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Territoriality and choreography in site-situated performance

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Territoriality and Choreography
In Site-Situated Performance

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Readers guide

The thesis developed as emergence –following the case studies as they unfolded, with no predetermined map in hand for what form the “whole” would take. The final form of the thesis that has coalesced here is faithful to a process-oriented way of working.

As such, some irregularities have taken form, which are in need of an explanation for the reader.

Each chapter is an account of a site-situated performance. However, in chapter 3, with the account of the performance *Surface Rising*, the concepts of embodiment and hospitality demanded further analysis.

I developed two supplement “pull-out” texts which expand my theoretical reflection. The first “pull-out”, *Embodiment in Surface Rising*, examines one key moment in the performance, fleshing out the material-discursive forces at work in guesting and hosting.

The second “pull-out” text for chapter 3, *Hospitality in Surface Rising*, examines hospitality as considered through Jacques Derrida’s “Of Hospitality”. Examining one key moment in the performance, I engage with Derrida’s arguments on conditional and absolute hospitality through the movement of the guest and the host.

The epilogue consists of a short description of the exhibition *Visiting Hours*, 2019.

Introduction

How might an intertwining of territoriality and choreography affect the production of practice and knowledge in site-situated performance? Both concepts, territoriality and choreography, represent critical practices that explore inventions of space and time, and navigations within them. They privilege questions concerning the perception and inhabitation of a site. Intertwining the operations of territoriality and choreography opens a space of experimentation that expands habits of perceiving, belonging, and orientation. Implicit in these two concepts is the interrogation of movement's processuality—how the concepts of territoriality and choreography exist in a continual process of composition and decomposition.

If territoriality and choreography are understood as concepts that generate movement, intertwining them enables a comparison and analysis of different types and qualities of movement. In my research project, connecting the practices of choreography and territoriality occurs between artistic experimentation and material, social, economic, and political relations. Site-situated performance refers to an artistic process that begins and ends on-site, working within the specific conditions of a location.

In this dissertation, territoriality is thought through along with its political and somatic implications. As I began to work in a site-situated manner, territoriality emerged as a complex force, attuning to the historicity and agency of the site as an equal player in the performative encounter between audience and dancer, between the concreteness of the site and its performative potential.

Territoriality, as I consider it, is connected to the concept of the everyday as developed by philosopher Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), which concerns the social and relational dimension of spaces, and the question of how individuals appropriate daily situations for their own means and expression. According to de Certeau, this daily invention and reappropriation of language, objects, and actions is a way for people to resist institutional expectations and to live a creative life. de Certeau's concept of the everyday evokes the constraints within which I work. I intervene subtly in a given site; this intervention does not entail removing or altering what I find to a great degree. I do not install full-blown sets or fantasies, but instead insert myself gently into the ongoing movement of the site, and thus negotiate freedom and constraint in site-situated performance.

The concept of the everyday is a paradox in that, at once, it consists in spontaneous transformative action yet is limited to codified structures. As choreographer and theorist Elizabeth Dempster puts it; "The everyday is complex and contradictory; it has a negative aspect, representing all that is trivial and banal, the dreary unfolding of repetitious activity, of rote existence."¹ This double-capacity of the everyday—its possibility and its conforming fixity—informs and enriches my research. By taking into consideration the fluidity and unpredictability of the everyday, (dreary and splendid), I aim to keep available to the surprise of "un-masterable" conditions.

As a dancer and choreographer with an extensive practice in choreography for the stage, my practice evolved toward site-situated events for a variety of reasons. Initially it was simply an economic necessity for me, as an independent artist seeking resources and

¹ Dempster, "The Choreography of the Pedestrian," 25.

possibilities to develop the work. I started by working in the places I was living in. As I continued to develop performances, I began to value the durational and intimate qualities of working in residential spaces. As sites of social, economic, political, material, and cultural operations, residential spaces offered rich and complex relationships within which to move. Working this way allowed for an expanded use of the term *choreography*, not just for the dancing body but for all movement within the site, human and non-human (e.g., atmospheric, material, and architectural). Site-situated projects allowed me the opportunity to shift my practice and develop observational-somatic techniques to engage with how the site was already “in movement” even before I initiated new pathways of moving.

Choreography

Choreography is a compositional force within artistic experimental practice. Structuring movement across time and space produces qualities, sensations, and relations.

Choreographic practice recruits all the senses to invent new ways of creating, attending, and orienting in spaces. The term “choreography” fuses *choreo* (from the Greek *khoreia*, or “dancing in unison”) with *graphos* (“something drawn or written, mark-making”).

“Dancing in unison” is considered in this thesis as attunement, a manner of sensing and expressing the movement of oneself with others. The world is in movement; it is “dancing in unison.”²

² Here, unison is not intended to indicate uniformity or a whole, but rather a simultaneity of a multiplicity of parts.

The Greek root-word *graphos* describes a compositional force, writing from an infinity of qualities and forming a singular creative sequence. *Choreo-graphos*, then, as I consider it in this thesis, is the simultaneous task of inventing ways of attuning to what is moving, with inventing ways of creating movement.

Importantly, creating movement involves asking of another (or of myself) to move in this or that way. This operation of command (of how movement may be predetermined, executed, resisted, or negotiated) across relations is a key concern in choreography's discursive process.

The practices of Western contemporary dance are ever-evolving: a mode of production of dancing human bodies in the black-box theatre, as well as a cross-disciplinary questioning of how to attend to movement. To expand these practices from their orientation around the dancer's technical virtuosity toward broader concepts of performance demonstrates, as contemporary performance scholars Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki have proposed, a "shift of thinking, away from the humanistic toward the movement of objects, of systems, not as a rejection of bodies and their possibilities, but as a view that might conceptualize choreography as an 'equivalence' of anything ... system, body, mechanism, organism – that might produce movement."³

Attunement(s)

In this thesis, the dancer's body is considered as a processual body, a body always in process, a body whose relational capacities are not predetermined but in movement.

³ Allsopp and Lepecki, "Editorial: On Choreography," 5.

“Movement,” as philosopher Laura Potrović theorizes, “makes the body, or, more precisely, it continuously creates new possibilities of a body.”⁴

I employ the term *somatic* in reference to the processual body and to the field of sensorial and experiential research with which contemporary dance studies are intrinsically linked. A term popularized by philosopher and founder of Clinical Somatic Education, Thomas Hanna, somatic practices develop the awareness of the living processes of the human organism and concern themselves with the continuous, changing nature of somatic experience. Somatic practice is at once the awareness of internal sensations and of extending awareness outward to the complex ecologies amidst which the body moves. Internal and external stimuli are experienced by the body as reciprocal, as continuous feedback. Somatic awareness is explored through processes of attunement, which enliven and question the seemingly clear border between a body and its environment, the ever-moving edge of the internal/external body-world. Attunement, considered as movement, actively shapes experience, actively informs what may unfold, for, as Hanna puts it, “reciprocity between sensing and moving is at the heart of the somatic process.”⁵

As opposed to spectacle-based work, which mostly organizes the spectator’s experience from a seated point of view, my audience-guests walk in through the door of the site and inevitably begin to touch things, to wander about, to take up space. Making performances that enable the visitor to enter into and navigate the site immediately opens up potential for crafting processes of attunement—specifically attunement to relations entailed by moving with sensing, sensing with moving.

A somatic awareness in my choreographic practice emphasizes the processes of

⁴ Laura Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 107.

⁵ Hanna, “What Is Somatics?”, 6.

attunement, those of dancer and audience alike. The choreographic concern here is not only with how the dancer is moving and sensing, but also with how the audience is moving and sensing. This is not to aim for precision or control, but to follow the process of sensing wherever the movement may lead, and the process of moving wherever the sensing may lead. It is to become sensitive to the live encounter of performance.

Territoriality

For philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their celebrated work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), territory is actively constituted through relations, expressions, and practices traversing entities. A territory is not a pregiven quantity but is expressed in movement.

Territoriality, following Deleuze and Guattari, is thus relational, and relations are never still. In their chapter *1837: Of the Refrain*,⁶ territory is referred to as continuously composed through processes of the undoing and reconstituting of elements, or *detrterritorializations* and *reterritorializations*.

Deterritorialization and reterritorialization may be broadly understood as the movements that constitute territory. “Deterritorialization inheres in a territory as its transformative vector, hence, it is tied to the very possibility of change immanent to a given territory.”⁷ Territory possesses the constant potential to shift and transform.

A way of moving and observing is also a way of territorializing—one way of territorializing, that is to say, among infinite ways. In this sense, performance may

⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 310-350.

⁷ Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary*, 67.

deterritorialize a site, assembling new elements and dynamics that animate a new territory, however temporarily.

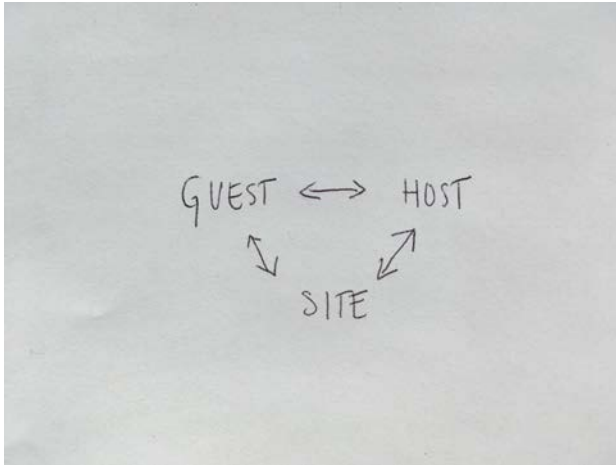
The link between territoriality and observational practices is significant to the intertwining of territoriality with choreography, in the sense that one's capacity to observe and express affects how one enters into composition with territorializing/deterritorializing movement. If something is not first observed, then it cannot be engaged with.

In other words, *how* one observes actively shapes relations. The shaping of relations is the creation of territories; it is the engagement with the potential of matter to be reformatted, rearranged, de-/reterritorialized into new meanings, uses, responsibilities, and values. "The territory implies the emergence of pure sensory qualities, of sensibilia that cease to be merely functional and become expressive features, making possible a transformation of function."⁸

Territoriality in site-situated performance is expressed, in part, through the collaborative dynamic of guest, host, and site. As I developed my work, the initial configuration of dancer/audience stretched into the hybrid roles of host-dancer, audience-guest, and performance-site. The audience member walked into a space that I was responsible for, immediately expanded into the role of audience-guest, and became co-responsible for the situation. This seemingly simple act had far-reaching consequences for my concerns—there was no longer solely a focus on the dynamic between audience and performer, but also on how the forces of the site had extended the meaning of our movement into registers of hosting and guesting.

⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 183.

The site is considered as a force that shapes a territory, that forms the guest and the host; in turn, the articulations and perceptions of both guest and host shape the site.



In this complex of forces, “expressive qualities or matters of expression enter shifting relations with one another that ‘express’ the relation of the territory they draw to the interior milieu of impulses and exterior milieu of circumstances.”⁹

Physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad’s research into the material-discursive forces of phenomena, the inseparability between material and discursive agency to create meaning, has guided my understanding of the guest-host-site relation in site-situated performance. Engaging notions of materiality takes on the relations between form and movement of matter, and discursive relations involve examining the workings of power.

Barad’s work moves away from a representational register for ordering the universe (one that would assign pre-given differences to the guest, host, and site), and

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 317.

instead examines how boundaries and differences are continually produced through various kinds of practices.

As I host, I practice an engagement with the site; it is through this entanglement I become a host. My hosting is positioned at the intersection between my body and the site. This intersection is an instance of embodiment, where embodiment takes on a form that erupts and traverses the planes of both myself and the site, the exact boundary between my body and the site becoming unclear.

Barad's neologism *intra-action* suggests that distinctions and meanings erupt from within (intra) a context and not between (inter) predetermined entities.¹⁰ How matter is "observed" is inseparable from the observer. "The notion of intra-action (in contrast to the commonly used term "interaction," which presumes the prior existence of independent entities or relata) represents a profound conceptual shift. It is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the "components" of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful."¹¹

Barad's conceptualization of intra-activity has assisted my awareness of how the site possesses agency, and how guest and host take form in the moment of encounter. It has reconfigured my research and propelled my understanding of hosting-dancing as a practice of engagement that is inseparable and indebted to the terrain and to others, and in so doing has expanded my understanding of embodiment as a process that takes place across the planes of both body and site. Through and beyond self-oriented practice and

¹⁰ Barad elaborates regarding the boundaries of entities: "matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency." Barad, "Posthuman Performativity," 828.

¹¹ Ibid., 815.

toward engagements with others, embodiment is considered not as a predetermined, stable body with a fixed edge, but as an unfolding of the body *as* an entire situation. Embodiment, considered in this way, is a means of actively observing and taking on multiple forms through the emergence of relational capacities.

Modes of Vision

One of the key threads of the thesis project is a theoretical and practical examination of the ways of seeing and looking that operate within a territory. In order to move in sensitive, meaningful ways, or even to begin to move critically through pregiven territorializations, I needed to understand how vision operates discursively—as an envisioning process—how visual practices influence political and social relations. I engage with processes of vision as not pre-cultural, but as social-political practices.

I employ the terms seeing and looking throughout - – I assign *looking* to a desire to find something with one's eyes, something already recognizable, whereas *seeing* I assign to ways of knowing, engaging in a desire to understand or to learn with one's eyes.

Vision, in the West, is linked with the core value of critical distance, a distance that performs a rational, objective concept of space. As Michel de Certeau observes, space is mastered through sight: “The division of space makes possible a panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forms into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and ‘include’ them within its scope of vision.”¹² Mastery of space is mastery of objective space.

This notion of objective space is essential to the notion of a territory in the Western

¹² de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 36.

modern world. It is space considered as homogenous and rational. Rationalization, a way of acting with the belief that one may master all things by calculation, is a key operation in a territorial state. It routinizes human action, making it ‘calculating, instrumentalist, and predictable.’¹³ Space is not understood as being produced through relations but is proposed to be “out there” in an objective, quantifiable manner. Cartesian¹⁴ abstraction, a manner of looking oriented towards achieving a discerning distance, facilitates the image of territory as distinct from the subject.¹⁵

A process of vision that enacts a notion of objective space, space as distinct from the subject, is the dominant cultural practice in the West. It enhances a calculating character to ways of seeing. It diminishes a reciprocal dimension to acts of seeing (between the observer and the observed). With my site-situated performances, I study this dominant mode of vision and seek to disrupt, challenge, and choreograph multiple modes in response.

Settler-Colonial/Colonial Context

Shifting my focus to site-situated performance within choreographic practice necessitated understanding conceptions of the territorial nation-state in modernity, specifically the spatial and embodiment discourses that produced the concept of the territorial state. This

¹³ Wolin, “Max Weber,” 297, quoted in Larkins, “The Idea of the Territorial State,” 34.

¹⁴ French Enlightenment philosopher René Descartes developed numerical coordinates by which to calculate space. Cartesian space is conceptualized as an abstract spatial system measured from a point of view exterior to it.

¹⁵ Descartes’ famously cut the world up with his tabulation of two substances; *res cogitans* (thinking) *res extensa* (matter). The world is cut into the subjective world of thought, and the objective world of matter. A distance is formed between the experiencing subject and the experienced world. Writes Sabisch, “the Cartesian epistemological model of the clear and the distinct does not account for movement and production.” Sabisch, *Choreographing Relations*, 54.

entailed contextualizing my site-situated performances through the broader forces of the modern nation-state, including its colonial and settler-colonial conditions.

Canada and the Netherlands, the two countries within which my research takes place, are Western territorial nation-states that configure territory as a nexus of space, knowledge, and power. Territory is not just a “geographical notion” but, borrowing from Foucault, a “juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power.”¹⁶ Space is organized through central control, and a firm boundary is expressed dividing an inside (domestic) from an outside (foreign), and is governed by “only one definite national legal order ... authorized to prescribe coercive acts”¹⁷ in the state’s interests. The unified legal order operates from a central point for governance. In modern Western practice, the state coincides with the territory, a territory formed through power.

Throughout my research project, I carry an awareness of working as a settler artist in colonial and settler-colonial contexts; therefore, in my ongoing practice of engagement, I seek to demand of myself accountability and awareness.¹⁸

As such, some definitions are necessary. “Colonialism,” as settler colonial and Indigenous studies scholar Victoria Freeman defines it, “can be described as a practice of domination of one people over another; it involves the establishing of colonies in one people’s territory by people from another. Settler colonialism involves the transfer of large numbers of permanent settlers from the metropole to the colony, where they claim the land and alter the territory’s social structure, government, and economy.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Foucault, “Questions on Geography,” 68, quoted in Larkins, “The Idea of the Territorial State,” 42.

¹⁷ Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State*, 210. Quoted in Larkins, “The Idea of the Territorial State,” 25.

¹⁸ The term “settler artist” entails the recognition of settler colonialism as a historic and ongoing process of violence toward Indigenous peoples, and the call for a “transformation of the symbolic and material conditions that have contributed to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples.” Taschereau Mamers, “Settler Colonial Ways of Seeing,” 28.

¹⁹ Freeman, ““Toronto Has No History!””, 2.

The settler colonial and colonial projects possess an inherent violence in their hierarchical classification of the world. The systematic structuring of the world through Euro-modern operations of categorization became the basis for physical and symbolic violence towards others. A colonial worldview classified European white peoples as the superior living beings while all others were considered with “various degrees of inferiority beneath them.”²⁰ This inheritance of a categorized world in the West has sharply demarcated modes of perception and value.

I acknowledge in the thesis the impossibility of an artistic practice to even approach a resolution to the violence that settler colonial and colonial society has engendered towards Indigenous peoples and the land that sustains all. The aim is to carry and articulate that impossibility across the works, to never let it go, in order that it can inform choreographic practice towards modes of attunement and accountability.²¹ I cannot, of course, speak to or in the position of the Indigenous experience of suffering, resistance, and “survivance”, both historic and ongoing with the settler colonial context. This is beyond the scope of this thesis. “Survivance” as Indigenous Anishinaabe cultural scholar Gerald Vizenor writes, “is the continuance of native stories, ‘more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active presence.’”²²

²⁰ Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, 79, quoted in Taschereau Mamers, “Settler Colonial Ways of Seeing”, 13.

²¹ “We need a wide range of diverse actions, each can play a part in the broader project of achieving justice. For that reason, we maintain a belief that even small, symbolic and everyday actions are significant and therefore need to be thought through carefully. While focusing on small actions makes us in danger of feeling that we have “done enough” (thereby avoiding the larger decolonizing actions that need to take place) discounting them not only risks creating a sense of powerlessness and despair, but also missed the potential of micro-actions to ripple, erode, and to subtly shift.” Robinson and Martin, eds., *Arts of Engagement*, 2.

²² Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Post-Indian Warriors of Survivance*, 15.

My research is focused on a critical engagement of how territorial powers influence individual and collective modes of perception, and the invention towards envisioning otherwise. By understanding choreographic practices as the practicing of new values and new relations, I attend to how sites may be territorialized otherwise, not by dismissing colonial and settler colonial conditions, but by engaging how these conditions permeate my habits of perception, values, and my conceptions of movement and body. In “Lie of the Land”, colonial historian Paul Carter proposes that what sustains colonialism is the creation of a subjectivity “without an attachment of the land,”²³ a profound disengagement of one’s body from the ground. This has particular import for choreographic practice in the West, a lineage that has blotted out specific connections to land, to animals, and to other life forms, and instead proposed and made use of a smooth, black-box space and of a human fantasy of self-sufficient movement.

To sustain an engagement of a site as a settler artist, is to demonstrate not just an agility and responsiveness, but equally to explore limitations, tress-pass and blind spots. In attending to how moving in site-situated performance produce difficulties as well as potentials, the research becomes oriented not through the smooth surface of a non-place, but the relational friction amidst territorial forces.

I write about four performance works located in different sites: my childhood home (Toronto), a sublet (Amsterdam), my current apartment (Tiohtià:ke/Montreal), and a borrowed apartment (Amsterdam). I include an epilogue, in which I describe a return to Toronto for a performance exhibition in a publicly funded art institution.

²³ Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, 294, quoted in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 100.

In the first chapter, I elaborate on the choreographic practice of opening—in this case, opening my house to a dance performance. I elaborate on how the settler-colonial context enters into choreographic choices upon a very personal terrain. I engage with how the house I grew up in is/was embedded in colonial ways of seeing and organizing, and how my trajectory is thus entangled with these forces.

In the second chapter, I examine a sublet experience in Amsterdam. In this context, I examine entangled space and consider how touch, territoriality, and partitions resonate between host, guest, and site.

