

Faceless Body in Performance

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other higher institution of learning.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script, which appears to read 'Zahra Killeen-Chance'.

Zahra Killeen-Chance
October 2015

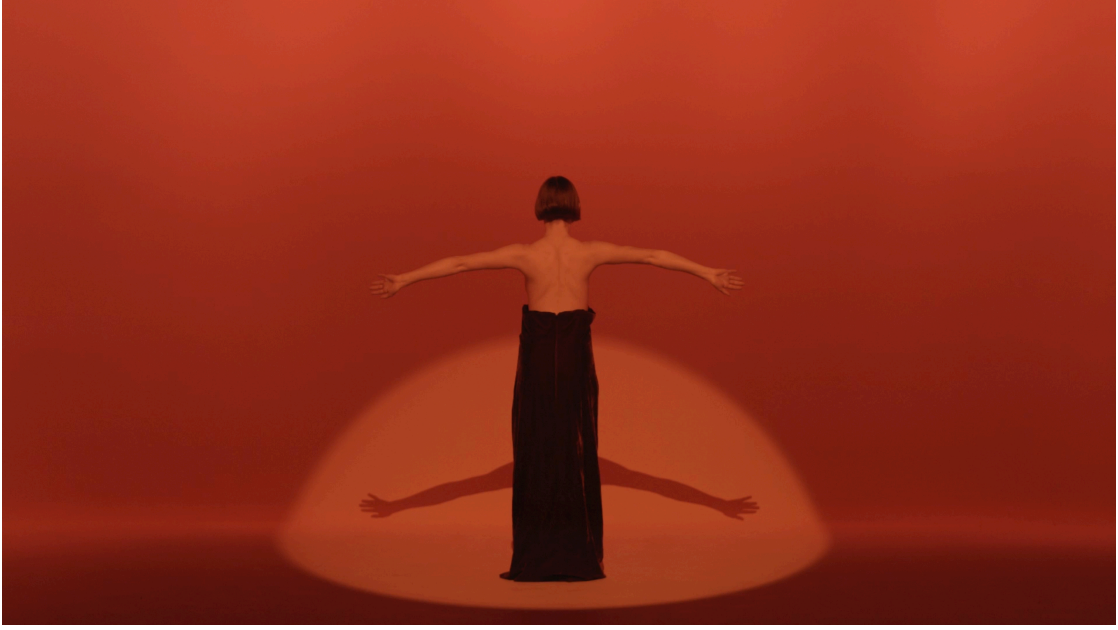
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Abstract

Faceless Body in Performance is a practice-led research project in live and digital performance. There are two series of solo performances, *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove*, which explore choreographic procedures that can direct the audience towards ambiguous plays of relation within the embodied, sensory encounter of the performance. The focus is on decentering the modalities of visibility, invisibility, aurality, stillness, and motion, with the aim of exposing intermodal relationships across the senses and genders.

The project is located in a post-phenomenological paradigm where the body, environment, and technology are regarded as a field of mutually dependent relations. Don Ihde's post-phenomenological exploration of amplification technology and notion of an auditory turn, provide a framework for viewing the solo performances as indeterminate plays of relation across the senses and technology. Jacques Derrida's strategies of deconstruction and notion of undecidability, provide a lens for viewing each of the solo performances as an open-ended process that is irreducible to a final meaning. The project argues that there is a range of choreographic procedures, which can expose performance as an embodied, relational process that resists stabilisation into a single modality or meaning.



Antumbra, digital performance still, November 2015

Introduction

Faceless Body in Performance explores strategies to choreograph plays of relation within and across the senses through two series of works: *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove*. These works are an inquiry into how choreography can use the performer's body as a vehicle for exposing embodied relations that are perpetual and indeterminate. Amelia Jones uses the term "performative" to describe this open-ended process that has no final interpretation:

The notion of the performative highlights the open-endedness of interpretation, which must thus be understood as a *process* rather than an act with a final goal, and acknowledges the ways in which circuits of desire and pleasure are at play in a complex web of relations. (original emphasis 2005: 1)

During the course of the research project seven solo performances were staged for which I was both the choreographer and performer.¹ There are five iterations of the *Breath of Air* series: *Breath of Air (MAP)*, *Breath of Air (Test Space)*, *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, *Breath of Air (Rooftop)*, and *Still Breathing*; and there are two iterations of the *Black Glove* series: *Black Glove (White Studio)*, and *Black Glove (Black Box)*. *Black Glove (White Studio)* is a digital performance while the other six works are live performances. The works of several contemporary performance practitioners have been selected from a Euro-American lineage to elucidate these explorations. The practitioners include choreographer/dancer Trisha Brown (U.S.A.); choreographer/performer Sean Curham (N.Z.); performance artist Angelika Festa (U.S.A.); choreographer/dancer William Forsythe (U.S.A.); and video artist Bill Viola (U.S.A.).

For the purpose of this exegesis a digital performance is the exhibiting of a digital document for an audience, and a live performance is the staging of an event in real time for an audience. The use of digital video technology to document my work is an important part of my practice. Firstly I use it to record the various iterations of my live performances for research and archival purposes. Secondly I use it to record digital performances for exhibition purposes.²

Undecidable Plays of Relation

The project questions the Euro-American balletic and modernist choreographic traditions, which use the performer's body as a vehicle for representing a predetermined, fixed idea. The choreographic practice of classical dance is defined by

¹ For a description of the performances see Appendix II.

² This opens up a theoretical debate with regard to performance and documentation. The performance theorist Philip Auslander (2006) argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between performance and

² This opens up a theoretical debate with regard to performance and documentation. The performance theorist Philip Auslander (2006) argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between performance and documentation: "the mutual dependence of performance and document" (84). It is beyond the scope of this project to undertake a research inquiry into the relationship between live performance and documentation, or to investigate whether the documentation of a live performance becomes a work in its own right.

performance philosopher André Lepecki as a “system of command” that stages “images”, which he further defines as: “the formation of obedient, disciplined and (pre) formatted bodies [...] to produce and [...] to reproduce certain staged images conveyed by an authorial will” (2012: 15). While classical choreography aims to produce an image that represents a pre-existing idea that lies beyond the senses, this is no longer the only view of choreography: “the artwork is no longer viewed as a static object with a single, prescribed signification that is communicated unproblematically” (Jones 2005: 1).

The American choreographer William Forsythe argues that choreography cannot be reduced to “a single definition [...] representing a universal standard for the term” (2012: 201). He contends that choreography is being redefined ceaselessly by “each epoch, each instance of choreography” (ibid). For the purpose of this exegesis, choreography is defined as the practice of staging an event that directs the audience towards encountering ambiguous plays of relation that are embodied in sensory experience. Performance writer Freya Vass-Rhea, citing Sabine Huschka, states that choreographic practices are: “ways of structuring perception and movement that relocate ballet’s propositions ‘in the unpredictable territory of corporeal perceptual processes’” (390).³

The notion of a stable idea or truth is the legacy of Western philosophy, and the term logocentrism is used by Jacques Derrida to critique the assumption that there is a “total message” that can be expressed or represented: “If there is thus no thematic unity or overall meaning [...] no total message located in some imaginary order, intentionality or lived experience, then the text is no longer the expression or representation ... of any *truth*” (original emphasis 1981b: 262). Derrida is commenting on the Western classification system that positions terms into hierarchical binaries where one term is valorised and elevated as the primary truth, while the opposing term is marginalised and repressed as secondary. Derrida contends that there are no static ideas or truths, but rather a play of relation between the two terms of a binary that is undecidable: “double, contradictory, undecidable value [...] two incompatible meanings” (221). Derrida’s notion of undecidability provides a lens for experiencing my work, and the work of other practitioners, as a “double, contradictory” play of movement that resists stabilisation into a single meaning.

Historically the Western classification system has created gendered binaries in which the male is associated with values such as visibility, light, and stillness, while the female is associated with values such as invisibility, darkness, and motion.⁴ Derrida coined the word phallogocentrism to critique the way in which the elevation of the masculine order is dependent on superseding the feminine order: “Femininity (the essence or truth of Woman) [...] These are the places that [...] are the foundations or anchorings of Western rationality (of what I have called ‘phallogocentrism’ [as the complicity of Western metaphysics with a notion of male firstness])” (1982: 69).⁵

³ Sabine Huschka is a German writer whose text is not available in English.

⁴ For a historical list of binaries that associate masculinity and femininity with opposing values, see Aristotle, “Metaphysics,” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), A5 986a 22ff. The binaries listed are: limit/unlimited, odd/even, one/many, right/left, male/female, rest/motion, straight/curved, light/darkness, good/bad, square/oblong.

⁵ For a critique of the gendering of binaries in the Western classification system, see Jacques Derrida, “Law of Genre,” in *Acts of literature* by Jacques Derrida, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Derrida contends that “phallogocentric mastery” is established by neutralizing the feminine order: “The dialectical opposition neutralizes or supersedes [...] the difference [...] one insures phallogocentric mastery under the cover of neutralization every time” (72). Similarly, the French feminist writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous asserts that gendered binaries create power hierarchies through the “subordination of the feminine to the masculine order” (1986: 65).⁶ Because binaries are gendered, a deconstructive reading of any binary will bring the modalities of masculinity and femininity into question.

Faceless Body in Performance explores choreographic possibilities for decentring the modalities of visibility, invisibility, aurality, stillness, motion, masculinity, and femininity.⁷ These modalities are defined as the quality or state of being visible, invisible, aural, still, mobile, masculine, or feminine, and this defines each modality as a pure essence that exists independently of the sensory body. My project is researching approaches for staging deconstructions of these modalities in order to expose a “double, contradictory, undecidable value” that is neither one thing nor the other (Derrida 1981b: 221). Consequently, this performance project does not seek to maintain the classical order that privileges the modalities of visibility, stillness and masculinity, but nor does it seek to invert this order to establish an alternative hierarchy that privileges the modalities of aurality, motion and femininity. This would not be a deconstructive reading because it would simply be replacing one set of hierarchies with another.

Instead, the project researches procedures to choreograph embodied plays of relation, which have the possibility of directing the audience towards experiencing intermodal connections and relationships across the senses.⁸ Don Ihde advocated a “turn to the *auditory dimension*” in 1976 in order to seek a “deliberate decentring of a dominant tradition” of visibility (original emphasis 2007: 13). Martin Jay has coined the term *ocularcentrism* to critique the way Western metaphysics privileges visibility at the expense of other senses: “‘ocularcentric,’ or ‘dominated’ by vision” (1994: 3). Thus the project seeks to develop choreography that has the potential to decentre the stability of these modalities by choreographing an “integration of perception across the senses” (Vass-Rhee 2010: 389).

The artist and writer Nathaniel Stern asserts that choreographic research is not about modalities *of* relation, but modalities *in* relation: “not merely ‘modes of relations’ but sensible concepts that are themselves emergent and in relation” (2011: 237). The key binaries that are explored include: visibility/aurality; visibility/invisibility, and their cognates seen/unseen, presence/absence; stillness/motion; and masculinity/femininity. The project aims to expose how one value of a binary supplements the other value in a perpetual play of movement so that each value is the condition of the other. Stern citing Nicole Ridgway, describes how the modalities are

⁶ See Hélène Cixous, *Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays*, where she argues that there is a series of hierarchical oppositions that are foundational to phallogocentrism: “Activity/Passivity Sun/Moon Culture/Nature Day/Night Father/Mother ... Logos/Pathos ... Man/Woman” (1986: 63).

⁷ See the Oxford English Dictionary where modality is defined as: “Those aspects of a thing which relate to its mode, or manner or state of being, as distinct from its substance or identity; the non-essential aspect or attributes of a concept or entity. Also: a particular quality or attribute denoting the mode or manner of being of something.”

⁸ See collinsdictionary.com where intermodality is defined as: “denoting an interaction between different senses”. The senses that are focused on in this exegesis include: the sense of sight; the sense of sound; kinesthesia, that is a kinesthetic or movement sense; and a sense of gender identity.

in a state of indefinite fluctuation: “[it] is not [then] a meeting of two extant essences, but a movement and unfolding of the [relation] that is always supplementary and incomplete” (234).⁹ The project aims to expose how performance is in a continual state of emergence.

Chapter Summaries

There are four chapters that frame, contextualise, and elucidate the project. The first chapter situates my practice within a critical research context, and a research process. The following three chapters extend my critical argument through an engagement with the shifts and development of my practice-led research, and with relevant performance artists who inform my work. Two appendixes describe and document the research process undertaken from March to October 2015.

