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Coming to our senses: Perceptual performance and fields of intensities

ABSTRACT

This article examines new methods and practices for the performance of interrelational spaces and perceptions in choreography and sound technologies. The series of works discussed, strategically solicit somatic-informed choreography to question attentiveness to space, time and body in intermodal arrangements. The critical spatial practice examines the potential for ubiquitous technologies to disrupt perceptions of time and place in live performance situations towards new methods of performance encounter.

KEYWORDS

somatics
sonic
digital
choreography
perceptual
performance

The texts below are excerpts from *A Live Recording* (2010), one of a series of participatory sonic choreographies, first presented at the St Paul St Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand in August 2009. This article discusses the concerns, processes and theoretical relationships that have arisen out of these choreographies in the pursuit of a critical investigation of performance practices in relationship with creative technologies. The choreographic 'tests' form a *critical spatial practice* and seek to solicit *somatic-informed choreography* in a discourse with sonic arrangements. The 'rhetoric of testing' is adapted from Avitel Ronnel as a process that prepares for new thinking towards the unknown, or as she refers to Husserl's terms, an 'open infinitude'. The term *critical spatial practice* is

<p>Listen carefully. Come with me. Follow me through the space.</p> <p>Tilting the head back to see the ceiling. Our eyes flicker ... and your breath shortens. The light is dim.</p> <p>Bring the head back to eye level, The nose traces a vertical line in front of the body.</p> <p>We turn 90 degrees to the right. Pause and look in front of us. Feel the feet connected to the floor, smell the years in the well waxed, worn wood.</p> <p>Cast the eyes upwards tilting the head again, craning the neck a little. High above is an ornate ceiling with massive candelabras casting light that smudges the details.</p> <p>Relax the neck and the gaze drops back to eye level and we take two steps forwards.</p> <p>A row of seats in a curve is in front of us, so we hesitate and glance over our left shoulder. What's to the left? A wall?</p> <p>We go from the left, our nose tracing an arc up and over towards the right and down over the right shoulder to land on the thick soft carpet.</p> <p>We blink our eyes really fast.</p>	<p>Listen carefully. Come with me. Follow me through the space.</p> <p>Tilting the head back the ceiling slides above us ... the light goes on and off, as the breath shortens and then the lights are dimmed.</p> <p>The wall moves up and a vertical line slides with it.</p> <p>The room shifts to the left. The wall is in front of us. The floor supports the feet and the musty smell of old carpet mixed with old worn waxed wood infiltrates the nostrils.</p> <p>The ceiling slides down again as the neck creases, the ceiling is ornate and there is a candelabra that blurs out of focus.</p> <p>Relaxing the neck makes the ceiling slide back up and by swinging the legs forwards.</p> <p>A row of curved seats moves towards us. If we turn the head to the left the wall swings to the right.</p> <p>Drawing an arc with the nose makes the ceiling swing down in a big sweeping curve – looking towards the ground brings the red carpet up towards our face.</p> <p>The scene before us flickers like a strobing film.</p>
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Text 1: Excerpt from A Live Recording 2010.

appropriated from Jane Rendall, who suggests a transformative process where thinking is a 'form of practice and practice is (as) a thoughtful process' (2001: 157). This *critical spatial practice* takes form in a nomadic style through inhabiting, collecting, capturing and representing the body in space and place. The significance of place and spatial and social codes is consistent in the work and implies a subversion of performance conventions and links with new media spaces. The research that delineates this body of work seeks to examine how ubiquitous sound technologies disrupt perceptions of time and place in live

performance situations and as such develop new methods of performance encounter.

