

"Hello. The invitation to respond in writing to the works presented in the **What if...** festival has framed an opportunity for me to continue a practice of response as creative act, and to begin (what is for me) a newer practice of constructing performance directives - written *suggestions towards* performance. These are concise texts, inscribed on paper, like song lyrics, like a poem, like a set of instructions. They're formulated through gathering and assembling sources (in this case, my response to the films, talks, performances and tangent experiences within the festival). By inserting spaces, observing silences, and accepting the page as space where elements can compliment and contrast each other, they evoke *possibility* for particular image/actions. I'd like to share these 14 works-in-progress with you."

The woman kneels on the floor next to the visualiser and takes a microphone in her left hand. With her right hand she takes the white piece of paper and places it to the side, revealing another piece of paper with 4 small lines of text. She leaves time for people to read the text, and then takes this paper off, revealing another piece of paper. This one has one line of text, followed by three marked lines, and then two lines of text. The last line has quotations and reads: "What am I?" After leaving time for people to reach this line, the woman speaks into the microphone: "What am I?" and turns to the next paper, revealing 2 lines of text. These actions continue through 14 papers. Whenever the line of text has quotations, the woman speaks into the microphone. On one paper there is an italicised line of text: '*accompanied by humming on the verge of singing*'. The woman accompanies the reading of this text by humming-singing Harry Nilsson's 'It's a perfect day'. When her turning of the pages, reaches a blank piece of paper, she looks up at the group of people, places the microphone on the floor, says "Thank you" and walks to the side of the room.

A line made by walking:

Follow the rhythm of my walk as I walk through the snow

Carry your house on your back

Make a line with your steps

Speak an enigmatic description

and then ask:

"What am I?"

A line made with a rope on the floor, makes a path with fingers fixing and snow falling from above.

Use your fingers to fix a rope on the floor to make a path in the snow.

Make a dance in two parts. Perform alternating between the parts:

part one:

Move as you would at a royal ball with elbows raised and chin high

part two:

Stand and wait to be asked to dance and touch your hands

"Are you dancing?"

"Have you stopped dancing?"

Exert yourself, engaging with 'invisible' forces so that more of you is visible.

accompanied by humming on the verge of singing

...und den Kopf in den Nacken legen

"...and lean your head back"

and lie your head in your neck

Lie your head in your neck

"kind of like this"

"kind of like this"

1. Adjust your head position while you laugh for 30 seconds
2. Rock your feet forward and back, sway a full-skirted dress, grasp your hands and smile

Black on white:

See a man in front of a white wall. There's wind between the wall and the back of his head.

Brown on brown:

See a man walking against the wall (in imagined darkness).

"In the dark you're walking into the wall"

Hold me while I skate

accompanied by piano music (imagined)

Spread the earth out past the edges of the frame to make the illusion of a sea of earth (and then bury your cherry).

Incomplete instructions for Sheila Ghelani's *Give me land lots of land*:

Lie on the floor

Rest, roll, fix your head on a pillow

Turn your head to the right

Sneak one small object into your mouth

Turn your head to the left

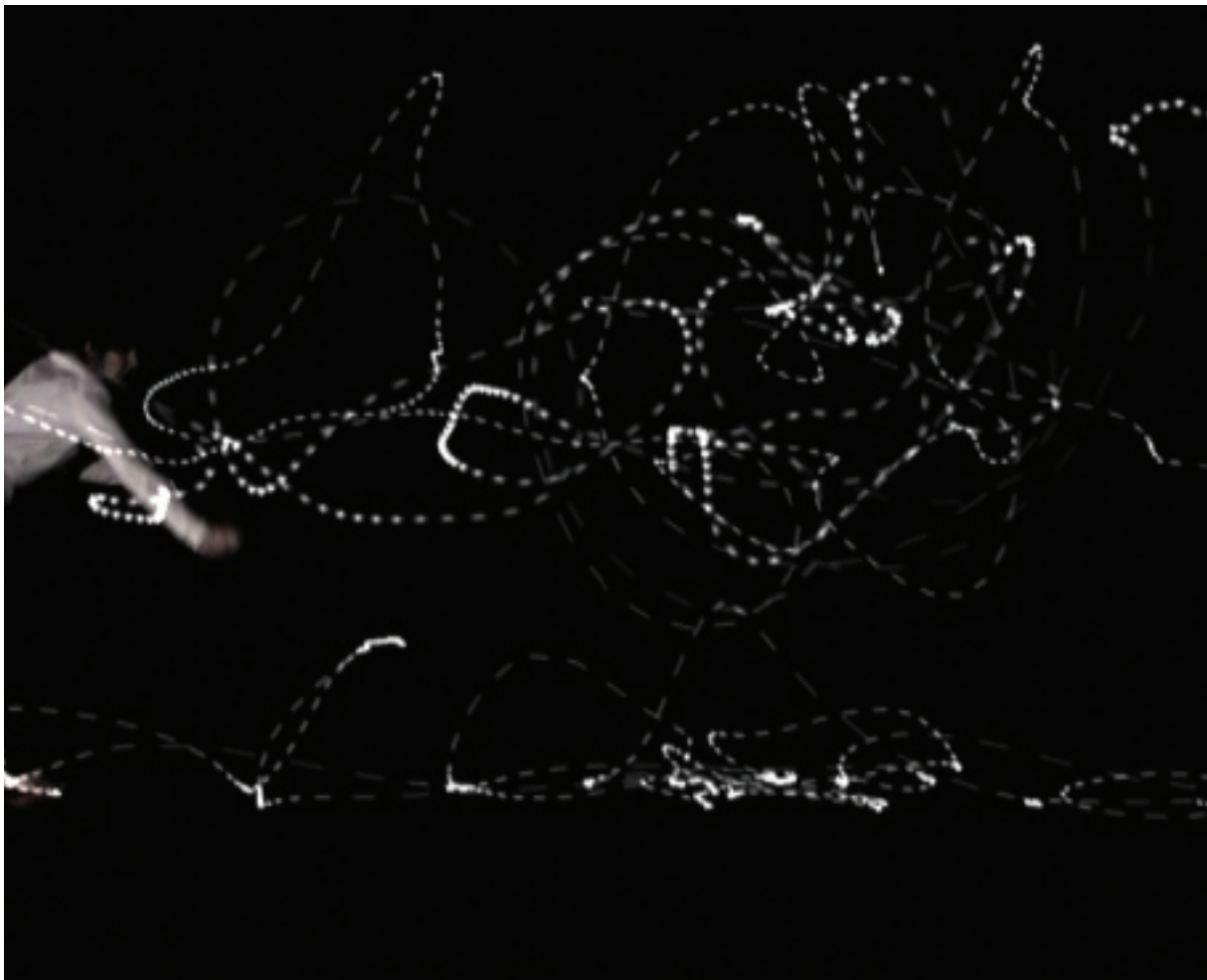
Smile up at the camera, that connects to the screen, that faces the audience

Dance ' a gold find' dance

without sound

Touch me lightly with your hand to tell me when it's time to start practising the other part.

Thank you for showing me some ordinary eyelashes just hanging around the eyes.



Still from *Trace* by Christian Whyte

THE DANCE-ADAPTED MIND

By Ken Grimes

For a science writer obsessed by human evolution, the *What if...* event raised two general questions: “Why does anyone dance?” and “Why does anyone watch someone else dance?” These general questions are, in fact, semi-specific formulations of the universal question which confronts all the behavioural sciences, i.e. “Why does anyone do anything?”

The short answer to this last question is “Because it stimulates the brain’s reward system.” – We tend to do something if it increases the activity of the feel-good neurotransmitter dopamine. The obvious next question is then: “Why do certain activities stimulate the brain’s reward system?” And the affordable scientific wisdom here is that, like all higher animals, we humans have evolved so as to derive pleasure from those acts which enhance our

chances of survival and reproduction. If we didn’t enjoy, say, eating, or copulating, or scratching away at a skin parasite, then we wouldn’t bother doing those things, and we wouldn’t survive long enough to pass on our non-eating, non-copulating, non-scratching genes.

Pleasure, then, is nature’s evolved mechanism for bribing us into performing our adaptive duties of survival and reproduction. And so, for an evolutionary biologist, the question “Why does anyone dance?” can be rewritten as: “How did dancing evolve to become an adaptive behavior for humans?”

The evolutionary heritage of our species is long indeed. And, as Garrett Soden points out in his



Photo: Andrew Downs

book *Falling: How Our Greatest Fear Became Our Greatest Thrill*:

Although narratives of human evolution tend to emphasise the six-million-year era since our ancestors left the trees, the previous sixty-five million years arguably had a greater impact on human nature ... Most of what we are – our body shape, our senses, even the basic circuitry of our brain – was formed over the vast stretch of time that our forebears spent among the branches ... The human line took to the ground only after eons evolving an extraordinary ability for an entirely different environment. That ability is acrobatics, and its birthplace was the trees.