In the third chapter, I consider the intricate movements of guest and host relations in a silent, durational choreography for one spectator at a time in my apartment in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. This chapter links to two supplementary texts: the first, an elaboration on the intricate reciprocity of guesting and hosting; and the second, a response to Jacques Derrida's articulations of hospitality in his conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle.²⁴ In the fourth chapter, I reflect on the notion of borrowing as choreography, employing Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "assemblage". Borrowing considered as choreographic practice that unfolds a micro-world of relations within broader territorializations.

In the epilogue, I describe the development of a technique that I name "visiting", which involves visiting the work of fellow artists. I elaborate on how the technique of "visiting" loosens fixed boundaries, in the pursuit of new aesthetic and ethical modes of offering and receiving.

²⁴ Derrida, Jacques, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

How may an intertwining of territoriality and choreography affect the production of practice and knowledge in site-situated performance? The research aims for one concept to animate the other. A configuration of elements, attunements, and encounters, aligning both concepts towards a heightened reciprocity of relations.

Chapter 1

Opening: Fear of Losing the Details

In this chapter, I examine the theoretical and artistic practices that inform my dance-installation *Fear of Losing the Details* (2014). The project experiments with the intertwined concepts of *territoriality* and *choreography* and reveals specific relations of constraint and freedom when working in a site-situated manner.

The project took place in my childhood home, 25 Stonedale Placeway, in North York (a suburb of Toronto, Canada), from January to March 2014. As my parents were travelling to Florida for the winter, I negotiated access to the house as a self-organized artistic residency. The initial questions that drew me to my childhood home concerned notions of belonging and memory. I wished to see if I might re-map the home with new, inventive ways of being, thus enacting a kind of transformation from the powerlessness of a child dealing with conditions she cannot change. How could I see this house and how could it see me?

John Berger writes: “We see only what we look at.”²⁵ The initial impulse of my research was to “re-enter” the house in search of other visibilities, to find details that I had never thought to look at. I wanted to understand my home against the full political and social backdrop of my upbringing, in order to reconnect, disrupt, and revisit the richness and complexity of my home, returning and connecting with the joy and criticality of both adult and child perspectives.

²⁵ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 8.

The agreement with my parents, whereby I would inhabit the house for three months, was also an agreement to *not* attract attention from the neighbours and to return the house to them in good condition (i.e., to repaint and repair any transformation that the house might experience during the residency). In this sense, the temporal nature of my interventions, occurring in between my parents' departure and return, afforded enough room to disrupt the usual ways of being/organizing in the home, and yet adhere to the responsibility of returning the house in "good" condition. So, confined to an exploration "under the radar," I worked within certain parameters in regard to noise, work hours, and limiting my actions to inside the house.

During the first weeks of working, I felt overwhelmingly constrained by the indisputable structure of the house. I had no choice but to accept the architecture, the household objects, the location, as is. However, as I worked, I realized the greatest freedom I could exercise was to create my own way through the given circumstances. The situation's tight constraints informed my process. Every action I engaged in unearthed the many preconditions of the site and afforded me the opportunity to understand how movement is always a negotiation with and within territory.

1.1 Context of Belonging(s)

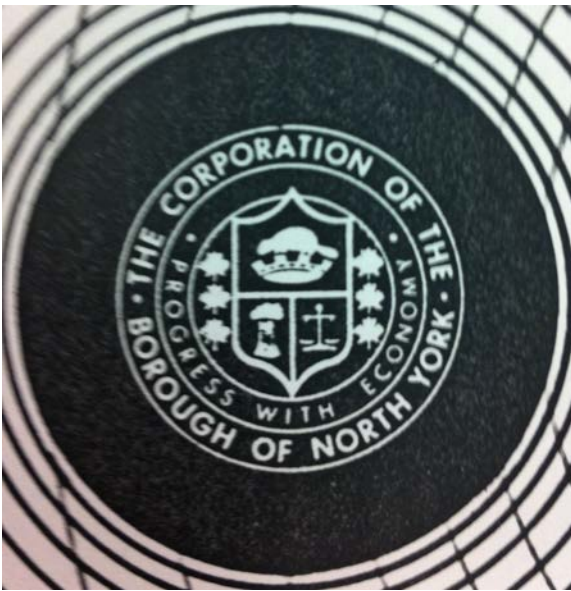
Thinking through territoriality involves understanding how I came to have access to the site. My parents moved to Toronto in the 1970s for academic appointments at the University of Toronto. Theirs is an inter-faith marriage. My father is a first-generation Canadian, the child of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. His father, my grandfather,

immigrated to Canada as a young man, evading Austrian-Hungarian anti-Semitism and conscription into the army. Coming to Canada certainly saved his life. On my mother's side, I am a descendant of Irish Catholics. My great-grandmother immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1890 in search of a better life, economically and socially. My mother grew up in Chicago and moved to Canada in the 1970's with my father.



My parents sought to emancipate their children from religion via a secular upbringing. Toronto offered them autonomy and freedom of thought. Education and public institutions were valorized in my family: politics, economics, and social justice were the pillars of my upbringing. However, I always experienced a “suburban malaise” in my North York home. It was the place where nothing happened and nobody came—and, as I did not drive until my thirty-third year, it was the place of waiting for the bus. The endless straight roads, the car as interface for everything, the Pizza Huts, the hot tar of the street in the summer—these, together, shaped my relationship to the place as one of unease, isolation, and sadness. I was not surprised, somehow, to learn that the suburb’s

motto, approved by the municipal council in 1923, was “Progress with Economy.”²⁶ Such “progress” involved a conditioning of perceptions: ways of structuring subjectivity and inhabiting the land.



North York’s “Progress with Economy” municipal logo

As a slogan, “Progress with Economy” is deceptively short and simple; in fact, however, it elides the dense, complex history of the place’s territorialization. In context, both of these terms, “progress” and “economy,” are elements of a Western colonial worldview. “Progress” signals a chronological ordering of movement into the future (and, concomitantly, a reckless abandon of the past) while “economy” speaks to extraction, quantification, and calculation as ways of creating value. Both terms are key concepts in

²⁶ Officially separating from Toronto in 1922, the city of North York became incorporated, and published their municipal slogan, *Progress with Economy*. Goldenberg, “Overtaxed and Underserved,” 2018.

a system of exploitation and accumulation, key operations in a modern colonialist-capitalist regime.²⁷

How could I open the house to a choreographic intervention that disturbed embedded ways of inhabiting architecture and land? Could I disrupt the seemingly neutral tempos, routes, and gestures I associated with these rooms? Was there a choreography that might render visible and sensible other “worldings” of the house?

My residency proceeded in two modes: experimental observational techniques and historical research of the site. I felt that I needed to deepen my research into the settler-colonial history of the land with which the municipal slogan “Progress with Economy” was associated. How does the settler-colonial project naturalize a hierarchy of space and bodies, and naturalize certain ways of seeing? How to account for my position as a settler scholar and artist?

At the same time, to explore ways of perceiving that are not shaped by the purposeful achievement of goals, I began an experimental, somatic approach to moving in the space. I aimed for new forms of inhabitation, new ways of imagining embodiments inside a house that had formed my habits, desires, and knowledge of the world.

²⁷ “It is impossible to think about the development of capitalism without thinking about its co-development with colonialism.” Lepecki, *Singularities*, 5.

1.2 Observation and Movement Practices



American philosopher Alva Noë observes that “[t]he world shows up for us in experience only insofar as we know how to make contact with it ... only insofar as we are able to bring it into focus.”²⁸ In this spirit, I source my body’s sensory capacities to expand my habits of perception and modes of experience and mobility, to interrupt habits of perceiving place, body, and position. I attune myself to the capacities of the sensing and moving body as a force that creates emergence and connections, and opens potentials. Setting about to explore/inhabit the house experimentally, with new angles, durations, purposes, and foci, I begin simply by lying down on the floor and breathing carefully. I direct awareness to the areas of my body that touch the floor. Long breaths are focused on places where my body holds tension. Attuning to my breath as I am looking focuses immediate attention upon the connection between feeling my body from within making contact with the floor.

Lying in a horizontal position, I train my vision on a detail of an object in the room and then open up my gaze to engage my peripheral vision. As I attempt to see the edges of the room in this way—peripherally—I notice that the centre of my vision shifts out of focus. A soft focus brings together many items and depths, without prioritizing any one element. I attend to the small movements of my eyes, enjoying shadow, enjoying light, enjoying blur. I pick different points of focus, at different depths. I zoom into fine scales of textures (walls, cracks, furniture, windows, ceilings, carpets, etc.) and the near objects expand into unrecognizable surfaces. Up close, the curved sofa armrest becomes a

²⁸ Noë, *Varieties in Presence*, 2, quoted in Nelson, “Articulating Presence,” 13.

flat plane of fuzzy blue—not as a lapse into simple empiricism, but to suspend a definitive knowledge of the couch and thereby experience its qualities differently, an attempt at “uncoupling the link between sensation and idea.”²⁹ And a reminder to myself that observation is a processual act involving insistence and curiosity.

My focus then moved away from the idea of the room itself toward my shifting capacity to sense it. Sensation—according to philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, “that which cannot be mapped or completed, always in the process of becoming something else”³⁰—shifted my rational orientation in these rooms into an experiential habitation, a “space revealed by sensation, which has no fixed coordinates but transforms and moves as a body passes through.”³¹ Attuning to sensation is attuning to change and emergence.

I proceeded to develop variations on how to pass through the rooms, exploring them with my body at different levels and speeds. As I danced, I composed a series of momentary viewpoints. I passed through the rooms over and over again. Each viewpoint was a choice against an infinity of angles, durations, purposes, and foci, and each such choice involved decisions as to how to slow down and how to speed up, what to block out and what to include, and what scales and details to attend to. The rooms exploded into prism-like variations on themselves.

I configured three objects in the space—my camera, my mother’s shoe, and my grandmother’s lamp—and chose a position from which to draw their composite forms on paper. I changed my position multiple times to produce a series of registers of these familiar items.

²⁹ Scholar Nita Little Nelson engages in a process of un-naming, which employs active forgetting as a way to develop new perceptual pathways in the body. Nelson, “Articulating Presence,” 45.

³⁰ Straus, *The Primary World of the Senses*, 202, quoted in Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 72.

³¹ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 72.



mycameramymothersshoemygrandmotherslamp



mygrandmotherslampmycameramymothersshoe



mymothersshoemycameramygrandmotherslamp

The contour line that encloses the three objects is an improvised border, an attempt to compose together these objects and how I observed the space around them.