Chapter I situates the project within a theoretical context, and a practice-led research process. It focuses on the way in which Ihde provides a post-phenomenological context for contesting the sight/sound, and body/technology binaries through his notion of an “auditory turn”, and his exploration of amplification technology (2007: 42). It also explores how Derrida provides a post-structuralist context for contesting key binaries through his notion of undecidability and strategies of deconstruction. As well, this chapter focuses on how a practice-led research inquiry enables my performance practice to be the basis of self-reflective research. The final focus is on other practitioners who provide a context for my work.

Chapter II takes a reading of a selection of my work via the modalities of visibility and aurality. The principal works discussed are: *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, *Black Glove (Black Box)*, and *Still Breathing*. This chapter focuses on strategies for choreographing sound amplification in order to foreground the sound of my breath, and bring it into play with the sight of my body. This exploration is elucidated through the following works: *make it / disappear* (2015) by Sean Curham; *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* by Angelika Festa (1987); *Heterotopia* (2006) by choreographer/dancer William Forsythe; and *Pneuma* (1994/2009) by Bill Viola.

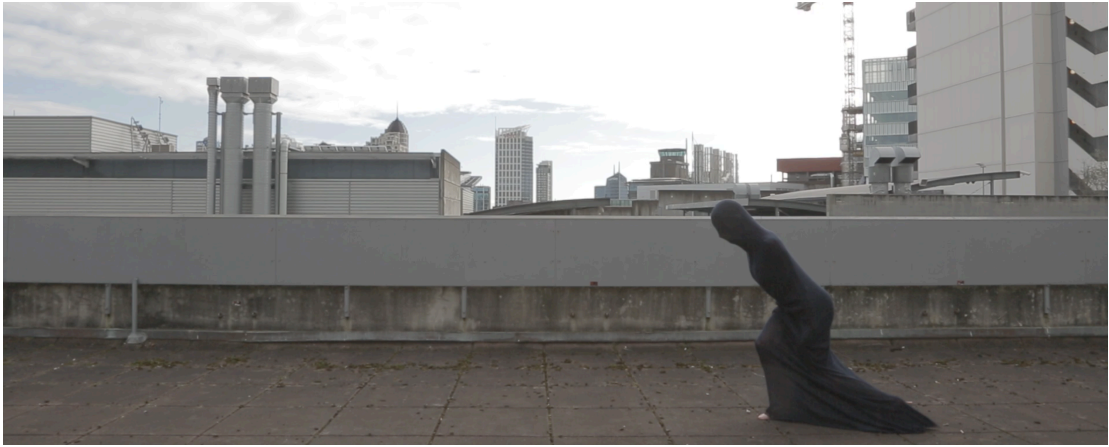
Chapter III explores a selection of my work via the modalities of visibility and invisibility. The main works discussed are: *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, *Breath of Air (Rooftop)*, and *Black Glove (Black Box)*. This chapter focuses on strategies for choreographing costuming in order to foreground the unseen, and bring it into play with the seen. This exploration is set alongside the following works: *If You Couldn't See Me* (1994) by Trisha Brown; and *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* by Angelika Festa.

Chapter IV takes a reading of a selection of my work via the modalities of motion and stillness. The primary works discussed are: *Black Glove (White Studio)* and *Still Breathing*. The chapter focuses on how the destabilisation of binaries could have implications for the modalities of femininity and masculinity. In particular the focus is on strategies for choreographing a play of stillness and motion, and how this might challenge the traditional identification of eternal forms with masculinity, and temporal becoming

⁹ Nicole Ridgeway’s text is unpublished. See Nicole Ridgeway, “In Excess of the Already Constituted: Interaction as Performance,” in *New Media*, ed. Owen Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, forth-coming).

with femininity. Trisha Brown's work, *If You Couldn't See Me* is a pertinent comparison to this thread of my research.

Appendix I describes and documents the process of my research undertaken during my five week residency with Movement Art Practice: Research Series for Independent Choreographers, April-May 2015. Appendix II describes and documents the process of my research undertaken for *Faceless Body in Performance*.



Breath of Air (Rooftop), performance documentation, August 2015

Chapter I

Double Scene

Chapter I situates *Faceless Body in Performance* within a theoretical context, and a research process. My project is located in a post-phenomenological, performance context, which is comprised of a complex, dynamic network of theoretical and artistic lineages.¹⁰ The theoretical lineages cross between the philosophical fields of phenomenology and post-structuralism, while the artistic lineages cross between the art disciplines of performance dance, performance/body art, and video art.¹¹ My research process is situated within a practice-led research paradigm, and employs strategies of deconstruction. This interdisciplinary approach acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice.

Performance Context

As outlined in the Introduction, my project intends to challenge the classical Western epistemological paradigm in which a performance is regarded as a representation of a pre-existing ideal or truth. While this legacy can be traced back to Plato, my project is delimited to challenging balletic and modernist dance aesthetics, and their search for an autonomous, stable essence beyond the senses of the body.¹² André Lepecki contends that the disciplines of ballet and modernist dance “demand” this function:

[Balletic/Modernist] choreography demands a yielding to commanding voices of masters (living and dead), it demands submitting body and desire to disciplining regimes (anatomical, dietary, gender, racial), all for the perfect fulfillment of a transcendental and preordained set of steps, postures, and gestures that nevertheless must appear “spontaneous”. (2006: 9)

My project resists the notion that the role of the body is to function as an object that represents “transcendental and preordained” ideas (ibid).

Given my training and practice as a dance choreographer and performer, the project arises out of a performance dance lineage. Because I am seeking approaches to expose performance dance as something other than a representation of an idea, the project defines performance dance within a post-phenomenological paradigm where

¹⁰ The relationship between phenomenology and ecology, recently termed ‘ecophenomenology’, is an important theoretical debate, especially given that my project explores the phenomena of breath in performance, and that two of my performances are staged outdoors. However, this would involve a research inquiry into the relationship between art and nature, body and environment, and self and world. These analyses, although relevant, exceed the delimitations outlined in the Introduction.

¹¹ The artistic project is delimited to performance dance, performance/body art, and video art, but acknowledges that it has relevance to other fields such as sound art, environmental dance, environmental art, intervention art, installation art, and film.

¹² For Plato’s argument that a representation is a copy of a pre-existing idea, see Plato, “Book X,” in *The Republic*, trans. Henry Desmond Pritchard Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1987).

it is viewed as an embodied play of relations. Similarly, Amelia Jones defines performance/body art within “postmodernism”:

Body art is viewed here as a set of performative practices that, through such intersubjective engagement, instantiate the dislocation or decentring of the Cartesian subject of modernism. The dislocation is, I believe, the most profound transformation constitutive of what we have come to call postmodernism. (1998: xv)

Likewise, Holly Rogers defines video art in relation to performativity. She views video art as a “performative, interactive intermediality” that is “fluid and unfixable”, and cautions that video art differs from one era to the next: “the edges of the definitions of video art are blurred” (2013: 525-541).

Post-phenomenological Research Context

Don Ihde describes how in classical, Husserlian phenomenology, researchers begin their research by bracketing or suspending their “presuppositions” in their search for a pure essence:

[I]n the beginning was the suspension (epoché) of the ‘natural attitude,’ for a setting aside of certain taken-for-granted beliefs. But such a setting aside of beliefs was not to be a reduction of experience, it was to be a reduction of certain ‘presuppositions’ about experience. (2007:22)

Recent researchers in the field of performance, such as Susan Kozel, emphasise that phenomenological research is not free from preconceptions: “A phenomenology begins with a set of concepts and a set of starting points that are fundamentally akin to dance, theater, performance and other dynamic processes for expression” (2007: 50). Kozel argues that phenomenology is a simultaneous play of experiential and conceptual data: “raw sensory data received immediately from the senses, as well as memories and imaginative constructs” (52). While my post-phenomenological practice begins with the experience of embodied phenomena such as breathing, it is not solely a pure experience because I am engaging with a complex network of concepts, memories, images, associations, and environmental stimuli at the same time. This allows for a multi-layering of meaning to occur.

My project is guided by the post-phenomenologist Ihde, and by the post-structuralist Jacques Derrida, who both contend that a representation can no longer be regarded as self-sufficient and independent of the contexts in which it finds itself. Ihde coined the word post-phenomenology in order to distinguish between two kinds of phenomenology: the classical, Husserlian phenomenology “of essence, structure and presence”; and post-phenomenology “that opens the way to a reevaluation and re-examination of the very language in which our experience is encased and by which it is expressed” (2007: 20).

Derrida also critiques Edmund Husserl's phenomenology by contending that it is logocentric.¹³ Derrida asserts that Husserl's phenomenology seeks an "essence of meaning" that exists prior to observation or experience:

[P]ure meaning, or pure signified [...] prelinguistic (preexpressive, Husserl calls it) meaning whose presence would be [...] outside and before the process or system of signification. The latter would only bring meaning to light, translate it, transport it, communicate it, incarnate it, express it, etc. (1981a: 31)

In contrast to Husserl, Derrida questions the notion of a "simple term", which is to say a pure idea, or a pure presence, and argues that meaning is constructed within a network of textual referrals:

[W]hat is called 'meaning' (to be 'expressed') is already, and thoroughly, constituted by a tissue of differences, in the extent to which there is already a text, a network of textual referrals to other texts, a textual transformation in which each allegedly 'simple term' is marked by the trace of another term. (33)

Similarly, Ihde argues that a phenomenal experience is not autonomous but instead contextual: "experience cannot be questioned alone or in isolation but must be understood ultimately in relation to its historical and cultural embeddedness" (2007: 20). Ihde has directed his research towards challenging the elevation of visual presence at the expense of the other senses, especially the auditory sense:

A turn to the *auditory dimension* is thus potentially more than a simple changing of variables. It begins as a deliberate decentering of a dominant tradition in order to discover what may be missing as a result of the traditional double reduction of vision as the main variable and metaphor. This deliberate change of emphasis from the visual to the auditory dimension at first symbolizes a hope to find material for a recovery of the richness of primary experience that is now forgotten or covered over in the too tightly interpreted visualist traditions. (original emphasis 13)

Not only is post-phenomenology directed towards conceptualizing the world as a field of mutually dependent relationships, but it also refers to the body being extended beyond itself through technology. Derrida argues that there is a supplementary relationship between nature and techné (craft, art, skill, artifice) where each is the condition of the other: "there have never been anything but supplements" (1997: 158).¹⁴ In this paradigm, technology is an integral part of a complex web of interrelationships that is actively modifying and co-shaping these relations. Ihde explores the way human beings are shaped and extended by technology: "We are our bodies – but in that very basic notion one also discovers that our bodies have an

¹³ For a critique of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, see Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989). This was first published in 1962.

¹⁴ For Derrida's reflections on what he terms "teletechnology", see Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002). For an analysis of the relationship between technology and the body via the notion of prosthesis, see David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

amazing plasticity and polymorphism that is often brought out precisely in our relations with technologies. We are bodies in technologies” (2002: 138). Kozel also places the human body at the interface of technologies. She asks what can be discovered as we become closer to our digital technologies, and as they become extensions of our ways of thinking, moving, and touching. Post-phenomenology provides a theoretical context for exploring the interrelationship between my body and digital technologies.

Nevertheless, my project remains a phenomenological inquiry to the extent that it explores the phenomena of spatially and temporally embodied experience. Ihde refers to the exploration of subjective experience as existential phenomenology: “In an existential phenomenology it is the body-as-experiencing, the embodied being” (2007: 43). However, as a post-phenomenological inquiry my project does not aim to discover essential truths through a phenomenological inquiry, but instead it explores a range of reciprocal relationships that include performer/spectator, and performer/technology. As Ihde argues, it seeks to expose performance as an emergent process where meaning is relational and unstable: “all forms of world-knowledge within phenomenology are relational; but likewise, all forms of self-knowledge are also relational” (41).

Strategies of Deconstruction

The “post” in post-phenomenology also indicates that a post-structuralist paradigm is used to investigate the way bodies project meaning in performance. This is guided by Derrida whose writings popularized the term ‘deconstruction’. Derrida argues that deconstruction cannot be formulated into a methodology but rather consists of a series of strategies. The first strategy requires locating hierarchical, binary oppositions that privilege a primary term and repress a secondary term. The second strategy requires dismantling binary oppositions to overturn the hierarchy. In an interview with Julia Kristeva in *Positions*, Derrida stresses the violence of hierarchical subordination:

In a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful co-existence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. (1981a: 39)

The third strategy requires exposing moments of self-contradiction between the primary and secondary terms. These strategies do not invert the terms of the binary in order to establish a new hierarchical structure, but rather expose an unstable play of undecidability that suspends meaning. In *The Double Session* Derrida asserts: “An undecidable proposition [...] is a proposition which, given a system of axioms governing a multiplicity, is [...] neither true nor false with respect to those axioms” (1981b: 219).