The terms *somatic-informed choreography* and *perceptual performance* act as a fabric for rethinking performance arts practices as they merge with digital arts to encounter new ways of 'becoming' (or sensing). The term *perceptual performance* is adopted from dance academic Freya Vass-Rhee's discussion of William Forsythe's research into the 'performative potentials of perception' (Vass-Rhee 2010: 390). She interprets Forsythe's experiments in intermodal performance as a means to direct attention to attention itself, 'through shifting attention across the senses and as a result heightening the focus of the audience' (Vass-Rhee 2010: 390). *Perceptual performance* infers a deterritorializing of the experience and roles of both the performer and the spectator. Choreography and somatic practices in the last half century have evolved strategies to negotiate dynamic relationships between the territories of the inner body and the surfaces and spaces outside the body. Some of these strategies are adapted to create intermodal arrangements in a series of works that develop a language and processes for perception in this field. The works are a vehicle for the research process discussed in this article. It is widely acknowledged that technologically mediated encounters impact on our temporal, spatial and embodied experience. *Somatic-informed choreographic practices* also impact on our embodied experience. Although less commonly understood, somatic practices offer methods for consciously re-organizing the body in time and space, suggesting multiple flows of intensity and direction. This practice examines the potential of *perceptual performance tests* to promote somatic principles through the performance of space. Looking closely at these performance tests through *critical spatial practice*, theories and codes of space and place, the body, theatre and digital media intersect to imagine new possibilities in inter-modal performance arts.

This article poses the following questions, framed by *critical spatial practice* that investigates *somatic-informed choreographic practices* with sound art technologies. How can we come to our senses in mediated technological systems? How can audio technologies affect somatic exploration through performance and choreographic practices? What are the possibilities if we re-organize the hierarchies of sound, touch, smell and the kinaesthetic senses in order to afford new possibilities in the intertwining of the digital world and perceptual performance? In what ways could perceptual choreographic study help to rethink (*inter*)action in response to digital encounter? How might this reinvent our sense of corporeality in the intermodal?

Rethinking corporeality in the context of *somatic-informed* (and *perceptual*) choreographic practices proposes that discourses in this field afford a porosity whereby the 'imaginary' blurs the split between the self and society, or between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of the subject' (Braidotti 2002: 144). This article focuses on choreographies created for the ears, experienced through headphones the choreographic 'tests' consider the potential in sonic modalities to reorganize sensate encounters. Perceptual performance arrangements negotiate relationships between the choreographed body and the sonic digital interface that mobilize, multiply and divide time space and the body.

Most of us accept the convenience of ubiquitous digital devices as part of our everyday encounters in some way or other, through mobile phones, the Internet, GPS devices, etc., which split, divide, transform, transpose and mediate our senses and space. As new technologies develop – these ubiquitous technologies become more advanced, more a part of the everyday, more integrated

1. Sarah Rubidge's installation practice, which includes her work *Sensuous Geographies* (co-created by Rubidge and McDonald in 2003) attempts to examine 'thresholds of perception' (Rubidge 2006: 116) in 'multi-user interactive installations' (Rubidge 2006: 118). Rubidge brings somatic principles into play, drawing from Deleuze and Guatarri's theories of perception, she quotes Brian Massumi in her chapter '*Sensuous Geographies and other installations*' on affect as an 'indiscernable' 'state of suspense'. She suggests that Massumi's 'passing into', as a quality she aspires to in her work, 'of becoming intimately attuned to the intensities of the experienced phenomenon' (Rubidge 2006: 122).
2. From the perspective of my practice I am curious about the perceived resistance to the mediated in many somatically focused processes. For example, in my training as a Shin Somatics practitioner, references to nature in image-based explorations privilege the natural over man-made or machinic despite the fact that most of us live highly urbanized lifestyles impregnated with technology.

with the body and more feasible for use as interfaces in the arts. Increasingly we are mediated bodies and increasingly there is a question around how this is affecting our body politic.¹ The sonic choreographies bring somatic processes to the mediated performance space, facilitating a discourse between the algorithmic structures of technologies and the heuristic labyrinth of somatic principles. In the field of choreographic practices, artists whose work seeks to negotiate the irreconcilable chasm between the corporeal and digital, while highly specialized, typically branch out into interdisciplinary fields.² Adapting somatic-informed choreography to audio technologies attempts to incorporate an interdisciplinary language between the practices. *A Live Recording* (2010) proposes sonic choreography has the potential to recalibrate tensions between space, the body and the digital. The practice considers how re-thinking the sensate body into the digital forges possibilities for negotiation between the fields of *somatic-informed choreography* and creative technologies.

MAKING SENSE

The background research to this work began in 2009 with a series of screen-based performance studies that attempted to rethink the emphasis that is given to the screen in digital media and to prioritize the sensate body (see Figure 1). This process began with body-cam video recordings and performance tests in liminal spaces such as corridors and foyers, which were re-performed as live durational screen-based performance installations. These early recordings established a trajectory for further mediated spatial investigations using *somatic-informed choreographic practices*. This particular series of tests raised the question, 'What if the *spectators* sensate experience is prioritized?'