These sketches deepened within me a sense of renewal, which broke with my old patterns of experiencing the house “objectively.” I felt as though the sketches captured the movement of observation as a continual process of configuration and reconfiguration.

Entangling the awareness of my body, its mass, breath, and pulsations, its focal length and fields of vision, together with the house became a way of understanding how attending to my body also means attending to the porous edge of the body-world, the one composing the other. As I continued to experiment with pathways and viewpoints, the house unleashed unforeseen forms and qualities: compositions of colours, textures, and shapes. As physicist-theorist Karen Barad proposes, “the agencies of observation are

inseparable from that which is observed.”³² The experimentality that I activated via my strategies of observation transformed the house into a deeply personal terrain with inexhaustible potentials. My attention activates the house, and the house activates me.

1.3 Re-territorializing and Opening

I pile, regroup, and rearrange objects. I put a table on a table, turn a couch on its side, its length shooting up to the ceiling. I group all the dining room and kitchen chairs tightly together. I move a wooden cabinet from the living room into the kitchen. I set the kitchen table on its side in the hallway. I roll up the carpet and place the lamps on the floor, unplugged. I tape up a few pillows and plates onto the walls. I hang pieces of paper over the windows and dangling from the ceiling. I scatter photos on the floor. I take down shelves and lay them across the kitchen sink.

³² Barad, *What Is the Measure of Nothingness?*, 6.





Moving through rooms and rearranging objects and furniture began to create a destabilizing effect. I had made a series of wall drawings and sketched out notes and forms on papers haphazardly taped to the walls, evidence of a messy creative process. These unfinished works and scraps hung in the hallway under the elegant brass lights and in between my parents' collection of exquisite landscape paintings, which I had left on the wall. My sloppy interventions amidst the room's more polished elements created overlapping territorializations.

How, for instance, is a dining room a dining room with the table removed? The differential between a space's former and current uses suddenly became palpable. In regard to each room, I began to perceive "more than one" use or territorialization. The dining room without a dining room table was not quite recognizable as a new, functional category of space; rather, the room hung in a suspended state—no longer a dining room

but not yet something else. How was I to move among the many potential practices of this (new) room?

The house became disorganized, piles here and there, things spread out and turned over, with some floor space completely clear. Some paintings hung on walls, others leaned against them. It might have been a scene of someone moving in or out—a filtering, a sorting through. An uneven, irregular inhabitation. Some chairs remained, and the lamps on the floor were plugged in and turned on. It was a house transitioning, perhaps, beginning to know itself differently.

Realizing the powerful shift that my movement and observational practices had produced in reshaping the space was for me an electrifying moment. For my process, it meant that while the systematic means of designation cannot be dismantled with simple actions, it was nevertheless possible to effectuate a deterritorialization that disrupted the designated space. Even in the constraints of a dining or living room, it became apparent that there was potential for deterritorializations and reterritorializations, however temporary.

1.4 Critical Context: Settler-Colonial Archival Research

To begin my archival research, I sought out a copy of the historic Treaty No. 13,³³ the treaty between the British Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, at my local public library. I had never seen a treaty before. I experienced a chill as my eyes scanned the treaty map, which outlined the surrender of the lands on which I was born

³³ Government of Canada, “Treaty Numbers 1 to 483,” 32.

and raised.³⁴

Looking at the map of these lands, inhabited for over 15,000 years by various Indigenous nations,³⁵ in that moment I understood, if somewhat dimly, that this document was a powerful instrument among the many means of erasure and dispossession that had been employed against the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Alone, standing in the aisle of books, I grasped to take in the map before me. At 39 years of age, I encounter this treaty and its detailing of the processes of land surrender, never spoken of during all my schooling. Fully embedded into naturalized ways of seeing and of inhabiting spaces and bodies, I had never realized that my ways of perceiving, categorizing, and organizing were an invention of state power. In that moment, there became visible to me the deep violence of an invading power, a power to which I was intrinsically attached. My presence in the here-and-now included the dispossession of Indigenous peoples—ways of seeing, knowing, resisting, to which, until now, I had not attended. How even to begin to account for this deep entanglement of the settler-colonial project, from which three generations of my family, myself included, have benefitted?

The Toronto Purchase (Treaty No. 13, 1787–1805)

³⁴ Turtle Island is the Indigenous term for what is now called North America. First Nations were the original occupants of the land. The British Crown (government) and First Nations negotiated and signed treaties with the intent of delivering mutual benefits. First Nations signed as independent, self-governing nations. Despite the promise of the early treaties and the mutually respectful partnerships they established, Indigenous peoples were targeted by colonial policies designed to exploit, assimilate, and eradicate them. See: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/treaties>.

³⁵ “Toronto is comprised of lands from the territories of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and a confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.” McDowell, “The Indigenous History of Tkaronto,” 1.

The descriptive map of Treaty No. 13 is discursive; it reshapes the land into an object of perception, an example, as Foucault writes, of “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.”³⁹ It is an instance of broader settler-colonial practices that create and endorse specific frames through which the world becomes visible. “Ways of seeing enact specific ways of framing the world. They structure conditions of visibility and invisibility in relation to power and political desires.”⁴⁰

Only one of many such treaty processes, Treaty No. 13 effectively dispossessed a people of their ancestral lands. As a specific instance of land surrender, the Toronto Purchase was embedded in a broader structure of legislative acts intended to “undermine the conditions of possibility for the survival of Indigenous nations in order to establish the conditions of an ascendant and politically hegemonic settler population.”⁴¹

In her article “Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationships,” Indigenous Nishnaabe scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains that treaties were a component of the diplomatic procedures through which First Nations engaged in relationships with other First Nations to negotiate peaceful relations, trade, resources, and alliances.⁴² As Simpson articulates, First Nations and European conceptions of treaties differ greatly, being based on distinct socio-political cultures.⁴³ From an Indigenous perspective on governance and

³⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 49.

⁴⁰ Taschereau Marners, “Settler Colonial Ways of Seeing,” 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴² According to the Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, “When the Europeans arrived on the shores of North America they were met by Aboriginal nations with well-established diplomatic processes—in effect, their own continental treaty order. Nations made treaties with other nations for purposes of trade, peace, neutrality, alliance, the use of territories and resources, and protection.” Simpson, “Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa,” 30.

⁴³ Treaty-making between Indigenous peoples and settlers began before the 17th century, but became more formally established through the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which “reserved all lands in the Great Lakes region as Indian hunting grounds, off limits to settlers, and established rules for subsequent land surrenders.

international relations, “treaty processes were grounded in the worldviews, language, knowledge systems, and political cultures of the nations involved, and they were governed by the common Indigenous ethics of justice, peace, respect, reciprocity, and accountability.”⁴⁴ Moreover, the 1787–1805 Toronto Purchase treaty negotiations revealed a shift in the British Crown’s colonizing procedures, an “undeclared change from the negotiation of peace and friendship treaties for peaceful coexistence and trade to a land surrender process whose ultimate aim was Indigenous disappearance.”⁴⁵

For me, the treaty was a fundamental encounter—a key piece necessary to understand the complex set of concepts defining my city and my home, and to address the silence regarding pre-1787 Toronto. In “discovering” this treaty, I experienced a trembling blend of trepidation and guilt, a mix of feelings that continues to propel my writing and research.

1.5 Dance Event

After several months of work, I opened the house to my artistic community for a performative dance event, for witnessing and discussion of an intimate process. My invitation framed this event as an interrogation of the connection between personal space and state space. A copy of Treaty No. 13 rested on the center table of the living room,

A foundational yet contradictory document, the Proclamation implied that no lands would be taken without Indigenous consent and described the Indigenous nations as separate.” Freeman, ““Toronto Has No History!””, 52.

⁴⁴ Simpson, “Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa,” 29.

⁴⁵ Freeman, ““Toronto Has No History!””, 41.

signalling the presence of historical and ongoing forces of settler colonialism⁴⁶ traversing the home, traversing the dance.

The moment of opening my door and welcoming the audience into my childhood home was a forceful opening-up of roles, from dancer to host—a host embedded and complicit in settler-colonial conditions. As I became that host, the opening of the house to others made visible the limits of my very right to host, my responsibility to the scene. Opening the door amplified the direct continuity between my dancing-hosting body and the site, the one belonging to the other.

I open the door, in order to begin, with others, a reaching towards the impossibility of accounting for history.

I draw here from Karen Barad to underline the sense of responsibility in the event of making meaning: “Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering.”⁴⁷ Through aligning the dance-event as an event that interrogates settler identity, a framing of a responsibility that traverses through the house, through my body, through the bodies of my guests, and composes with all the materials, encounters, and movement.

Audience-guests were invited into the kitchen for food and tea. No initial overview or tour of the house was offered; visitors were simply welcomed into the house, the dimensions of which were not yet revealed. I asked them to stay in the kitchen while latecomers arrived, which compacted everyone tightly within one room. The extended

⁴⁶ Settler colonialism is “a structure not an event.” Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and The Elimination of the Native,” 388, quoted in Taschereau Mamers, “Settler Colonial Ways of Seeing,” 22.

⁴⁷ Barad, “Posthuman Performativity,” 827.

time in the kitchen created, unintentionally, a sense of confinement due to the increasing volume of the visitors' voices and the warmth and proximity of bodies. This effect, sustained for about thirty minutes, was quickly released with the opening of the dining room door, as the group was invited to circulate about the main floor.

At this point, the choreography of spatial constraints on the one hand and the material properties of the house on the other entered a relational process. I asked the audience-guests to sit on the living room floor. I took out a pencil and began drawing, slowly, a single line on the white walls, two feet up from the floor. Since many people had been leaning on the walls, my action around the room caused a scuttle of bodies moving out of my way. My slow drawing of the line traced a route through the entire house—a house rearranged, a house in which nothing was in its right position. I moved at a smooth and silent pace, so the audience-guests could follow me.

I led the group up the narrow stairs to the top floor. They passed in single file and followed the narrow circuit looping around my bedroom, and then descended again. Some audience-guests were still going up as others were coming down, resulting in an elastic focus as to where, precisely, the dance was “happening.” The multi-directional movement of the audience, a snake-like formation, and the slowness of the crowd converging in a narrow passage became integral to the dance. This particular way of being together became inseparable from the architecture of the space acting upon the group.