The project aims to dismantle binary structures that privilege the idealised, visual presence of the classical performer. These binary structures are dismantled in order to expose the privileging of idealism over experience, visibility over aurality, and

presence over absence. As Kozel argues, post-phenomenological research is paradoxical: “ambiguity of meaning, fluidity of existential and conceptual structures, scope for entirely new thought, perceptions” (2007: 19). This uncertainty of meaning opens up my project to processes that could create ambiguous experiences across the senses and gender identity. For example, Chapter II explores how the *Breath of Air* series seeks to challenge the notion of a stable identity by choreographing a performance in which the performer could evoke both a mummy and a cocoon.

Strategies of deconstruction provide a mode of research for exposing ambiguities within the lived, embodied encounter of my performance. My project intends to challenge logocentric, dance aesthetics by staging deconstructions in performance, which uncover self-contradictions and destabilise fixed meanings. As André Lepecki asserts, Derrida’s theories (along with other post-structuralists) allow for a reframing of the body: “Theirs is a philosophy that understands the body not as a self-contained and closed entity but as an open and dynamic system of exchange” (2006: 5).

Practice-led Research Process

My research process is situated within a practice-led research paradigm. A practice-led method of inquiry provides a mode of research for negotiating the multiple strands of my research process, which include: video practice, choreographic practice, performance practice, theoretical research, critiques, and critical reflection.

Performance is a subjective and elusive art form that is difficult to define and measure, however these research paradigms provide critical, self-reflective methodologies that allow a subjective practice to lead the research process. Bradley Haseman and Daniel Mafe contend: “heightened reflexivity is a part of what it is to be a successful practice-led researcher in the creative arts” (2009: 220). A reflexive practice involves strategies of self-observation and self-analysis, and as a result it entails the researcher being aware of her/his effect on the process and the outcomes of the research. Linda Finlay says of reflexivity:

[W]e accept that the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data. ... We understand that meanings are negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story. We no longer seek to eradicate the researcher’s presence – instead subjectivity in research is transformed from a problem to an opportunity. (2002: 212)

Given that I am simultaneously the researcher and the participant, the subject and the object, it signals that the research is partial, individual, and embedded in a socio-historical context. Consequently, the outcomes of my research cannot be reduced to measurable results. However Jillian Hamilton and Luke Jaaniste contend that practice-led research generates possibilities, experience and insight:

Because it is poetically and purposefully ambiguous and irreducible in meaning, the knowledge, insight and embodied experience that is evoked by an artwork is not consistent or measurable. Its value lies in its capacity to open up possibilities, experiences and insights. (2009: 11)

Hazel Smith and Roger Dean have constructed a research model that reflects the reciprocal relationship between research and practice: “We do not see practice-led research and research-led practice as separate processes, but as interwoven in an iterative cyclic web” (2009: 2). In this bifocal approach, theory and practice continually inform each other in a complex, emergent dynamic. The researcher is always in negotiation with emerging ideas and practices that are the “constituting condition of complexity” (Haseman and Mafe 2009: 217). The iterative cyclic web provides a mode of research that enables me to negotiate “contrasting registers” of professional activity, creative practice, academic research, critiques, critical reflection, and interpretation of research: “Practice-led researchers ... move eclectically across boundaries in their imaginative and intellectual pursuits” (Graham Sullivan 2009: 49).

Practice-led research enables my performance practice to be the basis of my research. The cyclic, open-ended dynamic of these research paradigms allows me to challenge classical representation, and explore the emergence of paradoxical plays of relation and multiple meanings. As Baz Kershaw states:

[T]he most crucial effect of performance practice as research is to *dis-locate* knowledge [...] performed moments can unravel all established forms of representation, becoming irresistibly viral to any assumed stability of thought. The source of that power is paradoxical, as it makes the commonplace extraordinary. (original emphasis 2009: 105)

Performance Context

Several performance works, which help to elucidate my project, have been selected from a lineage that traverses North America, Europe and Australasia. Among other works the selection include: *If You Couldn't See Me* (1994) by choreographer/dancer Trisha Brown (U.S.A.); *make it / disappear* (2015) by choreographer/performer Sean Curham (N.Z.); *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* (1987) by performance artist Angelika Festa; *Heterotopia* by choreographer/dancer William Forsythe (U.S.A.); *Pneuma* (1994/2009) by video artist Bill Viola (U.S.A).

Each of the selected works focuses on the embodied experience of both the performer and the witnessing spectator, as well as the technologies used to extend their experience. These works evoke a paradoxical play between aurality and visibility, performer and spectator, body and technology. However, these paradoxes are not employed to create new hierarchical orders, but to expose how performance is comprised of a complex network of reciprocal relationships that co-exist in an ambiguous play of meaning. As Ihde says of his post-phenomenological inquiry: “a deliberate de-centering of visualism in order to point up the overlooked and the unheard, its ultimate aim is not to replace vision as such with listening as such” (2007: 15). Consequently these works are part of a post-phenomenological trajectory.

Curham, Forsythe and Viola each provide parallels with my process of exploring the dynamic relationship between the sight of my body and the sound of my breath. Curham, Forsythe and Viola explore the relationship between sight and sound by bringing background noise into the foreground, and orchestrating it into a sound score. Where Viola uses ambient sounds from the environment, Forsythe and Curham use breath gestures as well as sounds produced by the body in motion, or

resulting from physical contact. In each case, there is a dynamic relationship between, within and across the ocular and auditory experiences. These elements are discussed in Chapter II, principally through my works *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, *Breath of Air (Rooftop)*, and *Black Glove (Black Box)*.

Curham and Viola investigate the complex dynamic between the performance, the spectator, and the technology. In Viola's *Pneuma*, the spectator is immersed in images that are projected onto three corners of a darkened room. Because the spectator's viewpoint is always partial, the viewer is cast into the role of active spectator who constructs a personal, embodied experience. In Curham's *make it / disappear*, the spectators "perform" the performance collectively by breathing into a microphone to light up a light bulb. For each of these works, there is paradoxical interplay between the spectator and performer, which is mediated through technology. These elements are discussed in Chapter II, particularly in relation to my works *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, *Still Breathing*, and *Black Glove (Black Box)*.

Brown and Festa explore the exchange between the visible and invisible by making partial disclosures that deny the spectator a complete view of the body. In Brown's *If You Couldn't See Me* the dancer performs with her back to the audience, which foils the spectator's expectation for a frontal view. In *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* Festa has her eyes taped, which denies eye contact between herself and the spectator. These works explore a play of absence and presence, dorsality and frontality. These elements are discussed in Chapter III, especially in relation to my works *Still Breathing*, and *Black Glove (White Studio)*.

In these works and in my own project, the transgression of classical boundaries between different art disciplines, and a reframing of choreography takes place: "[It] allows for reframing choreography outside artificially self-contained boundaries [...] to step into other artistic fields and to create new possibilities for thinking relationships between bodies, subjectivities, politics, and movement" (Lepecki 2006: 5).

This chapter, *Double Scene*, explores the contexts and processes of the project. The following three chapters extend this critical argument through an engagement with my choreographic research, and a selection of performance artists. The following chapters explore how the research aims to bring modalities into question by exposing an embodied, intermodal relationships across the senses, genders, and technology.



Breath of Air (MAP), performance documentation, May 2015

Chapter II

Breathing Body

Chapter II brings the modalities of visibility and aurality into question by exploring the dynamic relationship between the auditory and visual perception of phenomena in performance. It challenges the notion that the performer's body is a silent vehicle that performs an imposed script, and instead acknowledges the performer's body as being emergent with a voice of its own. This chapter focuses on the way the choreographic procedures seek to expose a "double, contradictory" movement between sight and sound through the correlation and non-correlation of the senses (Jacques Derrida 1981b: 221). It also focuses on how the audience is directed towards experiencing the simultaneity of these two senses.

Auditory Turn

The sound of breath exists in the background of our life. It is also a sound that classical dance has striven to disguise. Yet our breathing is the constant, ongoing dynamic between the organism that we are, and the living world that we are in. Breathing entails a reciprocal exchange between our environment and our bodies, and it is a reminder that our relationship to the world is part of a complex dynamic system. My project seeks to foreground the hidden sound of breath in order to decentre the dominance of ocularcentrism, and draw attention to the dynamic relationship between our sense of sight and our sense of hearing:

[A] deliberate de-centering of visualism in order to point up the overlooked and the unheard, its ultimate aim is not to replace vision as such with listening as such. Its more profound aim is to move from the present with all its taken-for-granted beliefs about vision and experience and step by step, to move toward a radically different understanding of experience, one which has its roots in a phenomenology of auditory experience. (Don Ihde 2007: 15)

Amplified live breathing and prerecorded breath scores are used singularly and in combination to bring attention to the sounds of the corporeal performing body. This "auditory turn" does not seek to invert the sight/sound binary and elevate auditory experience, but rather it seeks to bring attention to the relationship between sight and sound (42). As Ihde argues, our sense of hearing is a relative experience that is embedded in a "global" experiential context:

I can focus on my listening and thus make the auditory dimension stand out. But it does so only relatively. I cannot isolate it from its situation, its embedment, its "background" of global experience. In this sense a "pure" auditory experience in phenomenology is impossible, but, as a focal dimension of global experience, a concentrated concern with listening is possible. (44)

The amplification of my breath aims to make the unheard heard in order to expose the dynamic play across the senses. As Ihde suggests: "Simple amplification brings

into perceptual experience, sounds which without amplification we could not hear” (2007: xv). Four of my seven works use live amplified breathing: *Breath of Air (MAP)*, *Breath of Air (Test Space)*, *Still Breathing*, and *Black Glove (Black Box)*. The other three works use prerecorded breath scores that amplify my breathing: *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, *Breath of Air (Rooftop)*, and *Black Glove (Black Box)*.¹⁵



Breath of Air (Rarotonga), performance documentation, July 2015
Video link: <https://vimeo.com/142564638>
Password: Rarotonga

¹⁵ For a description of the recording of my breath and the editing process see Appendix II.

Coherence and Incoherence

I performed “Breath of Air (Rarotonga)”, with a ten-minute prerecorded breath score, at Te Vara Nui village in Rarotonga, July 2015. I prerecorded the breath score at the AUT recording studio. I used Adobe Audition to gradually layer the sounds and add effects, such as delay and echo, to distort the sounds slightly. At first only a singular breath can be heard. Movement and sound cohere. The sound of the breath becomes layered so that there are multiple breathing sounds occurring simultaneously. There is a loss of coherence. An echo and delay is applied to the recorded breathing, which creates distorted and layered breathing sounds. Incoherence increases. The performance space in Rarotonga has two sound systems: one in the pavilion, and one where the audience is positioned. In order to utilize the venue’s potential for reverberation across the two spaces, the sound score is played louder in the pavilion than on the deck where the audience is seated. This intensifies the incoherence.

In *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* the movement shifts between being in and out of time with the prerecorded breath score. Consequently the performer’s movement and the sound score in *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* oscillate between coherence and incoherence. Layering, distortion, and reverberation are used in the sound score to emphasize this. Freya Vass-Rhee argues that an intermodal counterpoint between the sense of sight and sound can intensify perception: “intermodal counterpoint strategically intensifies performer and audience perception by choreographically merging the activities of sensing within and across modes” (2010: 406). The amplification technology enables a disruption of the notion of a coherent and autonomous body by heightening the spectator’s ability to hear unsynchronized sound.

Vass-Rhee argues that William Forsythe’s choreography reveals how it is possible to “disrupt the body’s coherence” and open up other perceptual understandings: “An intermodal approach to the study of perception and (inter)action (with)in the world interrogates the dichotomy between visual and auditory experience, fostering awareness of the connectedness of the senses” (2010: 410). Forsythe’s installation/performance *Heterotopia* (2006) exposes how the “visuo-sonic” exists in a dynamic relationship influencing each other simultaneously. *Heterotopia* is performed in a two-room space: the front space is an installation, and the backspace is a conventional black box theatre. Forsythe uses these two spaces simultaneously to create multiple centres of visual and sonic information that aim to fragment the spectator’s experience, and possibly overwhelm their senses. While my exploration of intermodal counterpoint differs from Forsythe, there is a similar intent to use it as an approach for fragmenting the spectator’s perceptual experience, and “fostering an awareness of the connectedness of the senses” (ibid).