Soden's thesis is that we humans possess a strong evolutionary heritage as 'arboreal acrobats', and that this heritage helps explain our penchant for dangerous, gravity-defying pastimes such as roller-coaster riding, rock-climbing, hang-gliding and parkour. Soden's main explanatory thrust – why we humans thrill to the risk of death-by-falling – steers him away from safer acrobatic activities, such as gymnastics, and of course dance, but we can easily expand the thesis to cover our present topic.

Soden brings to our attention the profound impact that taking to the trees made on the physiological evolution of our distant, rodent-like ancestors:

"The rat body was now gone, and in its place was a new animal with a body flexible enough to sit, stand, bend, twist sideways, curl up, and leap through the precarious tangle of the rainforest canopy." – The body of a 'tree-dancer', if you like.

Together with these locomotory adaptations, came others which supported the new behavior of rapid and precise movement through three-dimensional space. Early in arboreal mammal evolution, for example, the eyes moved from the side of the head to the front, producing binocular vision for the accurate depth-perception essential when leaping, swinging or scampering through the trees.

Our distant ancestors' arboreal lifestyle also drove the evolution of novel cognitive processes, such as those involved in calculating safe and efficient 3-D trajectories, making instant judgements about the weight-bearing properties of branches, or plotting and remembering complex foraging pathways through the forest canopy.

Finally, and centrally for our dance thesis, the demands of tree-dwelling pushed critical developments in our ancestors' sixth and seventh senses. No, not clairvoyance and pre-cognition, but our 'real' extra two senses: of balance and of body-mapping.

Clearly, any ground-adapted species migrating to the trees is under strong Darwinian pressure to improve its sense of balance. In the evolution of the human line, this improvement was achieved mainly by refinements to an ancient and basic animal adaptation, the vestibular organ, located within the skull. This organ, which forms part of the 'inner ear', is composed of three liquid-filled tubes, arranged as a kind of three-dimensional spirit-level. Changes in orientation of the body cause movements of the liquids, movements sensed by surrounding nerves and transmitted to the brain as information about whole-body position and stance. Unsurprisingly, it turns out that all primates, including humans, have exceptionally well developed vestibular organs.

In addition to information about balance and whole-body orientation, safe, fast movement through the ancient forest canopy also required continual and accurate feedback about the position of individual arms and legs. "To keep track of

its more mobile limbs," as Soden explains, "The primates' proprioceptive sense – the feedback system of nerves that monitor joint position – became finely calibrated to signal its brain of each limb's precise orientation in space."

This proprioceptive sense – with input from nerve-endings distributed throughout the body's muscles, tendons and joints – essentially provides the brain with an accurate, continually updated, 3-D representation of the position in space of the body's various parts. It is this 'touchy-feely inner body-model' that allows you, with eyes closed, and unerringly, to, say, touch your fingertip to your nose.

Again unsurprisingly, all humans, like all primates, have particularly well developed proprioceptor systems. And some humans even more so than others, as Professor Patrick Haggard, a neuroscientist studying dance at University College London, explains: "There are many studies which have looked at measures of how good this proprioceptive sense is in dancers. Many of them have found that dancers have exquisite proprioception; they are very sensitive to exactly where their limbs are in space."

So the answer to The Killers' query "Are we human, or are we dancer?" turns out to be "Both". And the answer to our query "Why does anyone dance?" turns out to be "Because it stimulates evolutionarily ancient brain-reward systems originally evolved to motivate arboreal acrobatics."

For the answer to our second query – "Why does anyone watch someone else dance?" – we turn again to primates, in this case our living relatives.

In the 90s, a group of Italian researchers studying the neurology of macaque monkeys made an unexpected discovery. They found that groups of specific neurons, stimulated when a monkey performed a particular motor-action such as grasping a fruit, were also stimulated when a monkey simply *observed* another monkey performing the same action. This was our first indication that another animal's movements produce a kind of 'neural shadow motion' in the brain of an observer.

The so-called 'mirror neurons' (a better term would be 'mirroring neurons', since they are, in fact, nor-

mal neurons which have also evolved a secondary, mirroring function) are located mainly in the motor and premotor cortexes of the monkey brain. When mirroring, the neurons effectively work to translate the visual perception of another animal's motor-action into a simulation of that same motor-action within the mind of the watcher.

Global research since the discovery of mirror neurons has both confirmed and substantially expanded the original findings. It has become increasingly clear that the previously separate cognitive categories of 'sensory experience' and 'motor experience' are somehow fused within the mirror neuron system. It is now thought that, when one monkey watches another perform an action, this actually stimulates the watcher's own neurons and muscles, though not strongly enough to produce movement. A case of 'Monkey see, monkey almost do', if you like.

Again, the question for the evolutionary biologist is why such behavior evolved: what is the adaptive advantage of being able to mirror the motor-actions of another species member. The answer here seems intuitively obvious: it allows learning by mental mimicry. The young of any tree-dwelling species cannot afford a trial-and-error method of learning to move around the tree-tops, where any single slight mistake can prove instantly fatal. There would have been strong Darwinian pressure on our ancestors for the young to learn as much as possible about arboreal locomotion first by watching, and then by copying, adults.

This evolved learning mechanism seems in humans to underlie the 'show-watch-copy' methodology characteristic of many whole-body teaching disciplines. Traditional oriental martial arts instruction, for example, is famously non-verbal: sensei teach by mute demonstration, intuitively targeting their students' kinaesthetic mirror-learning systems.

There are also didactic implications for teachers and students of dance. As Haggard observes: "Dancers could mentally rehearse just by watching. The neuroscientific point would be that they would be using the same areas of their brain just in watching as they are when they are actually moving. So one interesting possibility is that simply by regular observation of particular actions they can

somehow fix and maintain the motor skill to perform those actions.”

So the answer to our second question – “Why does anyone watch someone else dance?” – turns out to be: “Because it stimulates evolutionarily ancient brain-reward systems originally evolved to motivate the learning of arboreal acrobatics.”

Much of the research since the 90s has worked on extending the monkey brain-scan studies to our own species. These investigations have revealed that, in humans, mirror neurons are common and distributed over a wide network of regions in the human brain, far beyond the primate motor and premotor cortexes.

Some of these regions are known to be associated in humans with emotional empathy, for example the so-called ‘pain matrix’, which engages, perhaps causing you to wince, when you see someone else get hurt. So the mirror neuron system can also help us to understand the internal states of others.

Another region rich in mirror neurons is the inferior frontal cortex, close to Broca’s area, one of the brain’s recognized language centres. This has lent support to the theory that human spoken language originally evolved from a physical-gesture system interpreted by mirror neurons. If this turns out to be true, then we could re-write R. G. Collingwood’s famous observation, that “Dance is the mother of all languages”, thus: “Gesture is the mother of all languages, and dance is *gesture writ large*.”

More obviously relevant to our subject of dance is the strong mirroring function of a brain region called the primary somatosensory cortex. This is the main receptive area for the sense of touch, and contains a tactile model of the subject’s own body called the sensory homunculus. When we observe another person perform a certain motor-action, say a dance move, this brain region responds by producing an interior sense of how it would feel to move in the observed manner. So anyone who is intently watching a dancer performing should also be experiencing a kind of ‘internal shadow-show’ of that dancer’s performance.

Empirical support for this idea comes from Patrick Haggard, who designed an experiment using func-

tional magnetic resonance imaging technology to measure brain activity in dance spectators. The audience subjects were in three groups: non-experts; classical dancers from the Royal Ballet; and a troupe of expert Brazilian Capoeira dancers. They all observed both ballet and Capoeira dance pieces.

The results were intriguing. The two expert groups showed different reactions to the different dance forms, each group producing a higher neural response in the proposed mirror brain regions while observing their own dance form. As for the non-expert group, Haggard observes:

The interesting thing about these people is they showed activity in these mirror system areas of the brain. But this activity was lower than for the expert dancers, and more importantly it was completely unselective. So they showed equal amounts of activity, whatever kind of dance they watched. And this is consistent with the idea that if you have the motor program for the action that you’re watching somebody else perform - you internally run it, or simulate it, while you’re watching, almost as though you were covertly imitating or rehearsing in empathy what you watch somebody else do.

I will now, briefly and rather unfairly, bring the whole weight of this theoretical construct to bear on the work of one hapless artist, Chirstinn Whyte, whose contributions to the **What if...** event seem to me near-perfect examples of dance-based visual art.

Whyte is a filmmaker almost uniquely conscious of the neuroscientific bases of dance, as witnessed by short-piece titles such as *Proprioception* and *Kinetic Empathy*, not to mention her own theoretical writings. What I think Whyte’s work demonstrates is an exceptional understanding of the ways in which filmmaking techniques can enhance the mirror-neuron-stimulation potential of dance.