Throughout the dance-event, I was wearing my mother's bed robe. It is a shiny, soft, synthetic material from the 1970s, and I remember it well from childhood. It's not

exactly a costume, and it belongs to me indirectly. I felt slightly located in the present and slightly pulled into the past.

1.6 Blind Spots

Carved into the living room ceiling was a hole, approximately 40 x 30 cm. The hole held an indeterminate status; not explaining to the audience-guests why it was there was a deliberate gesture on my part. I passed my head and arms into the hole, dwelling half in and half out for some time. I started to rummage around. I slowly drew forth a redheaded Cabbage Patch doll from my childhood and made her do a brief dance. The hole in the ceiling, seen through the audience-guests' eyes, was the beginning of my awareness that the reasons for how the house appeared were not obvious.

Hesitantly, my audience-guests started asking me which objects were staged and which were used for everyday living. They asked me, for example: Had the artworks on the walls been hung for the performance or did they belong to my parents? Who had written the sticky note in the kitchen with the long-distance calling rates? Why were there Christmas decorations in the kitchen (the dance-event took place in March)? Were my texts and markings on the walls made when I was a child or in the present? Had I brought in the antique furniture pieces? Was the 1970s vacuum cleaner really still the one that my mother used, or was it a found object that I had brought in to evoke the period of my childhood? Was the aluminum ladder in the living room for renovations or had I bought it for the occasion? All these items began to vibrate with an uncertain status, activated by the dance event.

I had also constructed several raw, unfinished plywood plinths and set them in various rooms to display certain household objects and furniture pieces. These rough devices stood in contrast to the smooth, polished wood of the remaining furniture.



A cameraman arrived to document the project. Deliberately, I gave him little instruction, and he kept returning for confirmation that what he was indeed capturing were the intended interventions. He photographed the bathrooms, floors, and windows. He photographed the family portraits on the tables. He photographed closed doors, the notes and sketches taped to the walls, a drawing on the wall, a bus schedule, the stove and fridge. The entire house became an installation for him. The closed doors, for example—doors to rooms that I did not wish to expose—appeared in the documentation and thereby became integrated into the installation.

On the wall of the entrance foyer, my nephew had drawn a vivid, sprawling scribble in red marker, which I had decided, hastily, to paint over. What resulted was a messy, cloud-like shape of white paint against the original faded cream. I thought no further about the painted blotch as I worked to prepare the space. Revealingly, however, this cloud-like form turned up in the documentation, photographed meticulously on its own as a component of the installation.

The documentation photos were initially startling to me, as were the audience's initial pressing questions. They revealed, once again, my embedded habits of observing and categorizing. I had not "seen" the white, cloud-like painted form as "something" to be documented, but only as the background of the "actual" installation. I had assumed that the objects in the house would be obviously identifiable to my audience-guests. The experience forced open the powerful differences in looking subjectively, and manifested a porousness in seemingly strict boundaries, in strict territorializations.

The ambiguity between the perception of an object as belonging to the dance-installation and/or to "the real" opens up the potential for interrogating the real itself, or, as Grosz puts it, interrogating the "indeterminacy of the real."⁴⁸ In her book *Chaos, Territory, Art*, Grosz writes that the act of territorializing is the act of creating boundaries. Boundaries lead to aesthetic (spatial and temporal) interpretation and orientation. "With no frame or boundary there can be no territory, and without territory there may be objects or things but not qualities that can become expressive, that can intensify and transform living bodies."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 8.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

The powerful slippage of categories that my dance-installation created references the complexity of the visible, the way in which vision and classification work together to make meaning. My audience-guests' uncertainty revealed, crucially, that a process of observing is based on relations, that phenomena accrue meaning through context, through emergence. It revealed blind spots in a process of looking that typically considers visibility as something immediately perceivable and self-evident.

Métis artist and scholar David Garneau writes; "The colonial attitude is characterized not only by scopophilia, a drive to look but also by an urge to penetrate, to traverse, to know, to translate, to own and exploit. The attitude assumes that everything should be accessible to those with the means and will to access them; everything is ultimately comprehensible, a potential commodity, resource, or salvage."⁵⁰ The emergence of blind spots during the event reminds me of my position in this research. As a settler artist, I feel I must continually acknowledge that a way of seeing will produce blind spots, and that these become productive sites of learning.

1.7 Practices of Engagement

It becomes clear that I am hosting-dancing not the house itself, but along a process of opening up, offering up a personal event to scrutiny as a means of transforming and intensifying relations. I am hosting the impossibility of moving innocently, the impossibility of addressing the violence at stake. I do not extract myself

⁵⁰ Garneau, "Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation," 23.

from the house. I am hosting relations, blind spots, and memories. I am hosting a way of seeing.

The interval of dancer, settler, and host becomes a way of articulating impossibility and responsibility at the same time. It is an interval that engages with the forces of pastness, presentness, and futurity. It is an interval, referencing Barad, from which to form “an enabling of responsiveness.” “We are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity.”⁵¹

The opening of my childhood home as site of performance not only transforms me, as dancer, into host, but equally transforms the audience member into guest. This wavering of status never stops—as the audience-guest enters and eats food, as the audience-guest sits on the floor to watch, as the audience-guest climbs up my stairs to my bedroom, as the audience-guest discusses their experience and says their goodbye. It calls into account, alongside my own, the audience-guest’s multivalent status—of guest, of audience, of settler, of colleague, of being not separate but entangled in the site.

I have come to realize that the notion of opening I have been seeking is that opening which is located in the hybrid terms *guest-audience*, *host-dancer*, and *performance-site*. Moving across guest and audience member, moving across host and dancer, moving across performance and site—a critical space erupts that intertwines choreography and territoriality. The space that opens is a space in which social bodies are

⁵¹ Barad, “Posthuman Performativity,” 828.

intrinsically linked to and accountable for the power relations of the site and, at once, creative and critical subjectivities, who may imagine the potentials of envisioning worlds.

The hybrid term performance-site proposes the question: how has the site entered the performance, and how has the performance entered the site? One cannot be thought without the other; How the walls, windows, chairs, floor, doors, stairs sustain-push-hold the postures of the body, and the body joins with the walls, windows, chairs, floor, doors, into new form(ing)s.

Fear of Losing the Details was a three-month long experiment with inhabiting a house otherwise. The process entailed practicing ways of sensing, moving and looking, re-arranging, and archival research. The house was opened to the community for an encounter with a host-dancer. The day of opening the house was transformative, activating and exposing my personal and professional relations to the site. The qualities and micro-events that emerged through this day of opening nourished my approach of encounter-based research, for it is through encounter (of the site, of the audience), that differences of guest, host, and site emerge and are practiced.

The dance event shaped the site, my childhood home, as a collision of artistic and social practices. The practices included the culturally dominant ways of inhabiting a suburban home in a settler colonial state, as well as creative practices that moved with the rooms otherwise. The collision of practices created new tempos and pathways of moving and sensing, and, importantly, allowed to emerge the hybrid terms host-dancer, guest-audience, and performance-site.



Installation view, *Fear of Losing the Details*, March 2014, North York, Canada
Photo credit: Henry Chan

Chapter 2

Subletting: Touching/ Entangling/ Becoming

A sublet may become an experiment in coming together and coming apart.

In the fall of 2014, through a friend's friend, I was able to sublet an apartment in the east side of Amsterdam for two months. Because of the close community ties, it was an informal arrangement; we verbally agreed on a price and I showed up at the door with my suitcase.

I am somewhat a guest, somewhat a renter. This composite identity consists of some rights and some obligations: I gain autonomy and access by paying the rent, however I must accept the general conditions of the situation. I was given a tour of the apartment, with instructions about watering plants, collecting mail, and keeping things clean, and a tour of the neighbourhood. I was also told that should I run into neighbours, I should let them know I am a friend and am staying at the place for a while. I do not have an official right to be here as a tenant, but no one will pay much attention if I am discrete.⁵²

I don't know the original tenant well, but I know she is an immigrant who has learned Dutch and embedded herself meaningfully in Amsterdam. She is an artist in

⁵² As a Canadian citizen, I was not required to obtain a visa to enter the Netherlands for a period of less than 90 days due to a reciprocal agreement between the two nation states, whereby Dutch citizens may travel to Canada, and Canadians to the Netherlands, for a temporary stay. The ease with which I feel the informality of my sublet relation is in fact sustained and made possible through a formal agreement between nation states of the West. Through a common colonial heritage and an economic relationship beneficial to both parties, the agreement transforms my foreigner status into friendly guest. Further, I am a white woman, and so my foreignness is absorbed as likeness and not transformed into a threat by the European authorities.

search of an engaged artistic community. This personal endeavour inspires me—someone who has immigrated and learned a language in order to contribute to the community. She has constructed a place for herself, and Amsterdam has opened a place for her. In this sense, I am staying in a place of inspiring mutuality.

I was made to feel welcome. I am curious about the extent of this welcome, durational and physical. I feel the responsibility of caring for my friend's friend's things. I imagine that my friend's friend is losing some control of her place. There is some anxiety in her voice as she leaves.

I find myself alone in the apartment. I look around.

In this sublet, I realize I am *both* the custodian and the guest. At first, this appears to me like two separate roles, but it quickly becomes clear that “being a guest” is a role that entails responsibility. I am a guest in the sense that the place I am staying does not belong to me. But as I am staying here, I become partly responsible for it. It's not mine, but I feel compelled to care for it. It's an intriguing situation for me—to care for something that is not mine. Caring means becoming responsive. I must notice what needs to be done and go beyond my usual habits of self toward new inhabitations and relations. Guesting, in this case, entails care, involving myself in the space of the host. By increasing my attention to it, I increase my potential to “become” alongside of it, to be affected by it and to affect it. As the apartment's custodian, I animate it and it animates me, I become a bit like it and it becomes a bit like me. A becoming is understood as a qualitative transformation, and so caring implies a transformation.

“Becoming is to emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter a particular zone of proximity. Or, it is to emit particles that enter that

zone because they take on those relations.”⁵³

I put my things in drawers, set up a few photos on the desk. I plug in my computer. I put my makeup and toiletries in the bathroom. I make a cup of tea and look around.

I don't rearrange the furniture.

I eat the sandwich that I had in my bag and I wipe away the crumbs.

As the days go by, I have a strange, intimate feeling living amidst someone else's things—dishes, books, bedsheets, art, music, sofas, carpets, handbags, shoes, and plants. It is disorienting; I lie down where she has laid down, I touch her mugs, doorknobs, light switches. I use the same knives, sink, and washer and dryer. I look out the window in the same way. I sleep in the same bed.