By situating *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, and *Breath of Air (Rooftop)* in an outdoor environment, multiple centres of visual and sonic information are introduced that could create fragmentation and incoherence. This is in contrast to my studio performances where there is a single centre of visual action and limited ambient sound. Bill Viola’s *Pneuma* (1994/2009), is a work which foregrounds ambient sound while immersing the spectator in images that are projected into three corners of a darkened room. Because the spectator’s viewpoint is always partial, the viewer is cast into the role of active spectator who constructs a personal, embodied experience. Gene Youngblood discusses how Viola’s imagery and sound scores create a complex interplay between sight and sound: “As in music his compositional elements are cycles, dichotomies or harmonic opposites - foreground/background, time/timelessness, active space/empty space, sound/silence, stillness/motion. As in

music, silence and inactivity are as important as sound and activity” (n.d. 2). Like *Pneuma*, *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* and *Breath of Air (Rooftop)* both employ ambient sound in order to bring attention to background sounds. The intermodal relationship between the ambient sounds, environment, and performance creates multiple centres of visual and sonic information.

Black Glove (Black Box) seeks to “disrupt the body’s coherence” by complicating the play of relation between movement and sound. The movement not only shifts between being in and out of time with the prerecorded breath score, but also the movement shifts between being in and out of time with the live amplified breathing. The complex counterpointing between movement and sound seeks to disrupt the viewer’s perception, by directing the viewer towards contradiction rather than towards a stable meaning. This disruption forms a tension within the work, which may be unexpected and unexplainable from the audience’s perspective. Vass-Rhee (2010), citing the English literary scholar Hilda Hollis, contends: “The concept of counterpoint directs us to see contradiction rather than immanent meaning” (400). Vass-Rhee argues that counterpoint divides attention between perceptions: “Such views highlight how counterpoint divides attention between percepts and between differing means of parsing structure” (ibid). *Black Glove (Black Box)* seeks to complicate the spectator’s search for connections and a total meaning by exposing a paradoxical play of relation between the sense of sight and the sense of hearing.

Body and Technology



Still Breathing, performance documentation, August 2015
Video link: <https://vimeo.com/142568522>
Password: Breathing

I am lying supine and immobile on a raised plank like a sculpture. My body is corpselike and still while I breathe. My abdomen rises and falls with each breath. A radio microphone sits on my mouth and as I breathe the sound is amplified through two speakers into the gallery space.

In contrast to the above works, there is a direct relationship between the act of breathing, and the amplification of the breath in my work *Still Breathing*. *Still Breathing* seeks to decentre the modality of sight by drawing attention to a reciprocal relationship between the visible embodied self, and the invisible disembodied breath. Similarly *make it / disappear* (2015) by Sean Curham, explores a direct relationship between the sound of breathing, and the sight of the performance. In *make it / disappear* the viewer is part of a restricted group of ten people who are directed onto the stage to become both performer and spectator. They are invited to build their own seating as a team before being handed an individual microphone. Each microphone is hooked up to a separate light in the empty hall in front of them, and it is activated when the spectators/performers breathe into their microphone. Each breath simultaneously creates the sound score of the work, and the visual performance of the flickering lights. Like *Still Breathing*, *make it / disappear* seeks to draw attention to a reciprocal relationship between sight and sound. However unlike *Still Breathing*, *make it / disappear* is also decentring the modality of sight by dividing the attention of the spectator/performer. They are simultaneously spectators of the performance, and performing the spectacle.

Amplification technology allows the breath to be extended into space, and to be heard from afar in performance. This not only enables the audience to experience the sounds of breath as an extension of the body, but also to experience technology as an extension of the body. Ihde discusses the extension of the body through technology: “Contemporary science is experienced as embodied in and through instruments. Instruments are the ‘body’ that extends and transforms the perceptions of the users of the instruments [...] experienced through the embodying and extending instrument” (2007: 5). Amplification technology can provide another strategy for experiencing the sounds of the body that we are unable to hear normally, and may provoke the audience into being aware of a co-dependent relationship between our bodies and technology.

This chapter, *Breathing Body*, focuses on the way *Faceless Body in Performance* aims to resist the logocentric modalities of visibility and aurality. It argues that intermodal choreography is a means of resisting sanctioned systems of knowledge that privilege visual presence over embodied experience. An important element of this research is exploring the choreographic possibilities of foregrounding the sound of breath in counterpoint to the movement of the body in performance. This interrogation of perception across the senses aims to create an awareness of a dynamic relationship between visual and auditory experiences.



Breath of Air (Rarotonga), performance documentation, July 2015

Chapter III

Faceless Body

Chapter III brings the modality of visibility into question by exploring approaches for choreographing a dynamic relationship between visibility and invisibility, and their cognates, seen and unseen, presence and absence. It seeks to challenge the ocularcentric notion that the performer's body performs purely for optical viewing, and instead acknowledges the performer's body as a play of presence and absence. In the *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove* series I investigate ways to expose an ambiguous movement between visibility and invisibility. This chapter focuses on the way these works aim to create a performance in which the audience experiences a ceaseless, reciprocal play between the seen and unseen: "an effect of indefinite fluctuation between two possibilities" (Jacques Derrida 1981b: 225).¹⁶

Cocoon and Mummy

The choreographic investigation to expose an ambiguous movement between visibility and invisibility led to the process of developing a costume, which could allow the performer to oscillate between being seen and unseen.

I began to develop a costume in June, which could aid my investigation into the seen and unseen. I drew inspiration for the design from my experimentation with blue stretch fabric in my performances "Breath of Air (MAP)", and "Breath of Air (Test Space)". In a critique it was suggested that I approach the AUT Textile and Design Laboratory. The costume was made on a Whole Garment knitting machine (manufactured by Shima Seiki in Wakayama, Japan) that creates three dimensional, seamless, knitted garments. The knit is a loose weave, which when worn acts like a porous membrane where I can partially see out into the world and the world can partially see in. This costume was made for the performance "Breath of Air (Rarotonga)" and I continue to use this same costume for "Breath of Air (Rooftop)" and "Still Breathing".

When I perform "Breath of Air (Rarotonga)" at the cultural village of Te Vara Nui, Rarotonga, I take my time. Pausing and breathing I gradually move towards the open-air stage, a pavilion surrounded by water. I stand at my 'entrance' where I can only just be seen at the periphery, holding and sensing the surrounding space. From here I slowly make my way across the semi-detached raft, up the stairs and onto the main stage. The movements are slow and sustained as I continue to make my way to the end of the stage where my feet remain planted in one spot. My torso, hips and knees bend, sway, and undulate before I gradually reverse back towards the entrance. The movements slowly shift in energy and focus. There is a sense of a constant movement even in the pauses.

The sustained movements and costume in *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* could evoke a sense of a gradual metamorphosis, an image that could be read as both cocoon and

¹⁶ The interplay between presence and absence in performance art has been explored by many artists including Yoko Ono and Vito Acconci. They have both made works that have been foundational to "performance in the absence of the artist's body" (Cindy Baker 2014: 5). Ono's *Bag Piece* (1964) invites spectators to a crawl into a large black, human-size sack, and to perform the work while hiding within the bag. In *Seedbed* (1972) Acconci lies hidden under the floor of a gallery.

mummy. It is an ambiguous image, which is suspended between cocooned life and mummified death.¹⁷ The double folding motion between cocoon and mummy means that it is not possible to determine what it is one sees. This is a characteristic of the fold, which Derrida argues is irreducible to a single meaning: “the fold which, being neither one nor the other and both at once, undecidable, *remains* ... irreducible to either of its two senses” (original emphasis 1981b: 259). The sheath of the costume in combination with the movements allow for an ambiguity where I am neither one nor the other, and both at the same time. As a result the audience may experience a sense of undecidability about my body, which is partially obscured.



Breath of Air (Rarotonga), performance documentation, July 2015

Towards the end of the performance my left arm breaks through the sheath of the costume in a moment of sudden rupture.

The unexpected emergence of the arm aims to heighten the ambiguous double movement between cocoon and mummy, emergence and disappearance. Some observers suggested that this sudden appearance evoked a sense of disembodiment of the arm from the cocoon-body.¹⁸ As with all the *Breath of Air* performances, *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* seeks to provoke an awareness that embodiment and disembodiment, living and dying, are not separate processes, but are the condition of each other. Rina Arya writing about the videos of Bill Viola discusses life and death as being the condition of each other: “Dying is not viewed as a process that occurs at the end of life but is inherent within the very condition of living” (2013: 8).

There are resonances between the *Breath of Air* series and Angelika Festa’s performance *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* (1987). In Festa’s performance, her body is wrapped and suspended between two poles and her eyes are taped over.

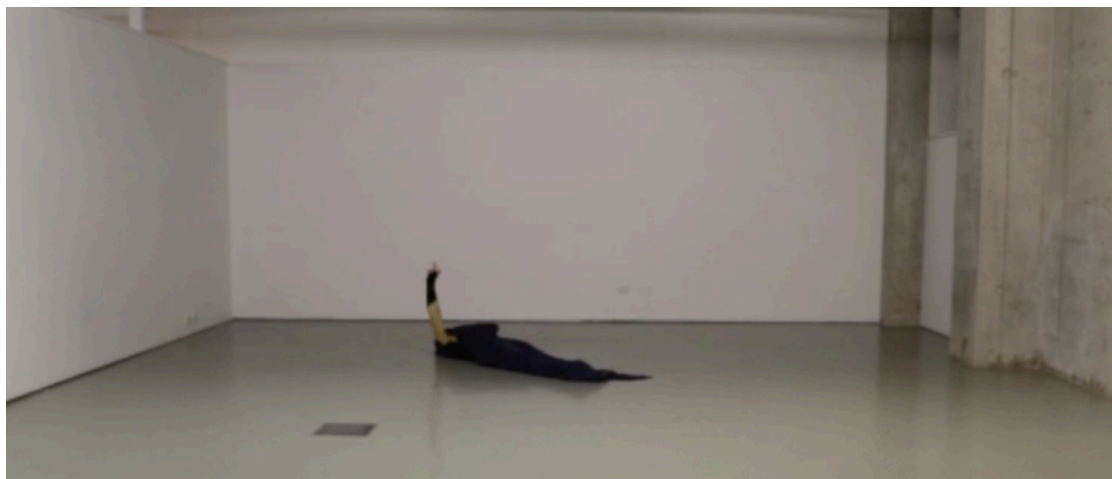
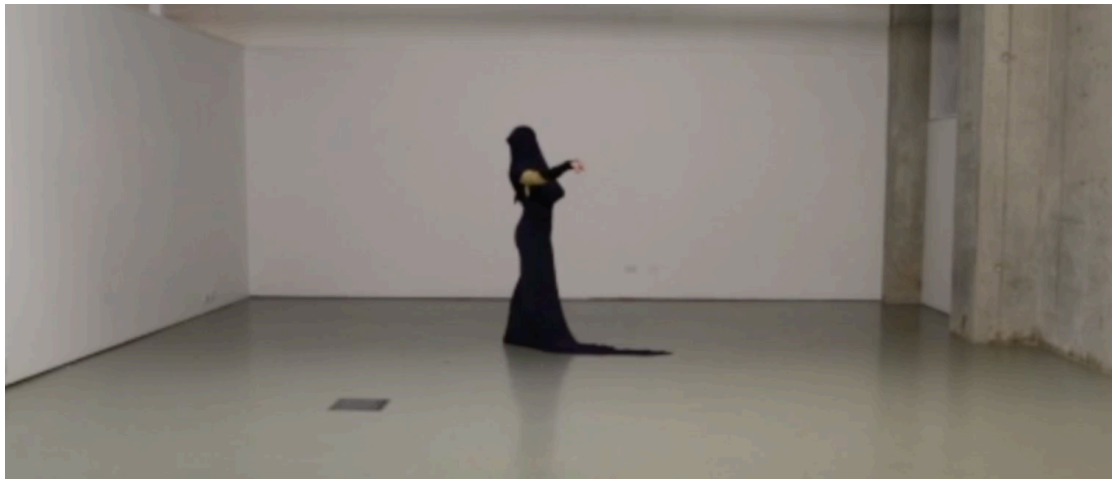
¹⁷ This paradoxical image was noted by an observer on June 2nd at the critique of *Breath of Air (Test Space)*: “The fabric also evoked a sense of both mummification and cocoon.”

¹⁸ This observation was made on June 2nd at the critique of *Breath of Air (Test Space)*.