In several pieces, such as *Flicker* and *Evanescent*, Whyte films and edits conventional, accomplished dance sequences in a way that presents movement as partial, staccato, discontinuous. In response to this fragmented input, it seems to me, the audi-



Photo: Andrew Downs

ence's proprioceptive mirror neuron system goes into overdrive, as it attempts to integrate these observed movement-fragments into natural, complete sequences of motions. In this case, the human 'kinaesthetic empathy system' is provoked into action by the poverty of the stimulus.

Trace – a symphony of limbs limned in light – employs exactly the opposite strategy to achieve the same effect. Here, the single dancer is filmed conventionally, but then in post-filming, tracer-lights are added to her hands and feet, so that as she dances, she leaves traces of all her limb-motions lingering in the air around her. These flowing, curving light-lines provide vivid visual reinforcement of the dancer's motions, a kind of super-normal stimulus for the watcher's kinaesthetic empathy system.

In the artists' correspondence which preceded the *What if...* screen-dance exhibition, curator Lucy

Cash, another filmmaker highly conscious of the neuroscientific bases of dance, observes that:

"It can be hard to argue for a different way of talking about the experience of art when that different way may be based on kinaesthetic principles – principles which may be intuitively understood, but rarely articulated outside of a movement context."

Of course this new kinaesthetic argument cannot be made solely from the perspective of human evolutionary biology, but knowing something about our ancient tree-dancer heritage can only help with this project.

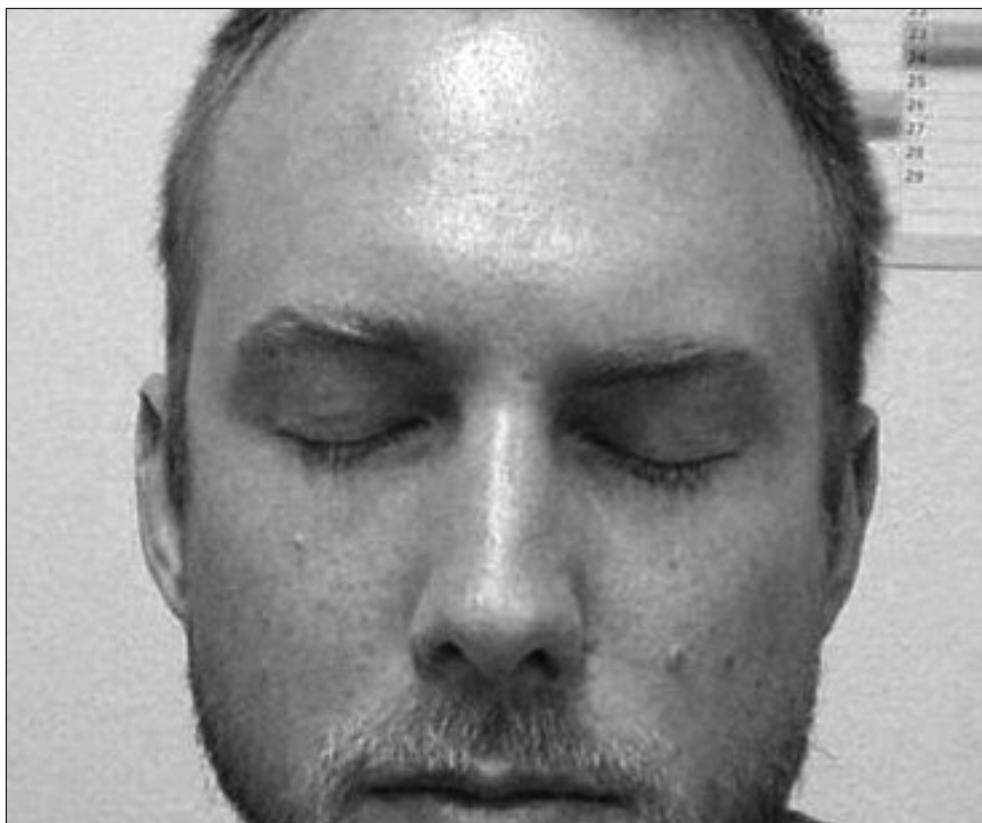
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How could I get my hands on such a
huge air-filled ball myself?



How long will it take for them
to cross the vast ice field?



Installation of Claudia Kappenberg, 'Moebius'. Photo: Andrew Downs

DANCING BETWEEN DISCIPLINES: REFLECTIONS UPON AFFINITIES BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND CHOREOGRAPHY

Olivia Swift

If anthropologists agree on anything, it's that few aspects of human life are constant across time and cultures. Even ideas such as what constitutes a person, which seem unproblematic to a Western audience, have been shown by anthropologists to be culturally contingent.

As an anthropologist with an ongoing interest in dance and performance, I am drawn to a number of points of connection between the two fields. Were I to apply an anthropological mode of analysis to *What if...*, I might choose to situate the festival's work within particular artistic traditions, or within a political economy of art involving producers, consumers, the state, and so on. Tracing the influence in the other direction, anthropology has most typically served the arts as a source of 'cultural inspiration'. Perhaps the most famous dance practitioner to draw on anthropology was the late

American choreographer and intellectual activist, Katherine Dunham, whose anthropological fieldwork in the Caribbean inspired her blend of African-Caribbean movements with those of ballet and modern dance. The results shaped the future of American concert dance.

Anthropology has also promised answers to ubiquitous questions such as, 'what is dance?', 'is dance a human activity?' and 'what purpose does dance serve?' These questions have drawn on different trends within the discipline's history. For example, the now-rejected 'evolutionary' style of early anthropology would have classified dances as indicative of different stages of human development. The functionalism that emerged in the early twentieth century in British and American anthropology, in which a social phenomenon is analysed in terms of its role in the overall functioning of

society, might view dance as providing catharsis that reproduces social cohesion. Or a structuralist approach within British and American anthropology, popular from the 1950s, views social forms as meaningful signifiers in relationship to a lexicon of others and so might analyse dance as a form of non-verbal communication. In general, the universalist strand of the discipline, concerned with what is shared by humans across time and space, would concentrate on elements of dance that are fundamental to being human, while the opposing relativism (also known as 'substantivism') within anthropology would attend to variation in dance across history and culture.

Less often, choreography has been put to the service of anthropology. I previously spent 18 months researching Filipino global seafaring in Manila and a village built and run by a maritime trade union for its members and their families. During this time, Sally Ann Ness's writing about 'gestures of companionship' – such as the loose holding of a companion's wrist while walking - helped me make sense of social relations by attending to the ways in which culture is embodied. Given the extent to which bodies are socially inscribed more broadly, I find it curious that anthropology does not look routinely to dance practitioners, for whom the body is a raw material, since this seems a collaborative partnership with productive potential.

If *What if...* made one immediate impact upon me, it was not that it comprised work belonging to specialised artistic categories distinct from the rest of society, but rather involved a commendably varied collection of inspirations, ideas, technologies and aesthetics. The diversity of the pieces evoked a wider sense of how humans interact with one another and with their environments. For me, the work overlapped with anthropology's broad concern with human life. In varying ways, all the pieces engaged with themes central to anthropology, such as exchange and reciprocity, human experiences of time and space, and the relationships between the individual and the group that underpin politics.

These spurred me to reflect upon the comparative subjectivity of artistic and knowledge production. While anthropologists 'study' culture, choreographers 'write' dance. This distinction implies the for-



Installation of Graeme Miller and John Smith, Beside the A Side. Photo: Lucy Cash

mer to be objective and the latter subjective, and it is of course a false distinction. Postmodern choreography has 'created' work using techniques inspired by chaos theory, for example, that attempts to remove the choreographer's authorship from the dance product. Postmodernism saw a paradigm shift in anthropology too. The discipline that once considered itself a science now celebrates its inevitable subjectivity, its parallels with political activism, its qualitative and non-representative emphasis on a limited number of biographical accounts, and its often fiction-like prose. Today's anthropologists confront their biases, select and reveal their allegiances, and above all aim to provide 'thick' descriptions that allow multiple and nuanced readings not hidden by their own analyses. Theory is deployed simply to offer one interpretation of ethnographic data from which it takes its lead. Recognising that objective study is impossible, 'the postmodern turn' in anthropology revealed 'truth' to be relative and created dynamically between author, text and reader.

Super 8 still from the making of Lucy Cash/Goat Island, *A Last, A Quartet*.





Installation of Becky Edmunds and Fiona Wright, *After Thinking About Pocahontas and Me*. Photos: Lucy Cash

Just as economists can be considered to be actively productive of markets, rather than passively observing them, anthropologists are not camera-like, objective observers but rather producers of texts and other forms of knowledge. In this way, they share ground with art critics who are, by definition, biased in their reviews and who, in the act of skilful writing, create an aesthetic experience for the reader and a cultural product in its own right (the review).