The text in the left column presented at the beginning of this article is one of the original transcriptions made from the 'body-cam' video footage.



Figure 1: Making Sense of No Body, 'Glitch' performance event, St Paul St Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand November 2009. Photo credit: Becca Wood.

The recordings were made in surviving theatres around Auckland as part of the series of works that are discussed through this article. These text-based cartographies were then re-performed vocally, 'captured' through a digital recording process and eventually presented through headphones, as a series of performance installations. The shift in these works towards emphasizing the voice and the sonic has evolved in response to a personal drive to give priority to the sensate within the digital encounter and disorganize conventions of the theatrical event, democratizing space and the body. Rosi Braidotti supports this argument, also bringing a priority to the flesh in her inquisition, 'how to make the new technologies enhance the embodied subject' (2002: 257).

The right hand column of text at the beginning of this article adapts the transcriptions, reorganizing the body from the perspective of the screen, suggesting there are multiple tactics for transcribing space, screen and the body. *A Live Recording* (2010) (see Figures 2 and 3) was first presented in 2010 at the St Paul St Gallery, in Auckland and in this iteration the role of the performer and the participant is reorganized. Drawing the public *into* the work as participant, the relationship between the spectator and the audience is re-thought. Referencing the earlier works from 2009, *A Live Recording* (2010), continues to present places through intermodal encounters, privileging sound as the interface. The body cam recordings were made through

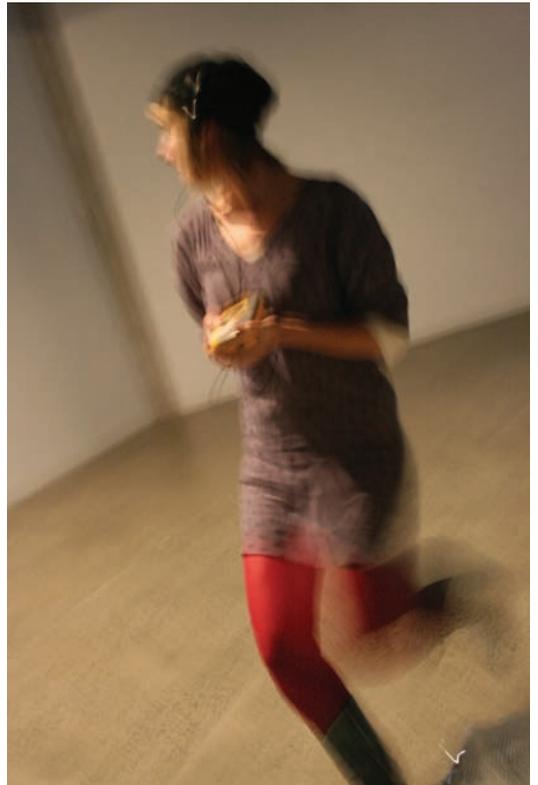


Figure 2 and 3: *A Live Recording*, 'LIVE. REPEAT. PLAYBACK', St Paul St Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand 2010. Photo credit: Becca Wood.

3. In using the term response(able) I re-imagine 'responsible' in relation to somatic principles as the ability to be attentive to the world, to self, to the community and to the environment through listening and responding to the sensate.

site-based somatic improvisations, drawing on the architectural features of the theatre buildings. Private solos were performed and recorded alone in spaces that were originally designed to inhabit large paying, public audiences. Re-situating performance and arts practices outside of the traditional architectural framework suggests an un-doing of conventional theatrical pedagogies to re-establish democratic relationships between the artwork and the audience.

A live recording (2010), rethinks conventional codes of choreography and arts presentation through the reorganization of the relationship between the audience, the performer and place. The performance tests ways to 'bring the participant to the sensate' through movement, memory and place, and re-membering architectures. Participants listen to instructional text, designed to guide them through a kinaesthetic experience. The instructions create a sense of dividing and multiplying as the attention shifts between intensity and extension and virtual (or remote) and local sites. As these borders become slippery, place overlaps and space becomes ambiguous. In *A Live Recording*, a physical engagement with the work is essential in order to experience the choreography. In the 'performance' of these sensate memory maps there becomes a shared mapping or cartography of a 're-membered' movement experience, through both the participants engagement with space and my recorded paths. The bodily mapping through space may stimulate simultaneous memories of place and the body through kinaesthetic sensing, re-membering and fracturing of place.