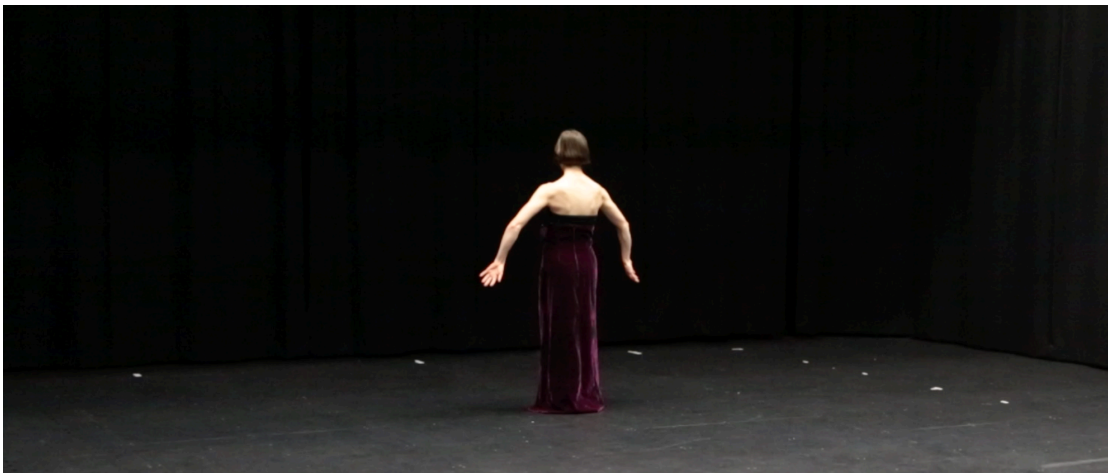
Festa's literal suspension between two poles emphasises how she is being held in an undecidable suspension between life and death, cocoon and mummy. Performance writer Peggy Phelan argues that this work evokes a paradoxical image:

The iconography of the performance is self-contradictory: each position is undermined by a succeeding one. Festa's wrapped body itself seems to evoke images of dead mummies and full cocoons. Reading the image one can say something like: the fecundity of the central image is an image of History-as-Death (the mummy) and Future-as-Unborn (the cocoon) (1993: 153-156).

In the *Breath of Air* series, and Festa's *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)* the suspension of meaning creates a ceaseless movement that prevents a stable identity from ever arriving.



Breath of Air (Test Space), performance documentation, June 2015



Black Glove (Black Box), performance documentation, June 2015

Throughout the nine-minute live performance of “Black Glove (Black Box)” I stand centre stage in one spot facing away from the audience. I gaze into the black curtains, which cover the back and side walls, and I breathe into a microphone that is attached to my chin. I am clothed in a strapless, purple gown with a black ‘boob tube’ underneath. The evening dress is oversized, and sinks below my chest line exposing my back to the audience. My head, arms and dress frame my back. My movements are slow and emergent; my back muscles and bone structure morph as my arms gradually rise up above my head, and come back down to the sides of my body. There are shifting tensions in my back muscles as the skin ripples over bone and muscle. The scapulae move over and across the rib cage like wings.

In *Black Glove (Black Box)* dorsality becomes the central focus of the work. This allows for a reconsideration of the other of the facial. The dorsal presentation of the body aims to disrupt the expectations of the viewer for a frontal performance. Briginshaw, citing André Lepecki, says that the refuting of the frontal convention subverts “the optical logic and location of spectatorship” (148).¹⁹ Similarly, Trisha Brown’s ten-minute solo work, *If You Couldn’t See Me* (1994), is performed with Brown’s back to the audience. Valerie A. Briginshaw describes how this work makes Brown’s fleshy back the centre of the performance: “Central to the piece is Brown’s back which is turned to the audience throughout [...] At times her back seems otherworldly taking on a life all of its own” (2001: 144). This insistence on the dorsal view of the body has the ability to contest ocularcentrism, which privileges the frontal orientation of the body in performance. Briginshaw states:

This focus on the back challenges the dominant single view-point that privileges the body’s front in performance and everyday life. It disrupts expectations and the logic of visualization, which normally objectifies the female dancing body. The body and its relationship to space are seen differently. (144)

The *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove* series seek to deny a reciprocal exchange of eye contact between audience and performer. Where the *Breath of Air* series uses a costume to cover my face and body, the *Black Glove* series uses the dorsal position of my body. In *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, and *Breath of Air (Rooftop)* this denial is emphasised further, by maintaining a profile presentation of my body to the audience throughout the performance. Baker argues that “the missing body” of the performer alters the relationship between the spectator and performer:

The artist who hides their body within the performance does not have the opportunity to be a witness to the work, but neither does the audience have an opportunity to witness the performance in a traditional way. The desire for mastery over that which is represented, which is created in the viewer through the process of looking, can best be resisted by denying the gaze. (7)

In the absence of that customary visual exchange, the spectator could be confronted with his/her own desire to be seen. As Phelan (1993) contends: “the desire to see always touches the desire to be seen. It is necessary then to speak of both the object of the gaze and the gaze of the object” (21). As already mentioned, Phelan analyzes the work of an artist Angelika Festa in a 1987 performance titled *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)*. In this work Festa is blindfolded by silver tape, which obscures her vision. This creates a similar discourse between the viewer and performer. Festa is unable to

¹⁹ See André Lepecki, “The Liberation of Space,” *Ballett International/TanzAkuel*, (February 1997):14-19.

see herself or the viewer, and as well the viewer is unable to see her eyes but instead can only gaze at her body. Phelan states: “To see is nothing if it is not replied to, confirmed by recourse of another image, and/or another’s eye” (18). This denial can draw the spectator’s attention towards her/himself accentuating an embodied relation of play between the performer and spectator.



Breath of Air (Rooftop), performance documentation, August 2015



Breath of Air (Rarotonga), performance documentation, August 2015

Breath of Air (Rarotonga) and *Breath of Air (Rooftop)* take place in an outdoor environment, which further complicates the relationship between the performer and spectator. *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* is situated in a constructed tropical garden of a cultural centre in a Rarotongan village, while *Breath of Air (Rooftop)* is situated on the inner city rooftop of the Spatial Design Building, AUT. In these works the hidden body seeks to dismantle boundaries between performer and audience by de-emphasising the performer, and allowing the spectator *and* the outdoor environment to be emphasised. The obscuring of the body allows myself as a performer to recede and almost disappear. This anonymity might divide the spectator's attention between her/himself and the performer, while at the same time the outdoor environment creates multiple centres of interest, which could divide the spectator's attention further. Baker states: "By de-emphasizing their own bodies, performance artists refocus attention away from themselves, privilege others' experiences, dismantle boundaries between performer and audience" (2014: 6). Because these performances place the hidden body in an outdoor environment, the audience may find that they are experiencing a perpetual flux between themselves, the performer, *and* the environment.

This chapter, *Faceless Body*, focuses on how the project aims to resist the logocentric modalities of visibility and invisibility. It seeks to find strategies to stage deconstructions that expose an embodied dynamic relationship in which presence is the condition of absence, and absence is the condition of presence. Derrida contends that there is no autonomous presence, but rather a double structure in which absence and presence are contingent on each other. Derrida refers to this double structure as trace: the "mark of the absence of a presence" (Spivak 1997: xvii). The absence of the hidden body, and the denial of the customary visual exchange are two ways in which the project seeks to expose this double structure of being neither seen nor unseen.



Black Glove (White Box), digital performance still, April 2015

Chapter IV

Moving Still

Chapter IV aims to explore choreographic procedures that bring the modalities of motion and stillness into question, and draw attention to the way binaries are gendered. Jacques Derrida argues that gendered binaries are not predetermined truths, and that recognising this challenges the notion that there is an “essence or truth of Woman”, and by implication an essence or truth of Man: “Such recognition should not make of either the truth value or femininity an object of knowledge (at stake are the norms of knowledge and knowledge as norm)” (1982: 69). In the *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove* series, I investigate approaches to destabilise gendered binaries by choreographing plays of relation. This chapter focuses on the way in which I choreograph ambiguous vacillations between stillness and motion, and how this might challenge the identification of eternal forms with masculinity, and temporal becoming with femininity.²⁰

Rest and Motion



Black Glove (White Box), digital performance still, April 2015
Video link: <https://vimeo.com/142566308>
Password: White Box

“Black Glove (White Studio)” is a two minute digital performance, filmed in the TV studio at Auckland University of Technology. It is the first iteration of the “Black Glove” series. A spotlight is directed centre upstage, so that a circle of light falls on both the floor and back wall. This light casts my shadow back into the circle of light. As with “Black Glove (Black Box)” I wear a long, ill-fitting, purple, velvet, strapless evening gown, as well as a floral sports bra. Again I remain centre stage in

²⁰ Refer to footnote 3 where Aristotle’s list of binaries equates male with rest and female with motion.

one spot, facing the wall with my back to the audience for the duration of the performance. The movements occur on a lateral plane, so that the arms and hips are moving from side to side rather than from front to back. My palms face outwards; they are relaxed while the arms hold the tension. The movements sustain an even tempo in the beginning. As my arms begin to rise and fall the arm movements become more robotic and mechanical. There is a rupture towards the end of the performance when I reveal a roll-on deodorant bottle. I run this bottle up and down the length of both arms in a flowing motion created by lateral body ripples. In the long shots of the performance the movements of my arms are echoed by the shadow of my arms in the spotlight. My body conceals most of the shadow so that only the shadow of the arms can be seen.

The *Black Glove* series draws on the image of a cabaret singer, a solo performer in the spotlight of a jazz lounge, who would be dressed in a radiant gown and performing for an audience of lounge lizards. The works seek to disrupt the objectification of the female in several ways. As discussed in Chapter III, these performances deny the audience a frontal view of the performer. The view of the back is usually used to titillate the audience, however by never turning around the performer endlessly defers the gaze. The refusal to conform to the ideal image of a cabaret singer is further reinforced by the performer wearing an ill-fitting garment, which falls below the chest line. The garment allows my body to sit inside a ‘container’, which creates the effect of two separate but related entities. This allows the garment and the body to appear as if they have a life of their own but are also connected. They move with and against each other in a double gesture. A further disruption occurs in the digital performance, *Black Glove (White Studio)*, when the performer rolls deodorant along the length of both arms. This sudden shift brings attention to the performer’s corporeality into an uncertain suspension with the cabaret ideal.

Black Glove (White Studio) can be further elucidated in relation to Trisha Brown’s performance, *If You Couldn’t See Me*. Brown performs her work in a “fluid style, with its sways and undulations of the torso, and swings, bends, lunges and rotations of limbs” (Briginshaw 2001: 153). Briginshaw interprets her performance as overflowing the boundaries of the body and unsettling the Western philosophical notion of a contained, stable essence. Unlike Brown in *Black Glove (White Studio)* my feet remain stationary, while my arms and hips move from side to side. This choreographic decision is aimed at creating a contradiction between stillness and fluidity where both are held in suspension. Andre Lepecki discusses how “still-acts” can create a suspension that is neither active nor passive: “Thus, while the still-act does not entail rigidity or morbidity it requires a performance of suspension, a corporeally based interruption of modes of imposing flow” (2012: 15). In this way my work seeks to question the gendering of motion and stillness, fluidity and containment where the masculine is aligned with eternal forms and the female is aligned with temporal becoming. I am neither the gendered fluidity of the feminine nor the gendered containment of the masculine. From this perspective *Black Glove (White Studio)* could be viewed as putting gender identity into question by drawing attention to an undecidable ambiguity between stillness and movement. Briginshaw, citing Gilles Deleuze, observes how movement can be disturbing because it undermines a sense of permanence: “there’s nothing more unsettling than the continual movement of something that seems fixed” (2001: 147).²¹

²¹ Deleuze introduces a new framework that contributes to an understanding of the undecidability of deconstruction. See Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 157.



Still Breathing, performance documentation, August 2015

In “Still Breathing” I am lying supine on a shiny, enamel painted, navy blue plank of wood, which is the size of a door. The timber slab is balanced on four clear plastic boxes. This enables the plank to appear as if it could be suspended in the air. I lie on the wooden slab for one and a half hours at a time. I keep my body incredibly still so that the only movement is the rise and fall of my abdomen. I amplify my breathing through a radio microphone that rests on my mouth during the performance. The sound is directed into the gallery space through two speakers that are on the floor.