Becky Edmunds' *Have You Started Dancing Yet?* (2004) was the first work I encountered when coming into the building. While the breadth of work in *What if...* provoked me to reflect upon the overlaps in the subject matter and creative processes involved in dance and anthropology, this piece made the most lasting impression on me. It opens with the unseen narrator posing a question to a series of dance practitioners: 'Are you dancing now?' Initially, responses tally: 'no', 'no', 'don't be ridiculous'. Then one artist hesitates: 'in a way', she says. From then on the film splices together the dancers' movements and musings in their respective studios or kitchens, cut with a beach scene of dogs running and waves collapsing, suggestive of dance being something more than an exclusively human activity. In its editing the film finds consensus in the different dancers' thinking, creating a sense of flow within their thought processes that mirrors the sense of flow they collectively attribute to what one of them dubs 'a dancing state'.

Instead of dance being defined as dance by the presence of 'framing' (a stage, audience, and so on), or by 'naming' (dance is dance because one declares it thus), the film arrives at a notion of dance as a private, inner state of mind; a flow of

energy that focuses one's attention beyond the body and connects bodies to one another and to the space they inhabit. As such, dance is not an isolated event but a relationship to the world, as Steve Paxton – one of the featured artists - surmises. Paxton searches his memory for a quotation about dance being what's left behind when the crust of a 'culture' is stripped away.

This brief summary of Edmunds' work is not a 'thick' anthropological account of the film but rather a subjective glimpse at its content. As with anthropological and other writing, the summary includes and excludes according to the interests and biases of its author. My reading of the film is not that Edmunds is searching for a definition of dance, but rather that she is interested in taking dance beyond definitions or genres altogether. What the featured artists describe is a sense of dance liberating the body from the mind and of freeing dance from its social frameworks. An anthropological analysis of the film might highlight how this notion has its own social framework, which draws on a Cartesian tradition of mind and body separation or on Eastern philosophies and practices of yoga and meditation. Moreover, the idea of dance as freeing body from thought marks a particular point in the development of ideas about dance within a specific artistic tradition.

Edmunds' work makes a fitting introduction to the festival in which curators propose choreography not as an incidental process in the service of dance but as a 'sensibility' detached from dance. This sensibility entails an almost childlike openness to elements such as sound, pattern, form, colour, light and very often to movement. My interest in the notion of a 'choreographic sensibility' and in

Edmunds' film in particular pertains less to semantics than it does to ideas about movement in dance and beyond.

Foremost, Edmunds' film raises the question of whether, even though peace and calm are ever-sought, stillness can ever exist. While dance need not be defined in terms of movement, what Edmunds highlights for me is how movement is central not just to dance (commonly-conceived) but also to my own discipline of anthropology. When anthropologists and other scholars account for social change, they often speak in terms of space or distance, speed or time, and 'flows' of people and goods around the world. Geographer David Harvey, for example, coined the term 'time-space compression' to describe how technological advances have resulted in a sense that the pace of daily life and the time it takes to communicate over long distances has shrunk while accessible space has expanded.

By combining space or distance with time or speed, such ideas imply movement. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of anthropology without movement as a central-though-latent theme. In my own sub-discipline of economic anthropology, many ideas of what constitute humanity and abuses of humanity

come from Karl Marx. For Marx, productive activities are human activities, while selling of one's capacity to produce ('labour power') for a wage is a deeply anti-human, capitalist innovation. In comparison to anthropological searches for the origins of dance, Marx offers a more sombre take on what constitutes a 'quintessentially human activity'. Edmunds enabled me to reconcile these two aspects of human life, since all productive activity involves movement, whether the contractions of childbirth or the repetitive gesturers of the assembly-belt worker, as made manifest within some artistic endeavours such as Lars Von Trier's film *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), in which factory workers' tap-dancing bodies and moving machinery come together in one aesthetic. Even the production of knowledge involves movement, since new knowledge is merely the juxtaposing and hence recycling of existing forms in novel combinations, an inherently dynamic – indeed choreographic – act. The question I arrived at by the end of the festival, then, was 'What if dance is not an artistic or cultural form distinct from the rest of society, but one end of a spectrum of movement involving all of human life?' Now that's a question that should keep my anthropological mind busy and might just appeal to those with a choreographic sensibility for the small details of a big world... that never stops moving.

Installation of Becky Edmunds, *Have You Started Dancing Yet*. Photo: Andrew Downs





Inside her mouth she hides a flower.

What if... Subtitles

Notes on performance

Helena Blaker

10 April 2010

Amongst various forms of live performance over the **What if...** festival, and in a field made more complex as the concepts of performance and choreography were explored in video and film, the idea of *translation* was picked up beautifully in the live performance **Subtitles** by Christina Ciupke and Nik Haffner that took place at the centre of the weekend.

This idea was present in the fact that these were German performers, with a different vocal language and social body language than their audience in Britain, with a different (a German) way of being. ... And it was expressed not only in a live verbal translation by writer-respondent Litó Walkey, but in the bodies of the dancers, as they made use of spoken language and responded to each other speaking.

I.

The air in the room becomes still, and the artists look at each other. *They stand like dancers. They walk onto the carpet. The audience is in attendance.*

The gentle music plays and I am delighted to be here.

They are so different, the composure of each of them, their gazes ...

Interview

Helena Blaker and Christina Ciupke

20 May 2010

HB: I wanted to ask you whether the performance unfolded in the moment in a new way or whether it was fully intentional – in other words, whether you had a vocabulary you were using in different ways ... Because it looked as if there was a lot of decision making.

CC: Well it usually is [done] a little bit in terms of timing. And there are some parts where we have the freedom to play with the possibilities ... There are these moments when we are whispering –

I don't know if I told you this already: we played with this during rehearsals a lot. And at a certain point ... because we got sometimes lost in the kind of ... we lost kind of the relationship to each other – we had this idea it could be that we would fit these whispering moments in and really have a chance to exchange, like how it's going. And we really did this, like "How do you feel?" "I feel it's a bit tense," or "We should speed up a bit or slow down." ... And then we really exchanged what's going on. And it helped a lot.

And we also established at a certain point that we are allowed to make certain changes; so that this possibility is there and we always have to be alert that we might have ... the other might propose something else.

HB: Yes – something you have already practiced though, something already known?

CC: Yes, in this spectrum.

HB: Wonderful – so it had an organic life.

CC: Yes.

Subtitles – Performance to camera

A film by Lucy Cash, Christina Ciupke, Nik Haffner (March 2006)

Notes from a viewing by Helena Blaker, 24 June 2010

Sound rises and the iris opens onto the edge of a carpet.

Spaces:

Walls, corners – a spatial composition.

A chair.

The tools of the work and the place of it.

The camera pans slowly across the space mechanically.

sees both performers ready to act, and continues past them.

New phase –

The camera moves slowly back again.

Now we see them - or they are positioned - close-to.

A series of tracking shots set up the space we (and they) are inhabiting.

And their mechanical rhythm (the mechanical rhythm of these shots) is also quite strange – not entirely neutral, but in fact doing its own thing. But it is phased to coincide with some of their movements, the dancers' movements, which have their own rhythm ...

Sometimes they catch up with it (this roving camera)

One touches ground, one touches the carpet.

He lifts the edge of his shirt.
Something is being negotiated,
something is being understood.
You can see that people's bodies have been formed by dancing.

She carries so much narrative drama in her -- in her expressive posture, her face.

He speaks.

She touches her neck, but her hands go down slowly.

One of our writers speaks from the audience.

She moves her hands again in the same gesture ...
but more slowly this time.

Again,
in German, again in English, "again".
Our writer is translating.

"Can you touch your throat.

"Can you slowly drop your arms."

"Stop," he says.

She speaks.

"Can we start from the beginning."

Her voice is -- this is a German film ...

ii.

How language guides movement.

But she is able to do these things to perform (in response to) these instructions

with a dancer's control
and a dancer's posture of readiness.

HB: I also wanted to ask you about trained movement. Because it seemed very clear to me that both you and Nik were moving like dancers. Especially you -- or you [both] in different ways than each other, actually. And it also seemed to me that Nik's movement was very much that of a German man.

CC: [Laughs] Interesting. ... Well, Nick is really trained as a classical dancer. ... He danced a long time for Forsythe ... and then he developed his own way of movement. ... And I was a gymnast when I was a child, and I took a course in ballet as part of this education. And later on, suddenly this ballet -- or this dance -- part of my gymnast training became very interesting to me -- like what is this really about; can I take this somewhere else. And then I flowed very freely toward the forms that that can take, or what ... ways to move people develop for their bodies in Modern and Post Modern dance.

But Nik and I had a very different dance background, in terms of training. And this was very interesting for us. But I think we are both so strongly trained that whatever we do is ... rooted in that. When we did *Subtitles*, we did small pieces conceived from our perspective as dancers. But we would kind of choose what we would think about. And there was an issue ... of how language ... can be connected. It was very interesting to us. We had both never used it, and we had been very interested in it, both. And so this collaboration is very interesting and challenging -- to explore an unknown field.

HB: Do you mean because language triggers movement?

CC: Language ... Not exactly. Language triggers movement ... and vice versa. I think it goes in both directions. ... But what I think is interesting is that, of course, speaking about trained movement, it's all educated through language, or mostly. What was interesting to us was the issue of instruction,

But also it passes them.