The headphonic experience brings the bodily experience inwards as sound artist Brandon LaBelle suggests, creating an intimate and 'sensitive place of listening' (2006: 226). The recorded voice heard through headphones draws the experience of the voice *into* the participant's body through the ears and the body's movement in space externalizes the experience with the site. The juxtaposition of sound and spatial sources creates a new composition of acoustic and spatial fields, splitting and overlapping space and the body and reorganizing the senses.

Through performing the vocal scores, the inward attention and outward attention oscillate to and fro in vibrations of intensity and extension. In these shifting intensities between or at borders there becomes a doubling of space, the imagined and the re-membered. Andre Lepecki's chapter 'Still on the vibratile microscopy of dance' in *ReMembering the Body* names the inward focus as 'introspective proprioception' which 'takes the focus away from the natural visual and auditory objects to the body' (2004: 346), to the smaller more subtle movements on a microscopic perspective. While Lepecki is referring to the notion of a still body in this text, he is also examining the potential and politics of a dance that occurs *within* the body that is not visible. He suggests an ontological shift in choreography and poses the question 'By which (choreographic) means can the still body engage the audience into perceptual intensification?' (Lepecki 2004: 348). As the body performs stillness or performs for the inside there is potential for multiple layers of intensity to be experienced.

In *A Live Recording* (2010) the refiguring of the audience/performer respons(ability)³ is brought to question through sonic and choreographic intervention in which perceptual intensities oscillate between intensity, stillness and extension. The choreography is experienced through multiples of intensity; through the performed voice, heard intimately through the headphones and interpreted through the participant's engagement with the words and their body in action, in space.

EXPANDING THE FIELD

From the viewer's perspective western dance in the last century has been driven by the spectacular theatre event located within heavily coded architectures. Foregrounding movement experienced as a *visual* phenomenon for the viewer, the remaining senses *support* the work, there is little or no use of voice, the space and experience is distanced and mediated by theatrical conventions (sound, lights, scenography). Dancers are broadly seen as silent movers, composing images for the spectator. In many ways, dance's reception is coterminous with dominant modes of media.

Ask any dancer of their experience of performing dance. There is a continuous exchange of the senses, both from within the body and from the outer surface and beyond. Kinaesthetic, proprioceptive and visceral senses map, connect and perceive space as much, if not more than the acclaimed senses such as the scopic and aural. How different the dancers experience is from the audience. In this critical practice I wonder how the *dancers* experience might inform potential for inventing a new way of becoming an audience?

Natalie Garrett's study on somatics and dance making practices (2007) establishes the influence somatic practices have had on the ontological status of western contemporary dance. She observes a shift in the dance aesthetic whereby visual perception is not always the privileged mode of engagement, revealing 'the kinaesthetic potency of dance performance' and diffusing 'the privileged position of the spectator' (Garrett 2007: 3). Emilyn Claid contests the widely considered notion that 'Somatic body practice looks inwards', recognizing that this is no longer the only focus, 'rather, the practice also allows us to notice what is happening outside' (2010: 136). As somatic practice becomes more integrated in education and performance practice in the twenty-first century, these assumptions are shifting as Claid suggests.

In rethinking choreography, performer, choreographer, educator and writer, Marten Spangberg introduces the notion of 'choreography in the expanded field', and in his self-published book *Spangbergianism* he introduces a disjunction between choreography and dance suggesting that choreography today is 'disconnected from dance or dance-like expressions' (2011: 58). In this discussion of the iterations of *A Live Recording* (2010), and the more recent variation, *Instructions for (Re)membering* (2011), choreography is developed as a *critical spatial practice* drawing from *somatic-informed* pedagogies. In somatic practices attentiveness is broadened and intensified through *intention* and *extension*. In the performance of perception, as the focus on the body and the environment intensifies simultaneously, there can emerge a feeling of slowing and attentiveness as the perception oscillates between extension and intensity.