Still Breathing suspends itself between movement and stillness. Embedded in the title of this work is a paradoxical play of words. *Still Breathing* refers both to the morbid stillness of my body, and to the constant movement of my living breath. This subtle movement of breath is visible in the rise and fall of the abdomen, and this is

reinforced through the sound of my amplified breathing. Lepecki discusses how stillness in performance has the potential to refigure and interrupt historical flows, and reveals the possibility of one's agency within controlling regimes. He writes: "the insertion of stillness in dance, the deployment of different ways of slowing down movement and time, are particularly powerful propositions for other modes of rethinking action and mobility through the performance of still-acts, rather than continuous movement" (2012: 15). *Still Breathing* has the potential to draw attention to the historical gendering of movement and stillness, by opening up space to consider their codependence. Lepecki, citing C. Nadia Seremetakis, emphasises how the still-act disturbs the "historical dust" under which the secondary value of motion has been "buried", and exposes its supplementary, "life-supporting" relationship with stillness:

[T]here is a stillness in the material culture of historicity; those things, spaces, gestures, and tales that signify the perceptual capacity for elemental historical creation. *Stillness* is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from historical dust.²² (Lepecki 2012: 15).

Identity and Non-identity

There are implications for the spectator/performer relationship when the *Black Glove* series, and the *Breath of Air* series hide the performer's identity from the viewer's gaze. The artist who hides her/his body within the performance does not have the opportunity to witness the audience, but neither does the audience have an opportunity to witness the performer in a traditional way. The full or partial removal of the performer's identity in performance displaces the performer centrality in the performance, and in doing so allows the performer to resist the gendered classification system. Performance theorist Cindy Baker comments:

Re-centering where the art resides takes the spotlight off of the object or the body and shines a light on the margins. Denying the artist's centrality as the locus of the performance rejects the rarified position of the artist, hiding one body in order to substitute others' bodies, knowledge and expertise in their place. (2014: 6)

The hiding of the body in the *Breath of Air* series allows the performer to resist objectification by the controlling power of the spectatorial gaze, and the dominant view. This is reinforced by an observation of *Breath of Air (Rooftop)*, which proposed that the choice of costume and colour worked well in the landscape because it allowed the performer to be part of the environment rather than be a dominant other. Yoko Ono in an interview on her work *Bag Piece* describes how hiding the body can resist classification in many ways. She comments: "By being a bag you show the other side of you, which is nothing to do with race, nothing to do with sex, nothing to do with age actually. Then you become just a spirit or soul and you can talk soul to soul" (2015). Ono is contending that this strategy can give voice to people within

²² See C. Nadia Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory," in *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, ed. C. Nadia Seremetakis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12.

marginalized groups, including those whose race, gender, or sexuality differ from the dominant culture.

This chapter, *Still Moving*, focuses on how the potential destabilisation of binaries could have implications for the modalities of femininity and masculinity. By focusing on the simultaneity of motion and stillness the performances emphasise an interface where gender identities could be redefined: “In these in-between spaces bodies are no longer seen as containers with separate insides and outsides, bodies and souls, but as fluid transformative entities disrupting hierarchical binaries bound up with masculine ideas of a Cartesian subject” (Briginshaw 2001: 161). In my performances, the hidden body aims to create an opportunity for the viewer to experience an alternative relationship to the performance physically, conceptually, or symbolically, by enabling the viewer to “resist the dominant narrative” (Baker 2014: 6).



Still Breathing, performance documentation, August 2015

Conclusion

Faceless Body in Performance contributes to the debates and practices that explore approaches for choreographing intermodal plays of relation within and across the bodily senses and technology. Two series of solo performances, *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove*, focus on experimenting with procedures for decentring the modalities of visibility, invisibility, aurality, stillness, and motion with the aim of destabilising binaries, and opening up insights into gender identity.

Jacques Derrida says of the process of deconstruction that it does not constitute a method, but rather that it consists of strategies of deconstruction. Similarly, my choreography is not a set of techniques that constitute a methodology, but rather I employ strategies to unsettle binaries and expose embodiment as relational. My choreographic exploration includes experimenting with sound, costuming, technology, lighting, movement, body orientation, and environments (inclusive of indoor and outdoor sites, and event venues).

I found that foregrounding bodily sound through the procedures of amplified live breathing, prerecorded breath scores, and ambient sound could unsettle the modality of visibility by bringing it into play with aurality. As well I found that foregrounding the hidden body through dorsality and costuming could unsettle the modality of visibility by bringing it into play with invisibility. Furthermore I discovered that foregrounding the still and slow body could unsettle the modality of motion by bringing it onto play with motionlessness. I also found that this could disrupt the identification of motion with femininity and emergence. Finally I discovered that a variety of environments such as black box theatre, indoor studios, indoor galleries, a constructed garden, and an urban rooftop could contribute to the unsettling various modalities, and the gender identities associated with them. These explorations open up possibilities for further research into alternative environments, group performances, and experimenting with different variations on the procedures that have been explored in the project.

Faceless Body in Performance suspends the fixed position of normative binaries in order to expose how the senses and genders are the condition of each other. This undecidability means that there is no dominant narrative, and no final judgment. At the same time however, this deferring of meaning opens up a space for bringing repressed modalities to the foreground.

Coda: Exhibition

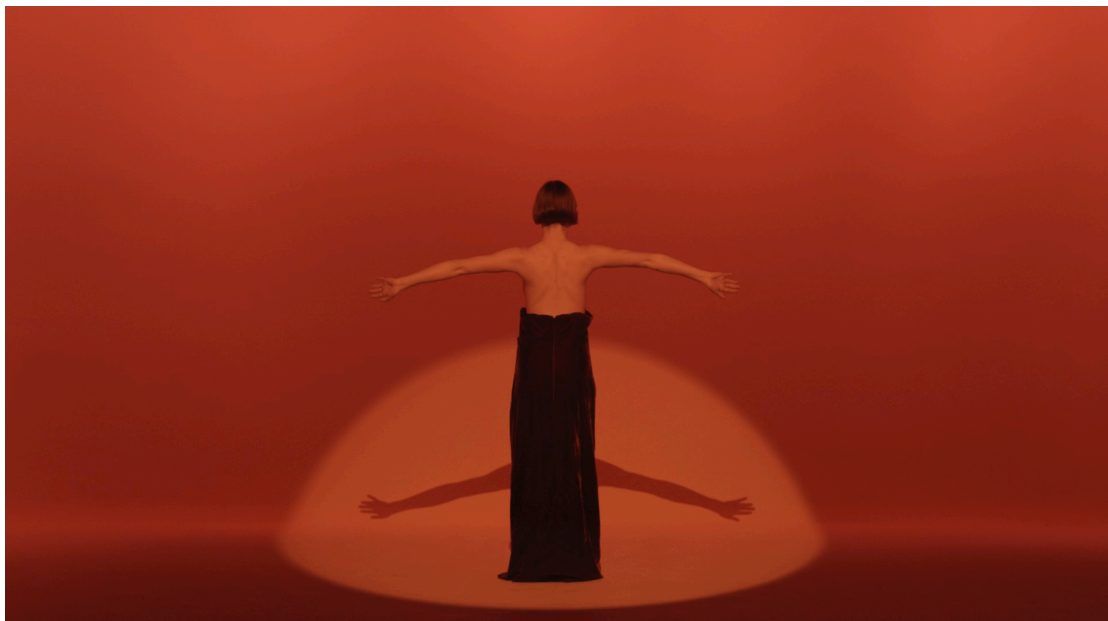
The exhibition for my Master of Performance and Media Arts, November 2015, consisted of the final iterations for the two series, *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove*. During the course of my research I performed seven iterations, which are part of a complex web of solo performances. As a result there is no 'final' performance that can contain all the subtle differences between each of the performances, and be a summation of my research. The three performances for the exhibition are titled *Antumbra*, *Still Life*, and *Breath of Air (Overbridge)*. They are part of an ongoing research project to be considered holistically. *Antumbra* is a digital performance, which is the third iteration of the *Black Glove* series. *Still Life* and *Breath of Air (Overbridge)* are live performances, which are the seventh and eighth iterations of the *Breath of Air* series.

Antumbra was exhibited in the foyer of St Paul St Gallery as part of the AD15: Art & Design Graduate Shows. *Antumbra* seeks to disrupt the modalities of stillness, motion, visibility and invisibility. A breath score accompanies the video. There is a shift in focus towards highlighting the modalities of light and darkness, which are also present in the digital performance *Black Glove (White Box)*. Lighting is used to cast shadows in order to unsettle the modalities of visibility and invisibility. The synchronized movement of the fleshy arms, and the shadowed arms could evoke a play of presence and absence, life and death. This paradoxical play is embedded in the title of the series, *Black Glove*, which refers to the way my hands are simultaneously 'gloved' and 'ungloved', seen and unseen, when they are enveloped by shadow. *Antumbra* could also evoke an uncertain suspension between transcendent and corporeal identities. The upraised arms could connote the transcendent, classical ballet, fifth position where both arms are extended above the head, while the slowly rising arms could evoke a prayerful posture. The ill-fitting backless gown may connote a titillating cabaret singer, while the baring of flesh may evoke corporeality. This work was exhibited at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, September 2015, and was produced in collaboration with Solomon Mortimer.

Still Life was performed in the foyer of St Paul St Gallery with live amplified breathing. *Still Life* seeks to disrupt the modalities of stillness, motion, visibility, invisibility, and aurality. There is an emphasis on the modality of verticality, in contrast to the horizontality of *Still Breathing*. Again the title is a paradox suggesting a spectral presence that evokes an indeterminate vacillation between stillness and motion, life and death. The verticality and elevated height of the work could suggest visionary transcendence, while the all-enveloping costume could suggest blind mortality. *Still Life* might also evoke an undecidable ambiguity between sculptural and human identities, and a feeling of suspension between eternal stillness and spatio-temporal action. There was an iteration of this work, *Breath of Air (Rooftop II)*, in AD15: Art & Design Graduate Shows. This was the sixth iteration of the *Breath of Air* series, and was performed on Level 5 of the AUT WW Spatial Design building where *Breath of Air (Rooftop)* was performed.

Breath of Air (Overbridge) was performed on the Wellesley Street Overbridge, which spans the road between Albert Park and Wellesley Street footpath. *Breath of Air (Overbridge)* seeks to disrupt the modalities of visibility, invisibility and aurality. I

breathed into a radio microphone while moving from the Albert Park side of the overbridge to its centre. The audience listened to the live breath through earpieces. The ambient sounds of the surrounding environment were heard simultaneously with the live breath of the performer. The intermodal relationship between the ambient sounds, my breath, the environment, and my performance created multiple centres of visual and sonic information, which aimed to evoke an undecidable oscillation between coherence and incoherence.



Antumbra, digital performance still, November 2015



Still Life, performance documentation, November 2015



Still Life, performance documentation, November 2015



Breath of Air (Rooftop II), performance documentation, October 2015



Breath of Air (Overbridge) performance documentation, November 2015



Breath of Air (Overbridge) performance documentation, November 2015

Appendix I

MAP Research Process

I was invited to become a resident artist for Movement Art Practice: Research Series for Individual Choreographers, April-May 2015. The weekly reflections below are part of the research process, which were shared with the performance dance community. My research into the relationship between breathing and movement was extended into my research project at Auckland University of Technology.

Aim:

My research is directed towards staging deconstructions within a dance/performance context. This opens up a broad field of inquiry that is the context for my Master of Performance and Media Arts, which I am currently undertaking at AUT. Deconstruction strategies seek to expose how classical Euro-Western thinking uses oppositional binaries in order to privilege a dominant value at the expense of another. The process of deconstruction aims to show how prior to language, both values are in a dynamic relationship of play, and that it is culture that constructs a language based on static hierarchies. In my research, I am exploring how the mind has been privileged over the body, and I wish to find ways to expose the dynamic relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness, absence and presence. I am acknowledging that both values of a binary are as important as each other, and I am not interested in privileging one more than the other. My focus is to open up a space where both values will be in play, in performance.

MAP Reflections: Weeks I and II, 22 & 29 April 2015

My focus for this research series is the dynamic relationship between breathing and movement. This investigation has been sparked by an article by David Abram (1990), "The Perceptual Implications of Gaia" in *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, edited by Allan Hunt Badiner, and published by Parallax Press.

In this article, Abram discusses the Gaia hypothesis, as formulated by James Lovelock, which states:

The entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts. (1)

This hypothesis engages with the notion that all living matter on earth is interconnected.

Breathing entails a reciprocal exchange between our environment and our bodies, and it is a reminder that our relationship to the world is part of a dynamic ecosystem.