And as the music begins, we see them -- it is very sexy -- begin something that is more personal ... He lifts his shirt and simply touches his skin.

The music, which is lovely, is an instrumental version of ... a soul song.

Finally, Phase 3: we see her isolated, alone, against the glaring white wall as background, and the simple grey floor and skirting trim, hold her hands to her neck and slowly, very slowly, let them down.

"Nochmal," we hear. "Again" in subtitle.

She stops instantly he says "Stop."

"Can you touch your neck," is said by him, in German, off-screen, though we see this in subtitles.

Her movements are perfect.

But the emotion that is contained in them, and in her posture --

Somehow it reminds me of Fassbinder.

She says, "Can we start again?"

She is very small once she has moved to the back of the room. ...

"Can you turn your head? ... Turn to the right ..."

The subtlest, a subtle waver on the end of his last word.

Her -- something about her ... her workmanlike hair in a bun and her ready posture.

"Can you turn towards me."

She agrees to do it (a blowing sequence.)
Then he says, "You could ..."

These are generative descriptions of position, posture and movement. All of this then, is dancers' interest in the body, is control of movement. We are seeing modes of agreement, but also a structure for creating this reversal of (who is behind the) instruction.

She does a different set of movements – or rather gestures – than he has instructed (is instructing).
It is all a system, an elaboration of or through language.
Her gestures are now autonomous, done in an autonomous sequence.
But it is a sign language.

iii.

"In the dark you walk into the wall."
He looks at her – the translator.

Then the descriptions follow after.

But ... is he following? No –

"You are repeating yourself," the translator says, as he walks back and forth across the wall at the back of their space, (which is) the side of the room. It is all held in a beautiful ... narrative sensation with the music playing so quietly in the background, an instrumental jazz sound.

– but it is all 'held'.

and how do you – or how do people – propose an instruction to make the other do what you want to see.

HB: To see ...

CC: And of course you can limit it to dance [or to movement, to a discipline] but in general in daily life it is about how do you get what you want. And this is a constant negotiation, which has a lot to do with the construction of ... these instructions on different levels. And this is so much about language: wishing the other person would do this and that, or telling the other person, like in between lines, what would be great, or what you expect also. ... And then also how much you listen, how much you want to understand, how much you want to give in or ... provoke. And we really tried to stay on this level of negotiation – there's no resistance or no saying, "no, I don't want to do this," [because] then it's kind of – the game is over!

HB: **Right, but you could tell that there was**

choice: choices were being made. But maybe it was also ... there was time for reflection, to reflect on the movement and on the instruction. A conceptual space was suggested as well.

CC: Hmm. But we also – at the beginning we had such a vast field of choices: how to get in to this – should it really be more about instruction in language or should it be more the emotional impact – things like that. We did a long ... we took really a long time to explore that, to really open up [these possibilities].

HB: **The fact that you and Nik have different training ... immediately brings up the concept of translation.** A primary thing it seemed to me in this event was the word 'translation' or the idea of translation. Of course it's very interesting that the work's called *Subtitles*. ...

Now she does look like gymnast. ...

When she faces forward, in response, it is quite sexual, because presence is very much so. Even when we see them both. And she looks at him.

His blowing is surprising ... But he cannot blow her over – But she does 'feel' him. Certainly her eyelids blink as she feels the breath on them.

Her voice! "Can you blow on me." He has asked her to say this. Her voice is deeper than his, Which is sharp, distinct, German. When she speaks, it is slower, and more composed.

It is very sensual, although they are working.

He has set up a sequence where she will fall back at the breath. And she does it again. And she 'controls' it now, spontaneously ... "Again."

"Again, from the beginning," he says. She smiles. She begins to say it. "Stop," he says. "Can you blow on me." He blows, and faces the other direction. She moves to receive this. Or to do it (afterwards, as he moves again.)

How did they set this up ... this form of agreement? It is more touching when seen on film.

Then an incredible position is held by her as a dancer: elbows (or forearms) flat on the floor, back raised by the tips of her toes on the floor.

She looks at the translator.

She does it first. Then he describes it and so does she.

"You put your ear to the wall ..."

An amazing posture, to show – taken to be –

... listening to something."

She holds her arms outward...

She looks to both.

He (finally) comes up with

"You are measuring something."

But why am I recording all of this?

"Your elbows are bent. Your hands stay flat on the floor."

Dance.

This is working with the body.

iv.

This is and these are literal instruction/s:

"You could get up and lie down again."

This is very interesting.

There is something literal about this, but it is much more complex. There is a framework in the background; another agenda; a spatial concept.

CC: But in fact this aspect of translation was very present for us, [it was] something we [were using]. Because language is a kind of translation, either into movement or into a new understanding of— into a space and time ... thinking into time.

We did a lot of research at the beginning about 'subtleties', and then this part suddenly vanished – things got so busy with exploring these instructions. And then much later, then it came back. And at a certain point we also wanted to involve a third person, to open this up, and to have another aspect of uncertainty; and that person can intervene whenever ... And then ... well, we are Germans – so [it's] not going very far in terms of understanding other cultures ... [if you don't translate it.]

HB: I'm thinking about the position an audience is in. There's no requirement on the audience to do anything, is there? It's just pure pleasure. ...

CC: I think the audience is usually— or what I want from the audience, or why I am in general doing this, is just to communicate ... to meet an audience.

HB: How do you feel that, actually?

CC: I think it's a very strong kind of ... I think [physical mood] which I can feel when it goes away, when they lose interest slightly, I get in this moment, and I can feel very strongly. ...

But this is of course something you develop over a period. And I did a lot of solo work, [with] very different audiences. ... And [with] certain audiences ... this is so strange, because it ... sometimes it's not possible to build this up, this kind of conversation between bodies. ... But you can really feel when people in the audience are not choosing. They don't want to engage in perceiving ...

HB: Why might that be? Why might they refuse?

CC: I think because they ... it doesn't speak to them. They can't really – or it's something they don't like

When they move to whisper,

it is as if it is in answer to her question, "Did you feel this?"

It is ... composed of breathing – breath – as a form of influence on each other (as a medium.)

She walks away and adopts a posture they have started with – simply kneeling, with head horizontal, hands on floor.

The camera pans across the studio to two waiting chairs. She

is sitting on one of them.

"Would you like some water?"

A narrative drama is immediately in process ... But this is a real question (designed) to help him.

"You could cross your leg ..."

We see their torsos, legs and pelvises. They lean across and whisper.

(This has been set up, but it is also as if the camera simply records what it sees according to their autonomous movement within the space, as they have designed it, to get their work done. ...)

She does not always do what he says. ...

Her hair is done up in a bun as if a dancer – she is a dancer.

There is a provisionality and yet a designation.

There is a space and a time that will be occupied.

A space is already delineated but the act is absent.

The instruction is provocative and yet open. It predicts time and future, and it lays the groundwork for a pattern. It does not, however, address the emotion, the psychology of that action.

There is a framework within which ... a sense of space is connoted.

This is anchored by the human negotiation, the suggestion of presence ... of acquiescence ... on consideration. And yet these are trained dancers ... this is trained movement. They are speaking the same language (which is not necessarily our language, or my language.)

There is an agenda to this proposition – a desire to see.

A dancer knows that "You can sit on me" means can you sit entirely on me [as body].

There are some private moments. But the whole thing is ... systematic. Words change their meaning depending on situations.

... "You could take a few steps." He can do it as he wants.

from the first moment on. Let's say, you know – and it really happens for me too – I go to the theatre and I don't like this dancer's [feet], the whole way of moving, of being, I don't like it. And then at the end I can see it's a good piece but I couldn't enjoy it.

HB: Yes, so maybe you don't recognise it, or ...

CC: And sometimes I feel very manipulated as a spectator. But then I talk to somebody else after the performance and they did not. So that has something I suppose to do with [a] way of being and experiencing. ...

HB: Do you find there's any difference between the kinds of audiences depending on the spaces you're in ... I mean, when you've done your solo work does it matter [where it's done ... or whether it's done to dancers?] Were you mostly in 'dance spaces'?

CC: Yes. But at the beginning not too much – it was possible outdoors sometimes ... [and in] visual art contexts. But at a certain point I decided ... [that in order] to find out about a certain thing I had to focus, and I will go into the black box and really find out about that, for a certain kind of production [aspect] ... And now ... but it's too bad the fields are so divided. It's not too easy to do something on language in other spaces – art places. Dance is not so suspicious [about having the right audience.] ...

I think it's very interesting to have [this performance in] the afternoon, in daylight [when] people are at a [different, an acute] point in their day. And so these kind of ... smaller aspects can change a lot, which is very interesting.

HB: Do you know what is happening in the afternoon to everybody, rather than in the evening?

CC: They are much more – they have another energy ... still more. It is the active part of the day.

HB: They're still trying to produce things.

He looks at her and away, off screen.

The camera pans to her face, still neutrally looking forward.