Lepecki's stance on 'stillness' and his positioning for a 'slower ontology' (a term he borrows from Gaston Bachelard), expands choreography's terms. Lepecki's positioning deflects the romantic vision that, movement determines dance (2000: 338). 'Stilling the dancing body' from the perspective of romantic dance pedagogies undermines its very identity (Lepecki 2000: 339). In stillness, Lepecki advocates a shift towards a new sensorial, an awareness of the microscopic and a 'vibratile stillness' in which 'introspective proprioception' shifts the focus away from the scopic. 'The small dance happens in that nowhere; the dancer must explore the unlocatable *there* between subjectivity and body-image' (Lepecki 2000: 346).

William Forsythe's research into the 'performative potentials of perception' (2010: 390) offer a re-thinking of dance and dance making as a mode for

expression. Freya Vass-Rhee discusses a number of William Forsythe's works since 2003, in which he 'moves dancing across the perceptual boundaries between aural and visual' intermodal performativity (Vass-Rhee 2010: 389). *Decreation* (2003) and *You Made Me a Monster* (2005) test the limits of both audience and performers' perception, mobilizing sensorial conditions surrounding dancing, dance performance and spectatorship. His early works set out to penetrate the 'auditory barrier', inherent in traditional ballet and throughout modern dance practices, through his juxtapositions in visual and aural arrangements, in which he begins to undermine the notion of a fourth wall, that void that separates the spectator from the performer (Vass-Rhee 2010: 388).

In Forsythe's engagement with the intermodal, he works in, around and across multiple senses, equalizing audition and vision, in a 'sensory deluge' that pushes both audience and performer 'to the edge of perceptual performance' (Vass-Rhee 2010: 398). Vass-Rhee's use of the term 'perceptual performance' gives agency to Forsythe's dismantling of traditional performance hierarchies (Vass-Rhee 2010: 390). Forsythe's intermodal dance research empowers the potential for 'dance making and dance performance as resources for the study of human perception' (Vass-Rhee 2010: 410). His work re-thinks the way dancing bodies convey meaning and through this questioning he illuminates new possibilities in choreography and sensory perception (Vass-Rhee 2010: 391).

SPEAKING SPACE

In the second iteration of *A Live Recording* (2011) presented at the 'Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space 2011' – 'PQ2 2011' – the sound score was deliberately complicated through contextual layering of field sound recordings from and of the recorded sites with the text. The intention was to create a more evocative 'image' of the sites through field sounds, and while the sound score seemed more explicit, this addition of contextual field recordings obscured the situated-ness of the voice, distancing the participant from the virtues of the voice and the kinaesthetic experience. The tone, and vibrations of the voice speaking, having been recorded through the microphone, reflect and merge with space. As listeners we can hear the vocal modulation rebound off the surfaces, the proximity of the walls and the leakage of environmental sounds. These subtle characteristics heard in the recordings, situate the site of the recording more concisely than one may imagine on a conscious level. Playing back the recordings the voice extends the subject, displaces the body, which becomes both multiplied and splintered by its digital doubling. The recorded voice is projected into another space, in this case *into* another body heard through headphones. LaBelle describes how 'bodily hearing creates a deep awareness of physical sensation, diffusing perception of sound toward the tactile sense that touches the body as a whole' (2006: 175).

However, this integration is troubled by the recorded digitized voice being doubled and disembodied through multiple subject positions as performer, choreographer and director. The blips, pops and spits, characteristic of the interface that captured the material intercede the recorded and local sites. The vocal recordings, mediated by the microphone and the transference of the digital recording – are raw and immediate, there is a sense of intimacy felt between the speaker and the listener as the sound is drawn into the listeners body. Sound artist Brandon Labelle suggests that in the use of head-ponic

sound there can be a disjuncture between sight and sound (2006: 230). Sound is absorbed through the ear channel and the internal micro-frequencies intensify while the noise vibrating in space outside of the body is lessened (LaBelle 2006: 230).

The process of intensifying attention by bringing the focus to the inner body is analogous to postmodern and somatic dance methods and through this there can be felt a tuning of the kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses. Dance academic Sara Reed (2011) identifies the parallel connections made between pioneers in modern dance and somatics practitioners, in her Ph.D. thesis, where relationships between the two have contributed to the development of both fields such as Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Martha Graham, Steve Paxton and 'somatic pioneers' Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, Mabel Todd, Irmgard Bartenieff, Joan Skinner and Lulu Sweigard. The principles of somatics present ways for questioning the perception of the self and the environment in performance-based relational practices. Hanlon-Johnson (as cited by Reed) identifies (somatic) principles as 'beginnings-sources of discovery' that he sees as 'arising out of questions rather than answers' (Hanlon-Johnson 1986: 48 as cited by Reed 2011: 84).