Breathing is the constant, ongoing communication between the organism that we are, and the living world that we are in. I have been experimenting with different ways in which a performer can engage with their breathing while performing solo, in pairs and as a group.

The studio research tasks include:

1. Noticing and being present with your breathing without judgment or trying to control it. Then moving while being present with your breathing.
2. Watching another breathing at close range and from afar.
3. Moving with another while being present with your own breathing and the other person's breathing. Allowing yourself to move if your body wishes to do so.
4. Controlling your breathing patterns. Moving however you wish to do so.
5. Controlling your breathing with another while being conscious of your own breathing and theirs.
6. Choosing to either control or let your breathing be while performing solo, with others, or in a group.
7. Overt, performative breathing while moving to pop songs.
8. Seeing the difference between breathing and moving, not breathing and moving; pretending to breath but not actually breathing and moving.
9. Moving to a prerecorded breath score.

NB Throughout this practice, breathing led the movement, and not the other way around. I was thinking about the body following its own story and taking care of itself as I/others concentrated on breathing.

Some thoughts and reflections:

Because the abovementioned tasks were undertaken on one's own, in pairs and as a group, I was able to observe and experience different energies and ways of approaching the tasks. This allowed me to gain different perspectives.

When I was controlling my breath with one other person it felt performative and external while still aiming to retain a conscious presence with the self and other. There was difficulty in being with your own breath and being with another's breath because of the dynamics that occur within a relationship. If one moves then you may want to react to this movement in response, and allow that shift to occur. This requires more practice as it can take a lot of concentration just to be with your own breathing and with another's, let alone moving with another in this state.

When I was observing the group situation, the way in which they approached controlling the breathing was subtle and only occasionally 'showed' the breath. The group was able to maintain a strong connection whether they were close to or far from each other. They began to utilize other senses besides the breath, in order to stay connected when they could not see or hear the other performers breathing. Being able to choose when you control your breathing and when you let your breathing be, enabled more dynamics within the improvisation.

I am interested in combining the somatic breathing state with the controlled breathing state further. Next week I am curious to create some new tasks, which are more specific and allow for both non-controlled and controlled ways of breathing to

occur while moving.

MAP Reflections: Week III, 6 May 2015

My research has continued to explore the relationship between breathing and moving, and the play between controlled breathing and automatic breathing.

This week I placed the research tasks within a sci-fi framework to create an imaginary context for this exploration. I have also been experimenting with different levels of focused awareness while ‘performing’, in order to discover how this affects the audience. Moreover, I am extending my research by exploring the effect of breathing into the limbs. This exploration has in part resulted from attending two workshops with Iratxe Ansa who was running them for Atamira Dance Company last week. One of the tools that she uses to create different qualities within her body is to associate a sound with a certain movement. I wish to explore this technique more next week. I am shifting the premise slightly by exploring how breathing into the limbs can affect the quality of a movement, rather than using sound for this purpose. As well, I have been doing further research into phenomenology in order to become more skilled at using this methodology as a research tool.

I discovered that placing the research tasks within a sci-fi context created different movement energies. However, I think that I need to make the framework even tighter and more specific in order to create more intention within the improvisation. Each person took on ‘alien’ movement qualities, however I felt that the task was still too broad and the reasons for the movement were not specific enough (the participants created their own individual imagery within the sci-fi construct of how they were in the space, or how the foreign space affected the way they could exist/be in the space). I am interested in narrowing the tasks down even more in order to create a reason for moving in a specific way, rather than having the participants create an image of how they think a creature in a sci-fi world would move. I would like to invert the process, and explore some movement tasks before experimenting with these movement states in the sci-fi context, to see if this is more effective.

We discussed the different levels in which the performer can be present while moving in the space. We did a range of tasks and variations such as holding an awareness of the room, of each other, and the breath while moving. This required a lot of concentration on the part of the performer, and created an awareness of both the outside and the inside. This state feels as though it requires a lot of practice to be able to hold it. We also explored the difference between focused movements and unfocused movements, and observed the differences. The unfocused movements had the effect of looking like a disengaged image. While the performers appeared to represent the thing, they weren’t actually being it. We found difficulty in being able to actively switch between being present with the movement, and being unfocused while doing the movement.

I have been reading *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology* by Susan Kozel (2007) who is a choreographer, performer, and academic. She uses phenomenology as a method for her choreographic and performance practice, and has created her own personal variation of this methodology. Kozel (2007) states: “A phenomenology begins with a set of concepts and a set of starting points that are fundamentally akin

to dance, theater, performance and other dynamic processes for expression” (50). This statement not only reinforces how dance is able to do the things that I am exploring, but it also highlights the purpose of exploring breathing and connectivity. Within this phenomenological framework, Kozel discusses how phenomenological methodology can be useful: firstly, it can help the performer to embody their senses; and secondly, this embodiment of the senses can affect the audience. I am interested in how drawing attention to your own senses and way of being in the space as a performer, can affect the audience. Phenomenology allows for the engagement with the “raw sensory data received immediately from the senses, as well as memories and imaginative constructs” (52). So far we have been exploring the senses through breathing and ways of being as a performer, and I will continue to extend this exploration.

The tasks that we have been exploring during the sessions feel very much like a meditation practice at times. Kozel (2007) makes an analogy between the practice of phenomenology and the practice of meditation, with the difference being: “it [meditation] is about creating a new way for cognition to coexist with inner and outer experience” (51). This feels akin to the breathing and presencing exercises that we have been playing with, but it requires further practice in order to be able to fully develop this new “cognition”.

Reflections are an important part of the phenomenological method, and they can be a written, drawn, or vocal account of what has occurred. The aim is to help the performer give expression to their experience, and validate what is happening in that time of practice. The MAP requirement for reflections reinforces Kozel’s (2007) assertion that an investigation requires “a means for expression and validation within a community” (52). I have found these reflections beneficial for processing and articulating the research.

MAP Reflections: Week IV, 13 May

I am using this opportunity with MAP to undertake research for my Master of Performance and Media Arts, and as a result I have adopted a phenomenological methodology. It has influenced the ideas that I am researching and how I am processing them.

I have been researching breathing and movement in depth because it opens up an avenue for exploring the connectivity between people, as well as the connectivity between animate and inanimate things in the world. The research is highlighting the reciprocal exchange that occurs between the inside and the outside, and the subtle ways in which this impacts on a performer’s movement. This week I worked towards making the tasks more specific in order to extend my phenomenological exploration of the relationship between breathing bodies and their movements, at both a solo and a group level.

We began the session by exploring different ways in which we can control the breath. Firstly, we moved through a few ways of controlling the breath: fast, slow, uneven, even, stopping and starting. Even though this task had a direct instruction it opened up many other possibilities and variables, such as the relationship between how the air is entering the body and where the breath is focused within the body, for example if it goes into the throat, chest, or abdomen. Another variable is whether you allow

the breath to become an exaggerated or restricted movement, or whether it remains an automatic movement.

The first task was to breath into different parts of your body. Again, this task could be approached from two perspectives: imagining different parts of your body breathing, or breathing into a body part. After discussing this task within the group we tried a few other ways of approaching the task such as:

- the body expanding on the inhale and shrinking on the exhale, and vice versa
- fast breathing with slow movements
- slow breathing with fast movements
- imagining a body part was breathing and see how long you could hold the breathing body part while moving until you lost it, and then waiting until you could connect/find the breathing in a different body part

From here we experimented with breathing for another person while they were moving. This task is similar to an exercise where you make sound effects for someone else's movement. The premise is to breath for the mover as you think they would be breathing. In discussion, the mover felt as though they had a lot of agency as if they had manipulated the breather's breath. The breather however, could choose what they were following in the mover's body. I also experimented with breathing against the mover's movement to explore the effect. We also tried this task as a group with multiple breathers and one mover. Firstly, the breathers breathed off the mover, and then the mover moved off the breath. The next stage of this could be swapping the leader within the improvisation to work towards both working together.

This research has been exploring different ways of breathing, and the ways in which the breath can connect to movement and have an effect on the movement.

Choreographed movement has not been a relevant aspect of the research, and I have not put any emphasis on choreographing a performance as such. This is because there is no particular reason why you would or would not move in a certain way within these tasks. However, I think that this research has relevance in a performance setting, and that it could be used to help develop choreographed movement. While breath is only one aspect among many that needs to be considered in a performance, it has been very valuable to have this opportunity to explore it.

MAP Reflections: Week V, 20 May

This week we began with re-exploring the different ways of breathing that we experimented with during the previous session, in order to reconnect to the tasks. This included expanding movement on the exhale, and retracting movement on the inhale and vice versa; fast breathing with slow movement, and slow breathing with fast movement. Issues which arose as a result of these tasks included whether you are controlling the breath, or whether the breath is controlling you; the emotive feelings that come up when breathing in certain ways; and whether the performer is going for the 'obvious' choices during the task, or going against the 'obvious' choices.

I feel that through controlling the breath there is the possibility to separate the movement from the breath so that there is a counterpoint between what is seen and what is heard. At times there is a play between the breathing being out of time with the body's movement, and the breathing being in time to the body's movement. I am interested in hearing the breath while the performer is moving so that the task that

they are working with is clear, and can be observed by the viewer. Through more investigation and play this may become unnecessary, but at this point in time I find it interesting for the task to be visible.

The next task was to create a movement phrase based on one of the breathing tasks above. The aim was to draw more attention to the movement itself. After the phrase was made I gave the performers a task for altering the movements. I found this more interesting to engage with in terms of creating movement. This was followed by two improvisations based on the phrase. In the first improvisation we tried altering the breathing patterns with/against the movements. This brought up whether it is necessary to hear the breath and make the connection obvious, or whether it is a subtle aspect where the connection does not have to be obvious. I am thinking that the answer to this may be in the intention of what the material will be used for. The task is only obvious when you can hear the breath otherwise it is difficult to know what the performer is working with and why they are moving in certain ways. Some performers tried to steer away from what they perceived as being the obvious choice during the improvisation. I find this an interesting thought as this occasionally arises in the creation of movement. That is, the choice to go into your habits, or the choice to steer away from your habits. I see this as being similar to actively deciding to go towards the obvious choice or steering away from it.

In the second improvisation the group improvised on their phrase thinking about the breath as an emotive force. This created difficulties for the performers and brought up several questions such as: Where is the emotion initiated from? The breath or the movement? Is it the breath or the movement leading the choices? Can it be both? Do the performers need an emotion to work on from the outset, or can the emotion emerge out of the task? We talked about the breath being an inherent part of dance and how breath and sound are used within a teaching context to help describe the movement and give a feeling of timing and sensation to the movement.

We also revisited another task from the previous session, which was breathing for a performer's improvisation:

- fast breathing for a performer
- slow breathing for a performer

This task was satisfying to observe as the task was very clear. The performer improvised to the breath and used the sound, the speed (whether to go with or counterpoint) and the direction of the sound, as the motivation to move. The movement language itself was not directed.

This research has opened up an investigation into using breath as the instigation of movement. It is most definitely possible to create movement with breath. However, the movement language itself comes from the individual dancer's history of movement, rather than the breath creating its own movement language. I think that breath is a useful device, which can be easily applied to an established vocabulary in order to manipulate it and extend it. The tasks have been able to produce an interesting and connected energy within the room when you are either performing a task, or observing a group of people perform a task.

Appendix II

Project Research Process

As discussed in the Introduction, my project consists of two series of works: *Breath of Air* and *Black Glove*. The *Breath of Air* series consists of five iterations: *Breath of Air (MAP)*, *Breath of Air (Test Space)*, *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, *Breath of Air (Rooftop)*, and *Still Breathing*. *Black Glove* consists of two iterations: *Black Glove (White Space)* and *Black Glove (Black Box)*. While *Black Glove (White Space)* is a digital performance, the remaining iterations are live performances.

Black Glove (White Box): Critique, AUT, 20 April

Black Glove (White Box) is the first performance I presented for a critique as part of my Master's research. It consisted of a live performance followed by a digital performance. I used two soundtracks: *Heartland Feelings* by Beck for the live performance, and *Ghost Song* by Air for the digital performance. In the live performance I began by sitting with the audience and looking towards the wall where the video would play. When the music started I began to click in time to the music. I gradually began to stand up while continuing to click. This evolved into a standing clicking dance, which moved within a selected space with different variations of clicking. It was precise in its movements, and built an internal rhythm that the whole body responded to. I did not look directly at anyone although my gaze was directed outwards in several different directions. As the music faded I moved to the side of the room and the video started to play. The digital performance was dramatic and theatre-like in its content, and was energetically in opposition to the live performance. The digital performance was a solo dance, which was performed with my back to the audience. I was in a full length, backless, evening gown, and towards the end of the performance I unexpectedly started rolling deodorant up and down my arms.