How is this orchestrated between performers and camera?

The camera is behind them.

She gets up from her chair and walks to the other side of the room.

It is different without a third person, a 'witness', a translator.

She holds the most amazing posture, with hands, elbows held on the ground, hands bunched and slightly raised, and lifts her legs and back up off the ground by the tips of her toes only.

She touches the wall closely with one hand stretched up high, extended above her head.

She returns to the wall crouching like that only, without the arm raised, close to the wall. *It is so abstract.*

"You could walk to the middle of the room and lie on the floor."

A set of instructions continues.

The camera cuts as she walks almost out of frame (walking forward), to see her from further away and lower down.

Then she lies down. (This is at centre of frame.)

Her back to us, now she is sitting crouched and contained. He walks to the far side of the carpet (the performing space) and says ...

She comes over and sits entirely upon his back ...

"Can you touch your thighs," she asks of him.

"Left ... Nach links ...

"Nach rechts."

The language is lovely. ...

He says, "Can you imagine what I am going to do next."

v.

She gives him a long set of instructions in sequence.

We know now he can do it as he wishes.

She begins to talk again and he goes to the wall beside her to do it.

But he makes her face him.

This is a German thing.

He interrupts her.

She has – has she – memorized this

or is she inventing it?

It is about memory (the memory of instruction).

Is this abstract/ conceptual dance?

She is on overdrive repeating a movement sequence.

Is she remembering this? ...

She stops and speaks to him, asks him to do something. He blows (at her) again.

What people can do for each other ...

She makes autonomous movements ... And utters (the word):

"Stop."

CC: Yes. It's a bit harder I think just to let go and concentrate ...

HB: So Lucy really [...] thinks of herself as a filmmaker, at the moment – and a writer, I know – rather than a performer.

CC: [Yes.] that's my point of view. ... I think she likes performing [but] ...

But she is very specific about [this] ... because in Germany I sometimes call her a 'film-maker' and then she always says "no, I'm not, I don't really – I'm not so [confident with the] definition, I see myself [more] as an interdisciplinary artist." But in Germany, when I use this [term], which I try to do in respect of her, I use the English term exactly like that, because we don't have that in German. I translate that and it's just totally ridiculous, everybody's like "Oh what is this? Can't you say what you are?" This is very German, I would say. Our language is ... very structured.

HB: Do you mean you can't translate the term 'interdisciplinary artist'?

CC: Right. We have this word 'interdisciplinaire', but also it got a bit abused over time. It feels a bit like, whenever you make yourself interesting [you put this...] this term 'interdisciplinaire' ...

HB: It doesn't have any weight to it.

CC: Well it has weight, but you really have to point that out in a specific way. And just to say it like that, then people would immediately ask, "So what does that mean?"

HB: In what way though – in materials? ... or in what your relationship is ...

CC: Yes – or what disciplines you are addressing.

HB: Great. Thank you.

"Can you touch your chest? ... your kidneys?"
All of this is said and done with a dancer's understanding of the body.

He lies on the carpet.
She comes over to whisper to him.

... "Can you imagine what I'm going to do next?" he says.

In contrast to the stage performance, here this comes as he walks across the carpet.

"You put your hands in your pockets. You make a fist with your left hand ..." she says.
Here this is all translated – about hands and pockets and shoulders and elbows – where it wasn't in the live performance or the live translation.

Lucy watches the small parts of their bodies – her body and his – as she (Christina) narrates these instructions.

"Can you blow on me again?"

*This is a romance ...
done by dancers
With full irony, with bleakness,
with systematic procedure;
with insight, with humanity
with little explained;
with its own internal rhythm
with observation by a camera –
someone whose eye is also looking, though it
seems mechanical –
someone – their [someone's] eyes*

"Stop!" ... as the camera passes over the white-lit, muted windows, the metal frames.

Something has been completed. ...



She talks about slowness,
while speaking very fast.



The blond in the foreground with the red cheeks
carries a playful thrill in her face.

THROWING SOME WEIGHT AROUND

CORNELIA PARKER, ROSEMARY BUTCHER,
MIRANDA PENNELL

Lizzy Le Quesne



the outer reaches of ourselves..
butting up, against the
edges of others...

This text is a response to three pieces of work that shared a single wall. It is a response to the works, and to the curatorial choices that put them together. To the architecture of the exhibition. To the ways these pieces speak to each other, and the way they speak to us.

Before I begin this text, I stand holding a large solid block of wood placed inside the toe of a long black stocking. I revolve several times, gradually increasing my speed. The combined effects of centrifugal and centripetal forces cause the block to rise to shoulder height and swing out in a wide ring around my body. I slow down and thus gradually lower the block, eventually coming to a stop and placing it upright on the floor.

Before I begin this text, I write these words so they are projected onto the wall:

Thank god, we have an art which is turning back to politics.

Cornelia Parker's view of Noam Chomsky speaking his mind in *Chomskian Abstract* (2007); Rosemary Butcher's filmed dance piece *D2* (1990); and Miranda Pennell's extraordinarily tender screen puzzle, *You Made Me Love You* (2005) play on monitors, side by side, on a wall on the mezzanine level at the heart of *What if...* This unique assembly of things reveals aspects of our culture, and the ways that we relate to one another – in an essential state of relationship – and of the delights, responsibilities and complexities that come with that. Human subjects, depicted on screen as they exist in our world – as physical mass, have different qualities of weight and weightedness, which they manage, contain or project in various ways, within intricate social and cultural structures, power relations, and shared space.

The placing of these works is prominent, in the main public space, on the first floor of the building, where no visitor to the show would miss them. Yet it is relaxed. It makes me think of Dan Graham's people-friendly, democratic, video installations. He displayed his own videos alongside cartoons to keep the kids happy while their parents watched, and alongside other works he thought important, in specially designed spaces where viewers of the work could also relax, could lie down, and settle into cushioned corners, look through glass walls and observe others watching or resting, could observe what other people were interested in. And also here, you can find a comfy corner to put your feet up. The headphone wires are good and long so you can choose your spot on the padded bench. You can listen, in beautiful clarity on comfy headphones, to the soundtrack of the films, or not. You can listen to the soundtrack of one and look at the image of another. And you look and listen alongside others, in a light space, properly aware of them. Different people behave differently. Some stand, some sit, some close their eyes. We are ourselves a version of society, being together, with these three thoughtful reflections on togetherness.

There is a vital, triangular symmetry to the arrangement of these three works, both in form and in content. Two colour films sit either side of a black and white. While all three films have a balanced frontality, the central film has a deeper perspective, greater sense of height, width, space and motion, leaving the works on the two ends holding a dramatic tension between them. Both these screens are focused, close to, on faces, and hold that focus and that proximity throughout. The relationship between the face and the screen however, and the feeling of the pieces is very different.

In both works the camera is fixed, in a taut, unbroken relationship with the face it is showing, eyes looking directly into the camera. Parker's camera and subject are both astonishingly still – at times dropping almost imperceptibly into actual frozen images before continuing, while both Pennell's camera and subjects, without breaking their direct, head-on connection, are more nervous and chaotic, both continually shifting, unpredictably, back and forth on a horizontal plane. The relationship in this film between camera and subjects is puzzling. The rules are unclear. Who has control, in this world of looking and shifting and searching? Pennell's subjects are unusually and strikingly uncontained by the frame. Indeed the soundtrack of her film, unlike the others which are trapped within headphones, is also uncontained. It plays directly from the monitor's speaker and bleeds out throughout the open spaces of the building. The title of Pennell's piece is also a puzzle – "You made me love you" seems to speak of seduction - which might be beautifully innocent, talking of the wide-eyed young people it reveals, of being with them. Or it might be not innocent, speaking to some wider culture that has unwittingly seduced us all.