Within the sublet is a sustained reverberation of her presence and, in the repetition of the passing days, I feel I become immersed somehow. I experience a sense of delay or repetition that echoes and refers back to the presence of the original tenant. This has to do with the setup of the items in the apartment, and the physical gestures required to activate them. I reach for a mug as she would reach for it, on the same shelf at the same height. I pull up the covers in the same direction. I hang the towel on the same hook. I look at a portrait of cats, hung at eye level above the table, as she would look at it. I pull on the door handles as she would to enter or exit.

In the details as to where things are situated, a strange “matching” occurs whereby I stand in the place of the original tenant, making the same gestures in the same timings.

⁵³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 273, quoted in Cvejić, *Choreographing Problems*, 212.

This proximity, this blurring intrigues me. The site choreographs my body subtly. I feel trapped, slightly, by my circumstances.

I let my body be guided by the placement of chairs, of bed, sofa, and toilet. I make no new choices but merely follow the architecture and the furniture. I feel somewhat I am acting and moving as someone else. As Laura Potrović has put it: “What moves is not the body, but its potential to be moved.”⁵⁴

How to think through the notion of boundary in a sublet? Where does her space end and mine begin? The apartment never stops being hers, because of our contract’s temporary nature and her eventual return. And so, the apartment “becoming mine” is embedded in the knowledge that it is “still hers.” There is no exteriority or exactness to the boundary between hers and mine. I am inside the apartment.

Philosopher Michel de Certeau writes on the production of spaces through partitioning practices: “It is the partition of space that structures it. Everything in fact refers to this differentiation which makes possible the isolation and interplay of distinct spaces.”⁵⁵ A partition is a probable first territorialization, but *inside* the apartment’s partitioned space, the boundary appears and disappears as I move. I am brushing up against the sense of her territory. I am in continuous contact with it, yet the edge keeps moving as I do. The more I touch, the more I activate a connection—and a distinction between her and me.

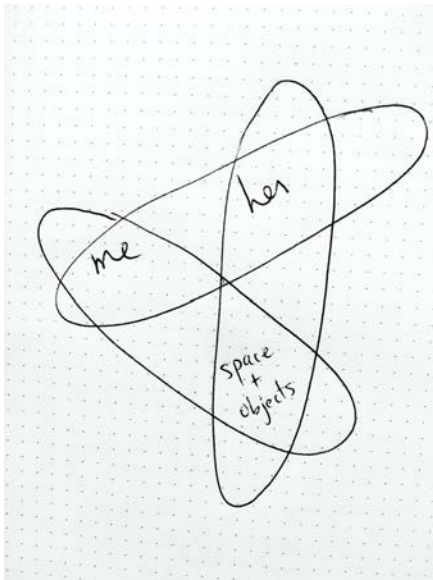
If I consider the notion of boundary through touch, I may conceptualize more clearly how the space is territorialized. I touch the sublet and it touches back—the cool surfaces of the walls, the soft cushions, the smooth, round cups, the sharp forks and the

⁵⁴ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 196.

⁵⁵ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 123.

edges of the glass coffee table, the warm water, the breeze from the open door. The sensations are momentary, unstable, and hard to quantify. There begins to be a blur between my friend's friend and her surroundings. It's hard to recognize exactly what I am touching. As I touch her things, I feel I am touching her slightly. In a way, she is fused to her objects.

The act of touching expresses a reciprocity, a continuity between body and space. In the objects dwell the traces of her actions, her body. And because I am inhabiting the apartment, in the same objects now dwell traces of my actions, my body. So, there is an inexact boundary between me and the objects, between her and the objects, which traverses an inexactness between me and her. Touch becomes an act of partition that precludes a stable territorialization.



In *The Politics of Touch*, philosopher Erin Manning writes that, “to touch is to

acknowledge that I must also be touched by you in order to touch you.”⁵⁶ The condition of living in this sublet entails touching and, thereby, exposing myself to the touch of another, being within movements of giving/receiving, being moved by it as I move within it.

And yet I am touching an unknowability, a distance. I feel both a connection to her presence inside the apartment, and a distance from it. I cannot touch without disrupting a concept of linear time, as the act of touching touches upon the presence and the absence of her, the original tenant.

Enacting touch in my sublet context troubles pre-existing stabilities of presence and absence, of near and far. Near and far, present and absent become entangled. Touching is a simultaneously reaching out and receiving, touching all that might have been touched before I arrived. I cannot touch without wondering what is touching back.⁵⁷

Responsiveness is central to entangling, to not distinguishing between being (oneself) and being-in-response (to another). Entanglement, writes theorist Karen Barad, is a notion from physics that comprehends particles over long distances as immediately responsive to one another, as indeterminately connected.⁵⁸ According to Barad, “indeterminacy, in its infinite openness, is the condition for the possibility of all structures in their dynamically reconfiguring in/stabilities.”⁵⁹ Becoming entangled opens up my sense of myself to an emergent, multi-directional reality. An entanglement disrupts the possibility of sustaining a distance, of keeping oneself apart from what one touches.

⁵⁶ Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty*, 15.

⁵⁷ “Matter is an enfolding, an involution, it cannot help touching itself, and in this self-touching it comes in contact with the infinite alterity that it is.” Barad, “On Touching,” 5.

⁵⁸ “Entanglements are relations of obligation—being bound to the other—enfolded traces of othering.” Ibid., 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.

2.1 Durational Boundaries

Before my friend's friend left, she showed me the various rooms. I am free to use the soaps and shampoos. Here is the bedding, the tea, the coffee. There are a few drawers, which she asks me not to open. The apartment is coded with degrees of territorialization, meaning degrees of access, restriction, and responsibility.

In the main living room is a closet. She asks me not to open the closet and not to use any of the things inside it. Therefore the sublet becomes sharply delineated right at the door of the closet. It has become differentiated from the rest of the sublet, qualitatively transformed into an intensity, an exclusion, a limit.

As days pass, the effects of this limit spill over into the rest of the sublet. The partition does not stay put; the space of the living room is affected by the sense of an unwelcomeness at the edge of a space of welcome. The living room begins to feel uncomfortable in relation to the closet's closed door, an unknown so close by. I experience the territorialization of the closet as a force of the unknown that infiltrates the rest of the apartment.

Philosopher Brian Massumi proposes the concept of the boundary or limit not as "a sharp demarcation but more like a multi-dimensional fading into infinity."⁶⁰ This proposition allows for a notion of a boundary as a threshold at which one thing affects another, a dynamic mixing and undoing of interiority and exteriority.

The closet does not become the "outside" of the sublet but composes with the

⁶⁰ Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," 13.

apartment, a mapping that qualitatively transforms the apartment with an awareness that something beyond the room is withheld. My guesting/subletting/caring includes what I am not permitted to see, such that I am living with the apartment's unseen.

Unfortunately, I do not have a high tolerance for the unseen. This force energizes me. It takes me a week or two of settling in, but increasingly I have the desire to open the closet and peek inside. I realize I am transgressing my friend's friend's wishes. The fact that I am not allowed to open the door, but that I just "could," produces tension in my body.

"Boundaries do not sit still."⁶¹ They are durational and dynamic practices. Boundaries may be expressed with each new gesture.

I open the closet.

It is a bit disappointing: shelves of art supplies and what seem like expensive makeup items. But the intensity of the boundary between what is seen and what is unseen dissolves immediately, and the living room feels more relaxed, more at ease.

2.2 Choreographic Practices of a Sublet

"Differences are made, not found!"⁶²

I set up a speculative, playful process that experiments with finding a way to differentiate between my presence in the apartment and the apartment in the presence of the original

⁶¹ Barad, "Posthuman Performativity," 817.

⁶² Barad, "Intra-actions," 77.

tenant prior to my arrival.

Inventing new boundaries enables new ways of locating oneself, new parameters for references and differentiations.

I decided to invite a stranger to help me differentiate the contents of the sublet. I asked a local photographer (whom I had just met) to enter the apartment and take photographs according to the instructions below. His only knowledge of my situation was that I had arrived a few weeks ago and was subletting for two months.

1. Photograph the spaces/objects of the apartment where you observe *my* possessions and actions.
2. Photograph the spaces/objects of the apartment where you observe *her* possessions and actions.

The photographer documented *my* possessions as:

- A stack of books on the table beside the bed
- A toiletry bag on top of the sink
- A towel hanging from the hook rack in the bathroom



The photographer documented *her* possessions as:

- A standing lamp and large potted plant
- A modem plugged into a wall socket
- A chandelier



The materials that were documented as being mine are positioned in transitory spaces: on the bedtable, on top of the sink, on a hook. They cannot be extracted from the action of having been placed there; each is visible in its temporary relation to its context. They become readable as action-objects, temporary events.

Meanwhile, for the original tenant's objects—chandelier, floor lamp, plant, and modem—the photographer selected items of heavier weight and a greater volume, more permanent in their functionalities. When questioned afterward, the photographer said he guessed which things were who's based on common sense assessments of each object's function. Simply, was it for long-term or short-term use?

This classification of objects as *hers* involved deducing the temporal relation the object has with its surroundings. Grosz writes on Henri Bergson's concept of temporality as a force that produces difference: "Bergson attributes to the universe as a whole a durational power that both enables all objects, things, to be synchronized, that is, temporally mapped relative to each other, divisible into different fluxes while nevertheless capable of participating in a single, englobing current forward."⁶³ The photographer's selections of images show that the apartment may be understood as having multiple, co-existing temporalities, and emphasize the recognition of objects in their temporal organization with reference to when they arrived and their participation in this "englobing current forward."

The impossibility of creating a completely clear division between her possessions and mine is revealed in the photos. The photo-document of "my" stack of books includes the table on which they had been placed (*her* table), the photo of my towel includes the hook (*her* hook), the photo of my toiletry bag includes the sink (including yet another fold in the chain of proprietors, the *landlords' s* sink!) The objects are not extracted from their contexts completely; they are in intricate relation to the apartment's architecture and objects, forming assemblages and relations with them.

Trying to divide the objects into two groups reveals that an object may not be entirely extracted from its movement; is not an autonomous piece of matter but enveloped by its surrounding active relations. *The space of the apartment can be felt, seen, and sensed within the object.* The space of the sink presses into the toiletry bag, the hook pierces the space of the towel, and the table pushes up into the space of the books.

⁶³ Grosz, "Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming," 11.