The audience found my performance unpredictable, in that it was different from what they had anticipated because of the set up. They had expected to watch a digital performance, rather than a live performance. My sitting beside the audience doing 'odd' movements made some of the audience feel uncomfortable in the first section. They noted that the movements went alongside rather than to the music. This is because I am not 'representing' the music as such, but using counterpoint to create an alternative, interior world while the music was playing. The aim was to create a more intimate experience by letting the audience watch a personal experience. Also, I remained in my everyday clothes to reinforce this. By not putting on another costume or persona I created a more intimate, personal experience.

The audience found that starting with the live performance shifted their relationship to the digital performance section – it drew them in more. One viewer thought that I could have sat back down with the audience while the digital performance was being played. It was suggested that this would have created a strange relationship between me and the digital performance, that is between the back of the 'real' me and the 'projected' me. It was also suggested that this would have reconnected me to the

audience in a very direct way. Starting with the live performance also softened the transition into the digital performance, and as a result the digital performance became more effective. However, more thought needed to be put into how the audience experiences the end of the performance, that is how to softly bring the audience out of the performance rather than abruptly finishing it. The idea of the audience being 'voyeurs' was raised, and I am interested in how the relationship between the audience being voyeurs, and being with the performer can be played with during the performance. I think that being part of the audience is one way that this can be done, and I would like to experiment with this more.

Breath of Air (MAP): Open Research Performance, MAP, 29 May 2015

My research into the relationship between movement, sound and breath first developed during my workshops in the Movement Art Practice Research Series. During the five-week research period I experimented with different ways of exploring the relationship between breathing and moving. I began to experiment with the idea of the breath being not only a way to connect to movement, but also as an amplified sound score for movement. I experimented with this in two ways. Firstly I recorded breathing sounds to create a breath score, and secondly I used a radio microphone to amplify my live breathing. Refer to Appendix I for a discussion of the Movement Art Practice research process.

I performed *Breath of Air (MAP)* at the end of the Movement Art Practice Series for the Open Research Performance. During the performance I used amplified breathing simultaneously with a soundtrack: first with *Biological by Air*, and then with *La Tristesse De Laura* by Patrick Juvet. To amplify my breathing I used a radio lapel microphone. In order to hold the lapel microphone to my mouth I wore a neck warmer, which I clipped into my hair in order to keep it above my mouth. This makeshift costume construction gave the work sci-fi connotations that were emphasized by the amplification of my breathing. I wore tight-fitting exercise gear, black leggings, and a black zip-up jacket that has a gold zigzag on the front. This costume added to the sci-fi fantasy I was experimenting with. Another element of this work was a large piece of navy blue, stretch fabric. Lycra has a long history in modern dance and I was curious to see how I could use it to find ways to wrap up my body. Half way through the performance I created a cocoon/mummy image by wrapping up my entire body. I allowed one of my arms to escape creating a puncture in the work, which disrupts the image. During the performance I was aware of the connection and disconnection between my movements and my breath. There was a play between connecting the amplified breathing and movements clearly, and also disconnecting them.

Breath of Air (Test Space): Critique, AUT, 2 June

I performed a second iteration of the *Breath of Air* series a week later for an AUT critique. The movement sections for *Breath of Air (Test Space)* remained the same as the performance of *Breath of Air (MAP)*. However, I made some changes to the sound score. In the first section of this iteration I began with amplified live breathing, but in the second section there was amplified breathing at the same time as the soundtrack *La Tristesse De Laura* by Patrick Juvet. To amplify my breathing I used a radio lapel microphone. The receiver was plugged into two small speakers.

A few of the responses from the critique commented on the way the *La Tristesse De Laura* soundtrack took them out of the experience of the breathing. This posed questions about my music choices, and my rationale behind them. However, one viewer described the playing of the music simultaneously with the amplified breathing as being like counterpoint, and that it resisted the ‘beauty’ of the music. This comment reinforced my investigation into using counterpoint as a strategy for manipulating the response of the audience. In this work there was counterpoint between two types of sound, and between the movement and sound. There was a suggestion to investigate how I could amplify and distort my breath in other ways. As a result of this critique I decided to research this further.

With regard to the blue fabric, it was seen as a framing of the body, which was very pool-like. It reminded one viewer of a Bill Viola art video where a body is submerged in water. The fabric also evoked a sense of both mummy and cocoon for one viewer. It was also suggested that the process of wrapping myself in fabric was like a reverse metamorphosis. A discussion opened up on whether there were alternative costume options that I could investigate with the AUT Textile and Design Laboratory for this performance. As a result of this critique I contacted Mandy Smith at the AUT Textile and Design Laboratory to begin a conversation about a digitally produced seamless, knitted costume. I also began to investigate different procedures in which I could amplify and record my breathing, and investigate Viola’s video art.

Black Glove (Black Box): Critique, AUT, 8 June

For the next critique, I performed *Black Glove (Black Box)* at the AUT Black Box performance space, WG201. This work arose out of my research into the combination of breath, movement and sound technology, and out of the digital performance *Black Glove (White Space)*. As with *Black Glove (White Space)*, I performed with my back to the audience, however in this iteration I changed the movement and I didn’t use a ‘found’ soundtrack. Instead I combined my movement with the simultaneous playing of my live amplified breathing, and a prerecorded breath score. For this performance I wore an oversized, purple, velvet dress and stood facing the back wall of the performance space. This allowed my back to become the front for the viewer. For the sound component of the work I used the lapel radio microphone to amplify my live breathing. For the prerecorded sound score I recorded my breathing through a zoom microphone, and manipulated and created a sound score using Adobe Audition. I attached the microphone lapel to my chin with tape so that the microphone could amplify my breathing and both of my arms would be free to move. The work was nine minutes long. The movement was slow and morphed through different variations of arm and torso movements. Eventually I raised my arms above my head and lowered them again. To exit I slowly walked off moving my hips from side to side with the arms moving in the opposite direction to my hips. I walked towards the ‘back’ and disappeared through a slit between two black curtains.

The combination of a prerecorded breath score, and live amplified breathing enabled several layers of sound to be occurring simultaneously. In this iteration, my amplified breathing was connected directly to my movements while the prerecorded breath score was not. This created counterpoint between my amplified breathing and the prerecorded breath score. Also there was counterpoint between the audience’s

breathing, and my amplified breathing/prerecorded breath score. Counterpoint was also occurring in the movement: tension between the exposed part of the body, and the covered part of the body; tension between the upper body, sternum and arms, and the relaxed hands.

The audience noted how the work was evocative and had an interesting economy of movement. It also noted that a few genre shifting “things” happening within the performance. For one viewer the work evoked an image of a lounge singer, however this was disrupted by the fact that I didn’t ever turn around and thus did not fulfill the stereotype of this image. Also, it was noted that the movement wasn’t the sexy kind of movement that would be expected in that setting, but instead it was abstracted and animal like, with a mechanical articulation of the body. The critique also noted that the work assumed a proscenium arch by keeping the viewers placed in front of the performance. There was a determined front from which the work had to be viewed. It was also observed that the distortion in the prerecorded breath score allowed the breathing sounds to connote something other than breathing, such as waves.

Breath of Air (Rarotonga): Oceanic Performance Biennial, Rarotonga, 7 July

Breath of Air (Rarotonga) is the third iteration of the *Breath of Air* series, which was performed at the Oceanic Performance Biennial, Rarotonga. The costume was drawn from a section of *Breath of Air (MAP)*, and *Breath of Air (Test Space)* where I wrapped myself in a length of stretchy fabric. Mandy Smith, Rachele Moore and Gordon Fraser at the AUT Textile and Design Laboratory helped me to develop a digital iteration of this costume for *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*. With their help, the length of fabric turned into a navy blue, seamless, knitted outfit, which encased me from head to toe. The costume had a slit knitted into it on one side through which I could release my arm into the air during the performance. For *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* I prerecorded the soundtrack to be sure that I would have sound for the performance. Because of the restricted time frame for setting up, and not knowing what technical resources would be available to me, I ensured that I would be self-sufficient on the technical front by buying some portable speakers and making a prerecorded soundtrack. I was very fortunate that the venue, Te Vara Nui, had a comprehensive sound system so that I could amplify my prerecorded breath score for the performance.

In *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* the sound track consisted of recorded, distorted and layered breathing sounds, which gradually built in intensity and eventually dissipated over a ten-minute time frame. I recorded the breathing sounds in the AUT sound suite to create better quality recordings of my breathing. I imported the sounds into Adobe Audition and manipulated them digitally using echo, delay and layering. The performance space at Te Vara Nui village had two sound systems: one in the pavilion, and one where the audience was positioned. I played the soundtrack louder in the pavilion and quieter in the audience’s area in order to utilize the potential to create distortion and reverberation. With this added subtlety, the sound would seem to be coming from two places rather than solely from within the audience’s space. There was no formal feedback for this performance.

***Breath of Air (Rooftop):* Talk Week, AUT, 17 August**

At Talk Week I had an opportunity to explore how *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)* could sit within an urban landscape, in contrast to the landscaped garden of Te Vara Nui village. I performed *Breath of Air (Rooftop)* on the rooftop of the AUT Spatial Design Building. This urban location has expansive views across to the horizon line of the central business district and harbour, and placed the work directly in an inner city environment. For this work I created another breath score, which used the same breathing recordings I used for *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*. It was five minutes in length, to fit within the time constraints of the Talk Week presentations. The audience was placed along one side of the rooftop looking out at the view of the cityscape. When the prerecorded breath score began, I emerged from behind one of the structures on the roof fully encased in the seamless knitted costume used for *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*. I gradually made my way across the roof until I was centered on it. I began to move, undulating my body. Swaying forward and back, this movement increased in size as I moved my upper body. At the climax of the work I released my arm from within the sheath of the costume. My arm hovered in the air, moving in a rigid manner. I walked backwards, slowly retreating to where I started.

One of the viewers commented on how the performance appeared to be part of the natural environment: “The work wasn’t removed from the world.” They liked the choice of colour because “it worked in the landscape and showed how the performance was part of the environment rather than a dominant other.” Another viewer commented on the effect on the costume: “The garment, given the material in the daylight, has a shear quality. So I am very much aware of you, or a body inside the shroud. Although this moment [the revelation of the arm] was very great it was like a puncture through the material. I was very much aware of a body and its movements and extensions.” Another viewer commented on the emergence of the hand: “[The] revealing of the hand from the shrouded, death-like figure that moves really slowly. The emergence of the arm is very striking.” A viewer commented on the frontal view of the performance and how there was a “sense of the stage here that is quite clear. The work felt quite cinematic.” The audience does not move through the work, but rather they are watching the work from one perspective.

An observer commented on the ambient sounds of the city. They thought that the industrial noise coming over the top of my work created a “machine-like feeling.” The combination of the performing body with the industrial sounds made them think of the human condition and the weather. Another viewer commented on the combination of the prerecorded breath score and the ambient sounds. They questioned the necessity of the prerecorded score, because of the ambient sounds and because the sound of the breath score was located behind the viewers. This had a dislocating effect, and made it difficult for the viewer to connect the prerecorded breathing with the performance. This created a conflict between watching and listening for the viewer. I found this conflict between the prerecorded and ambient sounds interesting. I am interested in the counterpoint between the breath score and ambient sound, and the way it can overwhelm the viewer and create multiple centres of information. I would like to explore the effect of amplified live breathing sounds, which are coming from the performer.

Still Breathing: St Paul St Gallery III, AUT, 21-22 August

I performed *Still Breathing*, the fourth iteration of the *Breath of Air* series, at St Paul St Gallery III as part of a postPILOT series group show, AUT. I was interested in bringing the cocoon/mummy aspect of the work to the forefront. This work was a distillation of the life/death binary that is an element of the *Breath of Air* series. In *Still Breathing* I was fully encased in the navy-blue, seamless knitted costume used for *Breath of Air (Rarotonga)*, however I was no longer upright. Instead I was lying supine on a shiny, navy blue, enamel painted plank of wood, which was the size of a door. The plank of wood was balanced on four clear plastic boxes. This enabled the plank to appear as if it could be suspended in the air. I lay on the plank for one and a half hours at a time. I kept my body incredibly still so that the only movement was the rise and fall of my abdomen. I amplified my breathing through a radio microphone that rested on my mouth during the performance, and which was amplified into the space through two speakers that were on the floor. There was no formal feedback for this performance.

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