In Paxton's 'Small Dance' the equality between stillness and movement (part of Lepecki's argument is that dance exists in a perpetual agitation) challenges the very means by which dance was described throughout modernity, 'democratizing the dance or the dancing body' (Lepecki 2004: 344). In minute movements there is potential to *perceive* a much broader range of movement, which in turn can expand our expectations of choreography, 'where stillness moves from the background to the foreground of perception, (and) launches dance into new ontological grounds'.

While the somatic principles discussed above commonly signify a focus that turns inwards towards the centre of the body, the language commonly used to describe scopic technologies, signifies movement *outwards*, *away* from the centre of the body. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan established the notion of technology as an extension of the body, in his graphic book *The Medium is the Message* (Fiore and McLuhan 1967). This establishes an opposition between the language used in somatic fields of practice and broad concepts in scopic technologies.

At the 'PQ 2011', in Prague social media expert Omar Khan introduces the idea of interactivity as 'inner-activity' and suggests that 'inter-active' spaces strive towards an activity that leads to a 'hyper-activity'. In response to Richard Sennet's keynote presentation on 'The sense of touch', Khan asks this question: 'What happens to the senses in this hyper-mode of activity where 'activity' is prioritized over 'inactivity' or passivity?' (Khan 2011). Khan suggests, a passive state, a place where doing less or finding stillness could shift our perception. 'Interactivity' as a technology-based expression creates a rupture and paradox of synchronous 'hyper-activity' and physical inertia. Slavoj Žižek writes of this inertia or immateriality of the body as a 'progressive immobilization of the body' (Žižek 1997: 134), he suggests that as the body engages less with physical activities and is reduced to sending signals to machines, the human being loses 'its grounding in the concrete life-world' (Žižek 1997: 135), Khan's proposal indicates a similar argument to Lepecki's 'slower ontology'. While coming from different disciplines Khan and Lepecki appear to be asserting the same argument, promoting a slowing down for greater attentiveness, applied in Khan's case to creative technologies and Lepecki's to dance.

STILLING

Choreography and somatic practices since the postmodern dance movement have already established strategies to negotiate the split of the inner body and the surfaces and spaces outside and of the ‘material’ body. The postmodern dance movement in the 1960s drew on the experiential, emphasizing the inner body, the sensing feeling body in reaction to the ‘modern’ body, which in choreographic practices prioritized form and image, determined through machinic precision in an ‘economy of gestures’ (Salter 2010: 227). Somatic methods such as Skinner Releasing, Shin Somatics, Body-Mind Centering® and Contact Improvisation, which were seeded from the postmodern movement prioritized the experiential, and have influenced choreographic processes that privilege a heterogeneous approach to dissolve binary thinking and allow for (as Lepecki suggests) ‘a slower ontology’. In his introduction to ‘*Exhausting Dance, The political ontology of movement*’, Lepecki observes ‘a simultaneous invention of choreography and modernity as a “being-toward-movement” and the political ontology of movement in modernity’ (2006: 7).

These somatic bodily practices can help to strategize a rethinking of the polarity between inner and outer and therefore the divide between the corporeal and digital. Screen-based encounters in digital environments privilege the scopic and haptic, bringing sight and touch into the foreground over proprioception, smell and sound for sensing the world. In these performance tests sound is used as a strategy to reorganize the senses and bring audition and the sensate to the fore. This facilitates both somatic-informed choreography and creative digital technologies to afford transformation and facilitate a multiplicity of directions that can in turn slow activity and increase attention. These methods prioritize shifts in perception as opposed to production. In Lepecki’s text *Exhausting Dance* he introduces the potential in the still-act ‘as a performance of suspension’. Lepecki challenges modernity’s preoccupation with kinetic restlessness, suggesting ‘the still *acts* because it interrogates economies of time, because it reveals the possibility of one’s agency within controlling regimes of capital, subjectivity, labour and motility’ (2006: 15, emphasis in original).