The items are inseparable from their positions, their physical relationalities, how they touch other things; in short, their entangled spatiality is revealed.⁶⁴

This situation recalls Spanish choreographer Norberto Llopis Segarra's 2013 performance *Orientation*,⁶⁵ wherein he writes:

...An object crosses the space ... mmm...
...a space crosses an object ... mmm...

In *Orientation*, Segarra displays multiple pieces of black paper on stage in a grid. Objects are photocopied onto certain papers, but mostly the sheets are solid black. Segarra speaks about how the space cuts into these copies of objects on the two-dimensional plane, and how the object cuts into the space of the paper. Later in the performance, he wonders aloud: "Where do the two movements meet?"

Following Segarra's line of questioning, I begin considering the space of the sublet as crossing into my objects, and the space of my objects as crossing into the sublet. Taking up Segarra's intriguing question—where do the two movements meet?—I transpose the question from the paper's two dimensions to a three-dimensional space. This crossing of the spaces of apartment and object meets in:

MY HAND

⁶⁴ "The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity in the ongoing reconfiguring of locally determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings." Barad, "Posthuman Performativity," 817.

⁶⁵ See: <http://www.tretigri.org/projects/136/Orientation%202011>.



My hand is the point of becoming of two space-times—hers and mine—in that both my hand and the sublet are continually constituted and reconstituted through every touching, shifting, pressing, and probing; the apartment becomes, appears through my (temporal and spatial) touch.

Objects move bodies, and bodies move objects. A body conceived as a dynamic conduit—intensifying connections.

object crossing // hand crossing // space crossing

Touch becomes more than a sensation. It is a plane of experience entangling many boundaries and dimensions.

2.3 Itemizing⁶⁶

“Then draw up the inventory of everything that surrounds, encircles, enrobes, implicates the present or past reality of the object...”⁶⁷

As the weeks pass, I am increasingly intrigued by the dynamic intersection of guest/host/space/object in the sublet. In the awareness that my body and all my objects are being crossed with someone else’s space, and vice versa, I begin to probe how a performative, choreographic process might bring the complex relations in this territorialized intersection to emerge.

A key operation of choreography is articulation, which may be considered as the expression of how one is paying attention. To articulate something is to set it in motion and to give it value. The “thing” articulated has been communicated in a particular way and has been weaved into the temporal moment of its articulation.

Choreography theorist Petra Sabisch defines articulation as a “double and simultaneous movement of composition and of differentiation.”⁶⁸ In other words, articulation is at once the process of differentiating and separating out heterogeneous parts, as well as composing these parts (into a new way of considering them). This double operation of articulation produces new qualities, which in turn lead to new relations.

Articulating points of interest reveals how I am attending to something, and to what I am attending, amidst an infinity of things to express. I separate out and thus turn a

⁶⁶ *Itemizing* is the process of separating out the contents of a room in order to take an account of them. It is a process of keeping track of things, of determining what is missing.

⁶⁷ Cramer, “Experience as Artifact,” 24.

⁶⁸ Sabisch, *Choreographing Relations*, 13.

focus upon certain movements and things. According to Sabisch, this choreographic process of expressing and identifying how one is paying attention “qualitatively transforms the relations between the parts.”⁶⁹

I consider how a process of itemization, namely of selecting, identifying, and ordering a list of my sublet’s contents, might actualize the economic, corporeal, and territorial forces at work here. The itemizing practice is a form of articulation of what is observed or not observed. The object-items appear through my spoken articulation and my bodily actions. When I show an item, I purposefully articulate a few aspects about it, but hold back from providing a more complete description. As much as I am demonstrating certain items, I am also bringing into focus a non-articulation of the surrounding things that I am choosing not to speak about. An articulation is a cut, a partial understanding of how an assemblage of body-space-object might move.

I set up a camera and, alone in the space, I begin dancing for the camera a series of items that I have collected. I consider the camera the frame for my unplanned process.

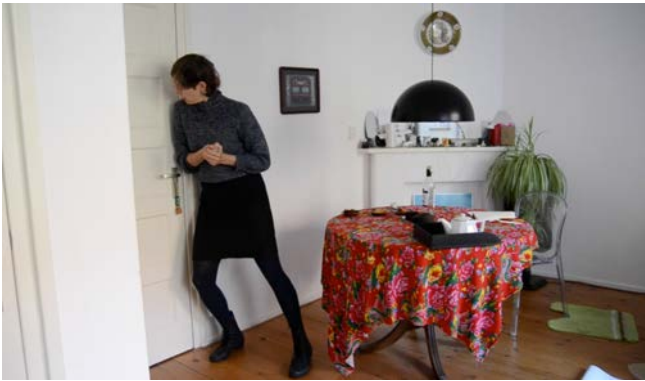
Who is the “I” that is dancing? The space of the sublet is threading through my body. Within the sublet, my body’s beginning and ending are uncertain. In this dancing practice, I found myself jumping right into the action of displaying the apartment without introducing myself. I do not elaborate on how I found myself to be in this space, how I belong, or how I might account for my presence and the absence of others. I don’t even have a name for myself as yet. Perhaps I aim to be a stand-in for the pleasure of a nameless, supposedly innocent occupant.

⁶⁹ “We will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice.” Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 105.

I display a series of items for the camera, not mentioning (at first) how they came to be here or to whom they belong. My tone is formal, polite, and upbeat. I find myself performing self-sufficiency and enthusiasm as though I had every right to show someone else's things.

I realize that every move I make is a *tiny trespass* against the original organization of the place upon my arrival. Gently, I probe and amplify this feeling of trespass. I bump into things, I rearrange, I pick up garbage and display it, and I drop things. As I probe my relation to these objects, I am probing *what kind of guest* I might be in this situation. I begin to insert the objects that I have brought with me into the collection sourced from the sublet, and do not always offer an explanation of which objects are whose.

Excerpted Dance: Script and Stills. (Body actions written in blue.)



Item 1. I lean against the wall and thump it with each side of my body.



Item 2. I place a blanket over a chair. There we go!



Item 3. I rotate a painting on the wall. Right!



Item 4. We are going to pretend that there is no difference between outside and inside.



Item 5. I move a painting from one side of the room to the other.



Item 6, which is actually two items, but I call them one single item. Unstacking a pair of cardboard shoe spacers.



Item 7 is a bit tricky, because it's actually just the outside of the book, not the inside. So for Item 7, please just think about the outside of the book.



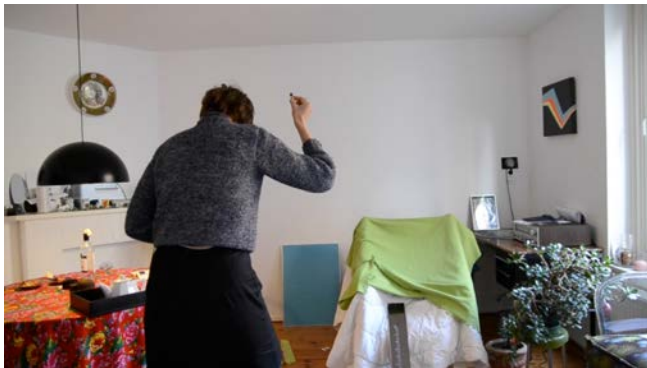
Item 8 is partially hidden. It's this measuring stick right here. [I lift it up and let it drop.](#) Its surface is burnished, so there's some nice reflected light, and it may break.



Item 9 is a bit funny. It's composed of a fork, a pen, an elastic, and my mouth. I'll just wrap this around like that. It, too, is actually just one item, called a "pen-fork-mouth." [I play with it against my teeth. A vibrating sound is emitted.](#)



Oh yes ... Item 10 is really special. It's somewhere between an action and an object. (I take two empty plastic containers and cross my arms. Slowly, I put one container inside the other). So, that was Item 10.



Item 11 is somewhat historical; it works in my country, but I am not sure if it can work here. The figure on the front of this coin here is a sailboat, and the sailboat is called the *Bluenose*. The *Bluenose* was a fishing schooner, built in the 1920s to fish cod, but what happened instead was that it became a famous racing boat. For seventeen consecutive years, it beat all the other American and Canadian ships—this strange, hybrid boat. Given subsequent improvements in fishing technologies, in the 1940s the *Bluenose* was sold and eventually sank somewhere off Haiti. That's the *Bluenose*!



Item 12 is this blue cushion. It's an especially bouncy cushion. *And this hat I am wearing is not my hat.* It is specially chosen because it is not mine.



I let the cushion drop. We can't see that bounce very well, but take it from me, it was a very nice bounce.



Item 13 is quite lovely as well. It takes you, the viewer, and places you over here, nicely up against the wall so that you may see me from the side. It's a simple one, but a nice one. Now you are just a little bit closer to the ocean than you were a moment ago.



Item 14 is the very beautiful difference between speaking and thinking. [Pause.](#)



Item 15. I am going to just sit down here, get a nice perspective, and think about some spaces to show you:

So, a
 space between the chimney and the jade plant
 between my chin and the cooking egg
 teapot and my ear
 edge of the table and top of your head
 the Amsterdam shadow of a tree to the measuring stick
 the hat that is not mine to the fork that is mine
 piece of ginger and the palm of my hand
 the inside of my elbow and the tiptop of the plant
 my spine and the camera
 between each of my fingers
 and I think I will end with underneath the chair and my tongue.

2.4 Analysis of Itemization (Choreographing an Inside and an Outside)

I assemble a heterogeneous collection of items: objects of some value, disposable objects, her objects, my objects, my body parts, and the spaces around objects. I am considering my “items” to be a series of movements that assemble objects, spaces, and bodily parts. All these I organize as equivalencies or consistencies, without dividing corporeal events and matter.

What does it achieve, not to distinguish between spaces, objects, and movements? To undo the boundaries between these parcelled-out phenomena? It smashes bodily movement into objects, and object-ness into the body’s movement. It makes a new body, a new bodying. Erin Manning writes that the process of ‘bodying’ suggests the capacity of the body to continuously transform (to take new form) through its circumstances. ‘[B]ody’ is an ecology of processes, [...] always in co-constellation with the environmentality of which it is part. A body is a node of relational process, not a form per se.”⁷⁰

Item 9, named a “pen-fork-mouth,” composed of a fork, a pen, an elastic, and my mouth, is body-as-relational-process. As I play with it against my teeth and a vibrating sound is emitted, my teeth compose with the sonorous pen-fork-mouth, and the pen-fork-mouth vibrates with the friction against my teeth.