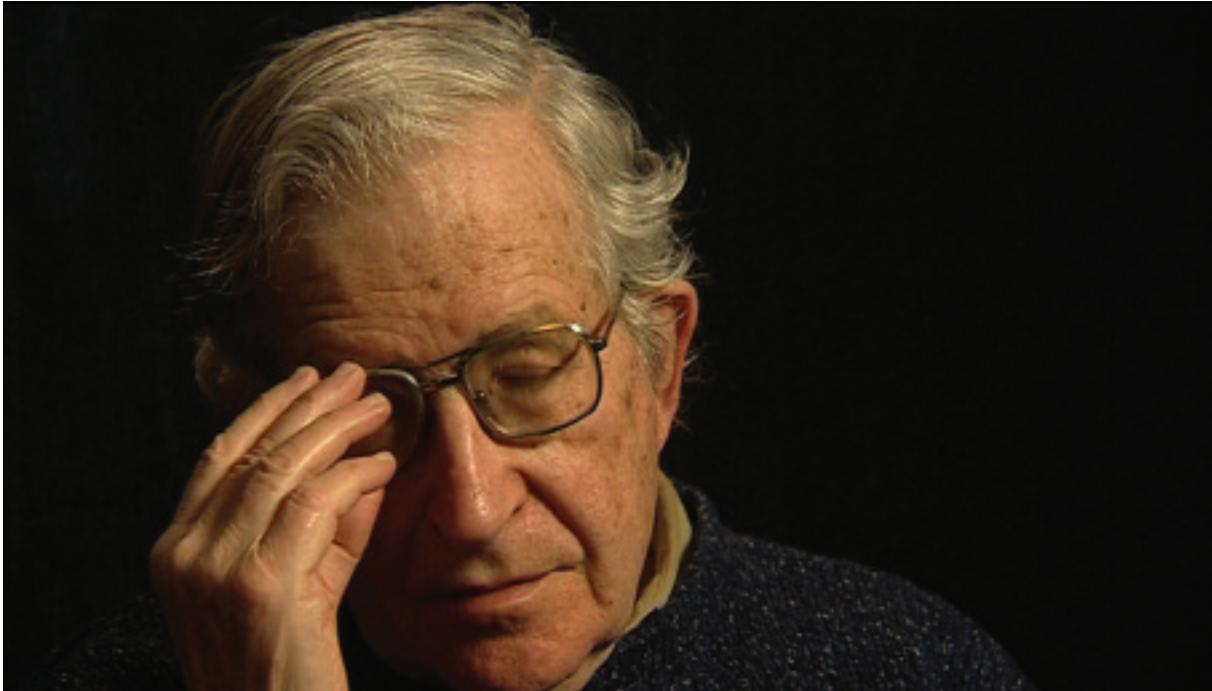
In contrast, Chomsky's body is ultimately contained, and barely moving in the frame, subjugated to his marvellously developed mind. It is his words which travel out beyond him and the tiny shifts in expression captured in the stills. While he is quietly fatherly and authoritative, the people in Pennell's film are young, flowing around in a different sort of world, in a different relationship with their bodies and the space. In the Parker, Chomsky is a weighted figure, centred, confident of his own position – albeit at real odds with the workings of the world as he describes them. His body contains him. It serves its purpose as a channel, delivering his ideas to the world.

The young people in Pennell's film are centred in the way that dancers are – upright, aligned around a mid-line that is shifting in space, but they are not, somehow, in possession of their bodies as free individuals. They are *unweighted* in a way – drifting, as a group. Their centre is somewhere outside of themselves, amongst and between them. Or rather it is held by the camera. They seem to pursue the camera, addicted to it. They appear to be looking in a mirror, pursuing their own image. Perhaps they could see themselves in the lens? Whatever the conceit, they are focused somehow outside of themselves. They move as a group, and are fixated on the means of image.

They, like us, are vulnerable to the external power of the image. And this resonates directly with what Chomsky is talking about in Parker's film: how people are herded, and controlled, how they go with the flow and behave one way in a group, but completely differently when left to themselves. He hints at the big personal changes – sacrifices - he has had to make in his own life, in order to step outside the given systems that control us.



Still from Miranda Pennell, *You Made Me Love You*



Still from Cornelia Parker, Chomskian Abstract

Rather than chasing the camera, Chomsky allows the camera. And Parker patiently waits, and entices him to speak his measured mind. This confident, understated figure, not courting an audience but rather sought out by the camera's eager, seeing eye, is incredibly poignant set against Pennell's group of young people. They are following the lens, working together, in a world of hopes and togetherness, but of chilling vulnerability and unresolved unknowing, and in the sinister presence of seduction.

In a quiet, unhurried tone, Chomsky carefully outlines his theory of how the advertising industry consciously creates "uninformed consumers, making irrational choices". He carefully describes how the state of consumerism we find ourselves existing in the grip of, is not a natural way of life but an imposed one. He illustrates his argument with a number of under-reported, real life atrocities - from the early targeting of religious and literary treasures in the bombings of Iraq to bullying work ethics imposed by corporations - perpetrated, in times of both war and peace, by our own cultures.

I write these words so they are shown on the wall:

Dancers fundamentally understand the concept of inter-subjectivity: that while we exist at the centre of our own world, we are also entities in the space and lives of others, and both affect, and are affected by, our surroundings.

Inter-subjectivity is – should be – at the heart of politics.

Between these two films sits a screen version of Butcher's *D2* (1990), which sites a cluster of prosaically swooping and arcing dancers inside a monumentally silent, solid, symmetrical and erect stone church. It is, in the most obvious ways, the only recognisable "dance" in the exhibition, and it is placed, not only centrally in the trio of works on this wall, but on the middle one of three floors, on the main bridging space between the glass walled front and back faces of the building, and between two further exhibition areas either side. It is right in the flowing centre of the building. This position does more than echo *D2* itself in the sense of flow and interchange of movement contained by a physical space. For Rosemary Butcher's work – so radical and pared down in its time - to be placed so pivotally, and to be viewable as the only bit of "real dancing" on show in this festival, demonstrates two things: 1) how far we have come in this medium, and 2) how adventurously this event has been curated. We stand at the present time within the dance art with a new sense of what it is, how it functions, where it functions, and who does it. *What if...* allows us to turn around from where we are now and look back at that work, radically re-contextualised at the centre of an aesthetic approach, rather than on the margins of one.

Butcher's piece begins with a quotation from a signature essay of US philosopher and art critic Harold

Rosenberg: "The city is a herd of individual minds". On one side Chomsky, having chosen a path of incandescent individual thinking – in collaboration with numerous others that he often references – is flying in the face of social imperatives and scrutinising the structures of image making and seduction that limit our individuality. On the other side of Butcher's film, a tear-inducingly tender and co-operative group of young people are tossed on an invisible sea, spellbound, driven by something mysteriously to do with their own image, in search of themselves. In the centre is a reference to Rosenberg, a thinker who placed the arts (indeed, in his theorising and championing of Action Painting, intuitive aesthetic expression of the *body*) at the centre of the search for human meaning, individuality and freedom.

Butcher's piece begins, with its quote, by announcing individuals as mashed together in the city, and shows them dancing around one another and together, finding ways to function as a group. In Butcher's piece the dancers function as individuals, working together. Each of them is not only weighted and centred in their body in a beautifully mature and buoyant way; but they are playing with that weight – deliberately launching it into space. The camera shows us their feet, stepping beneath themselves, catching their own weight and propelling it forward. It shows us their upper bodies bending, reaching way out into space in joy and risk. We see the private space of each individual, merging and co-operating with that of others. Each reaching out and turning in their limits, defining the extent of their own kinesphere, they cross the space in different ways, agreeing on when to go and when to stop. They stay evenly spaced from each other, at arms' breadth, giving each other room. It shows them, men and women, as equal, as different, and collaborating. In a beautiful efficacy of dance, Butcher makes weight and energy speak to us of human life and relationships. And a lone bird, flying silently across the screen in one of the exterior shots of the building, is enough to place us in relation to a larger, more complex realm of life forces, consciousness and motion.

I write these words:

Encapsulated within our physicality, lies a wealth of the world beyond - a web of politics and desire, of allegiances, of strategy, of tensions, and breaks, of power struggle, of loyalties and disap-

pointments, of dependence, of abuse, of risk, of bitter recollection, of possibility, of growth.

Institutions are fundamentally different from collaborations. In collaborations – individuals, as subjects, recognise the subjectivity of the other, and come together and contribute to something that is bigger than themselves, but they do not lose their own weight. They are present, as part of something. The power base is shared. *What if...* is a collaboration. It is a collaboration between women – that includes men. It is a collaboration (by its very title) that poses questions, and debate, does not impose answers. It brings different works together, places them in relationship to one another, to the physical world, and (with the spoken curatorial discussion and writers responses) to thought. From years of moving with and around one another, from sensing and moving the weight of the physical self into space, to meet the world, and in negotiation with that of others, dancers understand collaboration better than many.

I write these words so they remain on the wall:

It's all about weight, and centring, and centrifugal forces. The bubble that is the outer reaches of ourselves, butting up against the edges of others...



Photo: Andrew Downs



The red velvet is singing: a white dog is staring at me.



Wearing two watches on the same wrist,
she looks like a happy Charlotte Rampling.

TIME LAPSE

Sarah Wood

I am testing my memory. I'm trying to see what I remember and what I forget. I am describing films I've just watched.

1: Stand In

A girl is wrapped up well against the cold. She stands in a snowy landscape.

How do you know it's a girl?

OK. A silhouetted figure stands in a snowy landscape. The landscape keeps evolving beyond her.

Does that say it all?

A figure is black against the snowy whiteness of the landscape. There is an unusual sense of permanence in her stance. She reminds me of Antony Gormley's figures in the landscape. Because his figures are male, I know she is a woman.

I am watching this figure, watching the landscape. I am watching her and I am watching what she's watching.

Her permanence is striking. It's in complete contrast to what I expect.

Her stillness makes the landscape seem unexpectedly fragile.

It creates a shift in perspective.

At one moment a swirl of snow greys out her silhouette. Permanence is revealed to be an illusion. She momentarily disintegrates into the landscape.