CHOREOGRAPHY FOR THE EARS

The fluctuations, the failures and flaws in the performance tests of *A Live Recording* (2011) and later *Instructions for (Re)membering* (2011) emphasize the seemingly un-resolvable gap between the corporeal – our cellular, fleshy, material body and digital networks – binary code, image and mediated spaces.

Tested in varying performance configurations, *A Live Recording* (2011) and *Instructions for (Re)membering* (2011) have been presented in gallery and exhibition spaces, a community hall and a classroom, with different spatial and cultural coding. At first glance and in the first two iterations of the work there *appears* to be no dance, no body and no production, other than the walkmans or MP3 players. The audience’s role is to *become* an essential and active player in the work, through listening to the vocal score and activating body and space, and to *come with me* the choreographer, in *being with* the recorded voice in a performance of simple pedestrian choreography.

The challenge with these performance tests has been to empower the audience to cross the threshold from passive audience to active participant. The work prompts audience (or participant) to engage physically with the objects and also have them follow the aural cues to perform the choreography.

The work has been located in different sites, inciting varying social, cultural and spatial behavioural responses from the participants.

At 'PQ11', *A Live Recording* was presented in a crowded expo-style arrangement, compromising the spatial organization of the work. The perceived social codes of the exhibition format seemed to dominate the spatial and social cues for the spectator, particularly codes for touch. Testing alternative spatial compositions and arranging the walkmans in an autonomous space during the exhibition empowered the participants to pick up the objects, to handle them and be with them. The constraints of the 'PQ11' group exhibition layout elucidated the spatial, cultural and social codes of architecture and site that contributed to a perceived resistance to participation. There are obvious spatial thresholds in these gallery environments for audience members to negotiate, which emphasize the boundaries of the mediated situation. In all of the performance tests, if an audience member was already participating in the work then it was more likely for others to join them. Here I observed a willingness for sharing place and communities of *space making*, via the body.

The most recent presentation of this work as I wrote the first draft of this article was at an independent dance event, 'Hear Me' (see Figure 4), in July 2011 in Auckland, New Zealand. Renamed *Instructions for (Re)Membering* (2011) this performance test had four volunteers 'perform' a variation to an audience. The performance venue was clearly not a theatre (an old hall with a small stage), and the event itself was curated around traditional theatre presentation formats. In this test I used the question 'how might I renegotiate the distinction between installation and performance, audience, participant and performer within the constraints of the event?' to determine the arrangement of the work. I attempt to disrupt theatre conventions through audience placement, performer placement and my own actions.



Figure 4: (left) *Instructions for (Re)Membering*, 'Hear Me' Old Folks Association, Gundry St, Auckland, New Zealand July 2011. Photo credit: Becca Wood.



Figure 5: (right) *Instructions for (Re)Membering*, SEAM 2011, Critical Path, Sydney, Australia, September 2011. Photo credit: Becca Wood.

The audience arrives in fits and starts and I welcome each person as they enter, asking them to take a seat. I begin the work by leading everyone (participants and audience who are not distinguishable) through a somatic preparation, asking them to listen, asking them to notice what they hear, to notice their breath, to notice their bodies and the space. I attempt to bring everyone to a place of awareness together using my somatic teaching practice. I notice how I feel compelled to rush. I introduce the audience to my research as I set up. I wheel in a suitcase into the centre of the space. I lay out a cable. I take an old slide projector out of the wheelie case. I put it on a chair. I turn the bulb on and project a blank square of light onto the wall. The participants come into the space and put on their MP3 players. The projector light clicks off and on, and the image remains blank. The participants hit play on their MP3 players and visibly shift their attention to listening, I can see this change from the outside, their posture, the tone of their bodies is different. They move attentively, there is an expectation and focus that separates them from the seated audience.

The performers' deep engagement in their task creates space for us to witness them. The field sound recordings from my recent travels around Europe are playing over the speaker system. Places that I have passed through, inhabited and experienced are extended and doubled in recordings that are amplified into the performance space – the sounds bounce off the walls of the Old Folks Association Hall – the field recordings are mediated by the architectural form and crude edits that slice at the clips making raw sound bites. The audience can hear snippets of my recorded voice, the places and space, the wind; they hear the spatiality of the recordings – the sound resonating off the physical terrain, the people. They get a 'sense' of the spaces my body has inhabited as they watch the performers translate these spaces through their bodies. The performers experience a doubling of spaces as they inhabit the text space and negotiate the live space. A performer comments afterwards that the head-ponic space contains him,



Figure 6: Instructions for (Re)Membering, SEAM, Sydney, Australia, September 2011. Photo credit: Becca Wood.



Figure 7: Instructions for (Re)Membering, *Private showing, Old Folks Association, Gundry St, Auckland, November 2011*. Photo credit: Becca Wood.

holds his focus while he maintains a doubled and slightly fractured awareness of the live space. There is a splitting of space, in watching, listening and watching listening. The void between the ‘audience’ and the participants deepens, and I attribute this partially to the spatial conditions, the arrangement of seating and the expectations around coming to an event and also to the separation between the two groups through their different experiences of sound space.

Since the event discussed above, three more versions of this work have been performed (see Figures 5–7). In these recent tests I have expanded the capacity of the work towards facilitated performance installations that engage with large groups, who perform the work together. Participants comment on fluxing between; feeling self-conscious, to feeling safe and protected by the vocal score, to feeling part of a group, performing with others.

CONCLUSION

The increasing velocity with which we ‘inter-act’ with new ubiquitous technologies perpetuates ‘hyper-activity’ and intensifies the gap felt between the digital and somatic practice. This invites a critical rethinking of creative technologies and live practice. My work across sensate and visual practices prioritizes the moving body, motivated by the inertia that is felt in our inter-activity with technologies. Typically digital environments are *prescribed* based on the design of the hardware or software.

The discourse between the subject, the corporeal and the virtual create ‘more often, feelings of disconnectedness, dissatisfaction, and alienation’ (Lepecki 2004: 338). The sensing system fluxes in a ‘hyper-active’ dance that seems to separate the body from the sensate. In ‘inter-active’ digital environments perhaps we can rethink ‘hyper-activity’ to *incorporate* slowness and stilling to allow for a greater range choreographically and a tuning of perception for a dynamic and embodied relationship of space and technology. The

application of somatic methodologies to subvert productiveness and binary focused processes solicits an embodied consciousness with and within the digital. Spatial and movement terminology intersect between somatic terms and the language of digital interfaces; extension, coming to centre and moving from centre – this language creates potential for a porous body, for transformation and ‘intransitive becoming; it is multiple, relational, dynamic, dissolving boundaries and affording new tensions in the digital’ (Braidotti 2002: 86). This series of works has opened potentials for refiguring choreographic practices through multiple flows of vocal, sonic, spatial and choreographic intensities.

The practice pursues states for re-memembering, affording fluidity and embodying perceptions of time and space using sonic, proprioception and the kinaesthetic spheres. Body, space, place and time emerge, deterritorialized. These somatic-informed methods attempt emergent ways of becoming for a ‘slower ontology’ that challenges the western capitalized view that prioritizes ‘more and faster’ ideologies.

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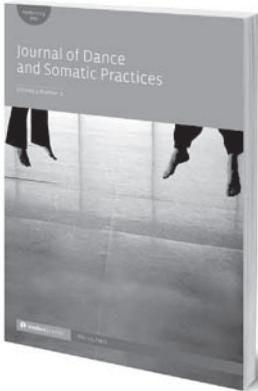
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Becca Wood works in performance practices that slip between the intersections of the body, space and digital environments. Her interest in this interdisciplinary area comes from years of working between the disciplines of design and dance practices. Becca is currently in her first year of Doctoral research at Auckland University where she also lectures in Dance Studies. She continues to work across the arts in performance, somatic research and education, and digital-based art and design. As well as creating her own work, this year she has enjoyed working on a variety of national and international works for artists such as Jim Allen, Carol Brown and Jerome Bel.

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Special Issue

Transcultural Perspectives on Somatic Practices and Research

Guest editors: Sylvie Fortin & Andrée Grau

Submission of full articles: 31 October 2012

Our starting point is that there is no doubt that bodies are culturally, socially and politically mediated, and therefore they are conceptualized, understood and used differently in different contexts, cultural or other. Yet we also acknowledge that as human beings we belong to a single species and that cultivating our interconnectedness with body/mind and nature might have implications that are transnational, transcultural and therefore potentially 'universal'. Furthermore, since the field of somatics is in motion and always in process, perhaps we must resist an attempt to fix or unify the field, but instead look to a fluid process of development around the world.

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