There's the shock of absence.

She reappears.

There's reassurance.

She is still and the landscape changes. Light moves across it. She is our marker.

2: Strange Lights

In a clearing in a wood a campsite sits below a moving universe. The night sky rolls overhead. The cars, the tents below are a premonition. They suggest anticipation.

No people are revealed by the filming - just the evidence of habitation and the movement of artificial light. Light flashes between the tents like the shooting stars above.

People are replaced with tricks of the light. Light illuminates but only reveals mystery. The skies speed overhead oblivious.

—

I've watched the films one after another so I try to think of them discretely while also being distracted by what resonates between them. It is a reminder of how complicated it is to see anything on its own terms and points up how hard the filmmakers attempt to do just that.

Film is always about sequence and always about time. It is a medium that exists in time and a medium that suggests it can reveal the workings of time. Frame follows frame sequentially from beginning to end in real time.

In the act of recording, film seems to promise a chance to see what we can't see with the human eye: time passing. Like human memory, exposed film seems to be a repository for all that is understood and seen from an individual's perspective. Like memory, however, there are omissions.

I think of the filmmaker Margaret Tait and how hard she looked through her camera lens to capture transition, to work with light and dark to scrutinise the mystery of time. She wrote about it in her poem, 'Now':

Still from Becky Edmunds, *Stand In*



Still from Joe King and Rosie Pedlow, *Strange Lights*



I used to lie in wait to see the clover open
 Or close,
 But never saw it.
 I was too impatient,
 Or the movement is too subtle,
 Imperceptible
 And more than momentary.
 My five-year-old self would tire of waiting
 And when I looked again
 – All closed for the night!
 I missed it
 Once more.

Cinematographically
 I have registered the opening of *escholtzia*
 On an early summer morning.
 It gave me a sharp awareness of time passing,
 Of exact qualities and values in the light,
 But I didn't see the movement
 As movement.
 I didn't with my own perception see the petals moving.
 Later, on the film, they seemed to open swiftly,
 But, at the time,
 Although I stared
 And felt time not so much moving as being moved in
 And felt
 A unity of time and place with other times and places
 Yet
 I didn't see the petals moving.
 I didn't see them opening.
 They were closed,
 And later they were open,
 And in between I noted many phases,
 But I didn't see them moving open

– extract from 'Now' in *Origins and Elements*, Margaret Tait, 1959

I am thinking about time lapse photography, something that is employed in each of the films I'm describing. Time lapse is the technique where each frame of film is captured more slowly than the speed it will be played back at. When played at its normal speed, time appears to be moving faster, revealing the effect of light in time.

Time lapse reveals something of what Margaret Tait tried hard to see, 'movement as movement', the processes of transformation in the real world, too subtle for the human eye to understand. Of course it is still an approximation. As its name sug-

gests there are lapses in the recording of the movement so it is a suggestion of what happens rather than a recording of the reality. In between each stage of transformation is absence, is the lapse.

I am thinking about the effect of placing human-scale stillness against the time-lapse speeded up movement of nature, as each of the films I've described does. Because the human figure in *Stand In*, for instance, is consistent, it emboldens the body, suggests it is more than lapse. It suggests a permanence impossible in the real world.

It also suggests a power shift in the relationship between the human and the environmental. It hints at immortality, a fantasy of permanence. But the still figure is also trapped by this power reversal. The figure loses agency, is static, undynamic. This image of omnipotence makes me long for the fall, the lapse.

—

I think of Rachel Davies' *The Assembly*. Like Tait she knows about the partial. She asks questions of time: what are we left with of the past? Memory? Re-enactment? Recording? Voice? From the very start the film asks: can we see time moving? If we can, what does it mean?

One of the many complex things Davies' film does is ask how we re-assemble the past. In answer she celebrates individual memory and collective action, creating a chorus of voices and a deconstruction of group identity – gesture and spontaneity are revealed as performance, and as fragility. In contrast is the slow movement of light through an empty classroom. How much can we see when we look? What does the space mean? What does time passing mean?

The fragmented form of *The Assembly* gives space to consider what we're not being shown. If lapse is

what we imagine we have seen, then when we assemble a memory we have to trust our imagination's ability to leap these ellipses and make connections for us. By deconstructing linearity she works in memory's rhythm.

As I tried to remember and describe *Stand In* and *Strange Lights* in sequence I was defeated. Instead I remembered only partiality. Davies similarly tries to put together her memory of the past in a form that acknowledges lapse. She tests her memory of the past in the present. She acknowledges the filter of nostalgia and the vulnerability of the need for corroboration. Above all she questions pattern in repetition simply by doing away with linearity, literally folding time in one grand flourish as she re-populates the school choir she once sang in with past and present members. Two timescapes are conflated in a ritualised nod towards the experience of memory and a very human acknowledgement of the way we experience our own pasts.

Watching all three of these films in a dance context I'm conscious that their use of stillness in contrast to environmental movement is a reminder of the physical action our minds perform when we understand. The mind is a muscle and these three films train us to renew the way we experience sight and the way we make meaning.

Still from Rachel Davies, *Assembly*





The sound of banging on scaffolding pipes.

INSIDE PERFORMANCE

Rachel Lois Clapham

1) 6, 10 2) 56, 35 3) 42, 92-93 4) 42, 93 5) Insert, 11, 26 6)
Insert, 11, 26 7) 6, 31 8) Insert, 12, 21 9) 7, 33 10) 45, 69 11)
57, 3 12) 5, 15 13) 32, 69 14) 21, 12 15) 42, 78 16) 21, 14 17)
44, 44 18) 9, 20 19) 45, 69-70 20) 46, 36 21) 44, 18 22) 33, 83
23) 44, 32 24) 42, 87-88 25) 28, 3 26) 42, 50 27) 21, 18 28) 21,
19 29) 21, 32 30) 47, 83 31) 47, 85 32) 47, 86 33) 39, 67 34)
Insert, 2, 34 35) 38, 20 36) 52, 13 37) 43, 1 38) 35, 21 39) 46,
1-2 40) 46, 89 41) 46, 5-6 42) 57, 40 43) 46, 7-8 44) 46, 8 45)
46, 27 24 46) 5, 13 47) Insert, 5, 38 48) 45, 71 49) 44, 71 72 50)
44, 73 51) Insert, 6, 27-28 52) 44, 8-9 53) Insert, 7, 19 54) 43,
65 55) Insert, 10, 8 56) 43, 69 57) 44, 40 58) 17, 31 59) 44, 14
60) 46, 79-80 61) 46, 3-4 62) 34, 30 63) Insert, 5, 11 64) Insert,
11, 23 65) 54, 21-22 66) 52, 14-15 67) 57, 19 68) 50, 20-21 69)
17, 1 70) 17, 66 71) 18, 43 72) 19, 14 73) 54, 62 74) 6, 3 75)
52, 35 76) Insert, 11, 19 77) 47, 93 78) 6, 11 79) Insert, 10, 29

1) those delicious moments before 2) lapse 3) - not entirely neutral, 4) doing its own thing. 5) construed evenness 6) artificial sameness 7) What if? 8) blink 9) Chance is something we wait for. 10) ...composed of breathing – 11) a fantasy of permanence 12) taking exactly *this* much of your time. 13) well developed vestibular organs. 14) response as creative act, 15) The tools of the work and the place of it. 16) *suggestions towards* performance. 17) in between lines, 18) [. . .] 19) breath – as a form of influence 20) like this 21) a sign language. 22) mute demonstration 23) 'held'. 24) – close-to. 25) Incomplete instructions 26) sometimes lost in the kind of... 27) page as space 28) evoke *possibility* for 29) a blank 30) with systematic procedure; 31) with little explained; 32) with its own internal rhythm 33) in the service of 34) to the side' 35) 'gestures of 36) butting up against 37) formed by 38) dance 39) There is a provisionality and yet a designation. 40) abstract. 41) A space is already delineated but the act is absent. 42) , literally 43) The instruction is provocative yet open. 44) It predicts 45) There is an agenda to this proposition - a desire to see. 46) the page you feel in your hands. 47) the act of composition 48) (as a medium.) 49) It is quite sexual, 50) because presence is very much so. 51) un-virtuosic 52) modes of agreement, but also a structure. 53) inventing / not inventing 54) an unknown field 55) On the other hand, 56) ...and vice versa 57) constant negotiation 58) meet a work, 59) It is all a system, 60) different without a third person, a 'witness', a translator. 61) There is a space and a time that will be occupied 62) gesture writ *large* 63) leave room 64) still-act 65) unexpectedly fragile. 66) of the body) 67) revealed as performance, 68) continually shifting, unpredictably, back and forth 69) The eye to the hand 70) The hand to the mouth 71) The hand to the screen 72) The screen to the body 73) there are omissions. 74) a brief pause, 75) at arms' breadth, 76) punctuated by 77) Something has been completed.... 78) it still could be anything: 79) to start again...