This process untethers these cheap plastic materials from their recognizable status as disposable commodities within a regime of capital, and propels them toward a sonorous quality and an intimate relation with my mouth. Of course, they do not stop

⁷⁰ Manning, *Always More Than One*, 19.

being “cheap materials,” but they do evince new qualities through their movement. The boundary that proposes the strict separation of body and object is troubled. The choreography of attending to these objects (with small, sharp movements against my teeth) forms a new body, or, “more precisely, conditions of a certain body giving itself a form.”⁷¹ With Item 9, I am experimenting with what this body in the moment might produce.

With Item 15, I name the spatial relations in between objects and body parts in the apartment. By naming the spaces between objects (as in *between the teapot and my ear*, *between a piece of ginger and the palm of my hand*, *between the inside of my elbow and the tiptop of the plant*), I draw attention to the fact that each object is fused with its position relative to other positions. These in-between spaces that I am naming will morph if I shift the position either of myself or the objects. This means that the simple act of moving an object across the room shifts not only the object but animates the object’s relations with other objects. More precisely, by rearranging the objects in space, the space in between the objects get rearranged too. This consideration lends the act of moving an object across the room a significant impact, as it causes the infinity of other spatial distances surrounding it to fluctuate.

Attuning to the in-between space of *the teapot and my ear* delimits these elements and composes them together, the double operation of articulation that Sabisch has identified. The teapot may be considered through its distance to my ear, and my ear may

⁷¹ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 98.

be considered through its distance from the teapot, thereby “qualitatively transforming the relations between the parts.”⁷²

2.5 A Hat *That Is Not Mine*



In Item 12, I state for the camera that I am wearing a hat *that is not mine*. Somehow, I do not directly belong to this item, and I am articulating (confessing) this non-belonging to the camera.

I have established that every object in the sublet is threaded through with the space of the sublet, and that the space of the sublet is threaded through with the objects in it. My body, considered as object, is already part sublet, the sublet already part body. The status of each discrete item has suddenly become relational.

The hat has been territorialized by the original occupant, and yet, by placing it on my head, with this gestural element I compose a new body. I am testing the intensities of

⁷² Sabisch, *Choreographing Relations*, 104.

a new body that doesn't belong entirely to itself, testing whether the hat in the sublet has the potential to be reterritorialized. As Deleuze and Guattari state: "It may be all but impossible to distinguish deterritorialization and reterritorialization since they are mutually enmeshed, or like opposite faces of the same process."⁷³

By stating that the hat does not belong to me, a difference is created, and the hat retains a belonging to something else, far away. A tension is choreographed, through the direction of my arm drawing the hat up toward my head, and through the words I speak, which pulls the object out of my grasp.

I consider this sequence a powerful convergence of territorial forces: the body's gesture of putting on the hat and finding its new form, in composition with the spoken words of the object's territorial belonging to someone else. Notions of inside and outside, hers and mine, merge yet also sustain a distinction. Territorializations, articulations, partitions, and touch express nuances of entangled space.

2.6 Embodiment and Subjectivity in Modernity

To describe the situation of dwelling in a sublet as an experience of touching that which *is not mine*, is to immediately enter into territorializations based on strict distinctions between inside and outside. Practices that create strict boundaries between things is a formulation that ushers in an entire Western system of classification and order,

⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 258.

the Cartesian practice of parceling out an I-it distinction between mind and body, and a I-world distinction between body and world. With this utterance “this is not mine”, I usher in practices of embodiment and subjectivity in Western modernity.

Modernity, in the West, as a system of beliefs, attitudes and practices, is expressed through the development of individualism, capitalism, technological progress, urbanization and the birth of the nation state. Modernity, as a complex and vast project that extends far outside the scope of the thesis, is addressed here as a “form of subjectivity,⁷⁴ and a mode of embodiment, acts of perceiving, experiencing and drawing meaning from the world.

Modern subjectivity is that which places subjectivity as a process cut off from directly experiencing the world. Subjectivity is conceptualized as an equivalency with a subject, a bounded, coherent identity. “Cartesian practice draws an absolute boundary between ‘inside and ‘outside,’ and privileges the former at the expense of the latter.”⁷⁵ In his book *Exhausting Dance*, André Lepecki situates modern subjectivity as a process that ensnares the “ego as the ultimate subject for and of representation”⁷⁶ and that views the “body as independently existing and governed by immanent laws.”⁷⁷ This view promotes a notion of the subject as a coherent, unified entity, remaining mostly constant and unaffected by new environments. Further, considering the body as “governed by immanent laws,” presupposes that sense perception is pre-cultural, disengaged from accounting for the situated, social and cultural nature of experience.

Modern embodiment is organized through Cartesian principles, prescribing a

⁷⁴ Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity*, 5, quoted in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 9.

⁷⁵ Larkins, “The Idea of the Territorial State,” 51.

⁷⁶ Courtine, “Voice of Consciousness and Call of Being,” 79, quoted in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 11.

⁷⁷ Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity*, 7, quoted in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 11.

body as an independent and discrete agent in the world. “The distinctive feature of modern embodiment lies in the process of individuation, in the identification of the body with the person as a unique individual and, therefore as the bearer of values and legally enforceable rights.”⁷⁸ This way of classifying the body as an individual becomes the basis for social, political, and legal institutions. The enactments of modern embodiment organizes and governs persons as coherent entities with clear edges.

My choreographic process in the sublet attempts to trouble this inherited modern understanding of the discrete individual, in order to re-conceptualize subjectivity and embodiment as evolving and ongoing, as multiple, as ongoing processes across each new situation. A subject may enact multiple subjectivities, subjectivities are composed and re-composed through each situation.⁷⁹ Subjectivities (in the plural) considered as a critical way of signaling the subject’s processes of subjectification.

Subjectivities produce embodiments, and embodiments produced subjectivities. Subjectivity and embodiment are not unchanging, they are forces and feelings that may move transversally across the I-it body-world boundary. I reference once again Barad’s key notion that boundaries are practices, not inherent, that “boundaries do not sit still!”⁸⁰

Referring back to the question I posed earlier in the chapter; Who is the “I” that is dancing? I now offer a few proposals. My ways of composing and differentiating elements between myself and the sublet aim to dismantle a certitude of embodiment and subjectivity, a reaching towards an unknowability, an entanglement.

⁷⁸ Ferguson, *Modernity and Subjectivity*, 38, quoted in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 8.

⁷⁹ Subjectivities are “a process of subjectification, that is, the production of a way of existing [that] can’t be equated with a subject.” Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 98.

⁸⁰ Barad, “Posthuman Performativity,” 817.

The “I” that is dancing is not only enacting physical movements of the body, but forming a new relationship with the sublet, producing contrasts, qualities and desires. I am dancing in order to entangle the role of guest to the role of dancer.

The “I” that is dancing is becoming multiple. The “I” that is dancing is practicing a state of unknowing, not knowing exactly what she is touching, not knowing what exactly is touching back. The “I” that is dancing is a body that is not self-contained, but a processual body, bound to others, “enfolded traces of othering.”⁸¹

The “I” that is dancing is oriented toward thinking subjectivity and embodiment through entanglement. Thinking entanglement is giving priority to indeterminate connections across my experience and the circumstances of the site, and foregrounding the senses. The “I” that is dancing is not exempt from the forces of modernity, yet is not limited to them.

⁸¹ Barad, “On Touching,” 9.

Chapter 3

Guesting and Hosting: *Surface Rising*

Images documenting Surface Rising, October 2, 2015, photographed by Paul Litherland

I created *Surface Rising* in 2015 in response to an invitation from the VIVA! Art Action biennial, a performance art festival in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal.⁸² The piece was a silent performance of one hour, to be experienced in my apartment, one person at a time. An audience member was greeted at my door and, through a series of handwritten notes, invited into a program of spectatorship, choreographed to look, pause, rest, sit, walk, lie down, smell, touch, and listen. I performed for ten days, with two or three performances a day.

My performance was announced through the VIVA! website and poster, and prospective audience-guests were asked to write to me directly for an appointment. I responded to each email personally, giving my coordinates, asking about allergies, and noting that the performance would take one to two hours.

Surface Rising is a study of hospitality and performativity expressed through the embodied modes of offering and receiving. I examine the micro-movements of guest and host and site, the qualities of imposing and being imposed upon. I also examine the territorializations that are expressed through choreographic performance.

⁸² Tiohtià:ke/ Montreal is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk). It is located at the confluence of the Saint-Lawrence and Ottawa rivers, a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations. Unceded territory signals territories of which the Indigenous peoples have rightful title, territories that have never been relinquished with consent to settlers. See: <https://www.caut.ca/content/guide-acknowledging-first-peoples-traditional-territory>



I heard the doorbell.

I approached the glass front door of my apartment and gently took down the large piece of flimsy newsprint taped to the pane. I looked through the glass and smiled at the audience-guest standing outside.

Slowly, I slide the paper down the pane, looking through the glass at the guest. Either our eyes meet as the paper passes, or they look away.

I slide the paper down the pane as far as my arms extend, and then I let go and it falls to the floor. I repeat this gesture five times, each time holding up the piece of paper to block our eye contact, and then letting it slide down.

One audience-guest put her bicycle helmet over her face as I slid the paper down a third time.

One audience-guest thought it was a trick, and, after two gestures with the paper, rang the doorbell again and tried to open the door. (The door was purposely locked).

One audience-guest turned around the third time so that I saw the back of her head as I slid the paper down.

Many guests met my eyes each time I slowly slid the paper down past eye level.

After the fifth time, I pressed against the glass a series of notes:

Please turn off your phone
Silence please
Enter

After showing these notes, I unlocked the door, opened it and stepped away, and the audience-guest entered.

In this sequence, I had several aims. I emphasized the directness and simplicity of gazes meeting, again and again, as the paper slid between my hands. The repetition points to the simultaneous condition of seeing and being seen between guest and host. The technique of covering and uncovering (which I repeated in other ways throughout the performance) created an ebb and flow, navigating different depths of visibility. The endless loop of covering and uncovering draws attention to the unsteady act of seeing, the visible flowing with the not-yet-visible, the site exposed through a certain brief trajectory, tempo, angle, proximity, and then covered up once again. My actions aimed to invite the audience-guest to become aware of the registers of the not or not-yet visible as much as those of the visible, to attend to the process of looking as involved with questions of access, position, excess, and incompleteness.

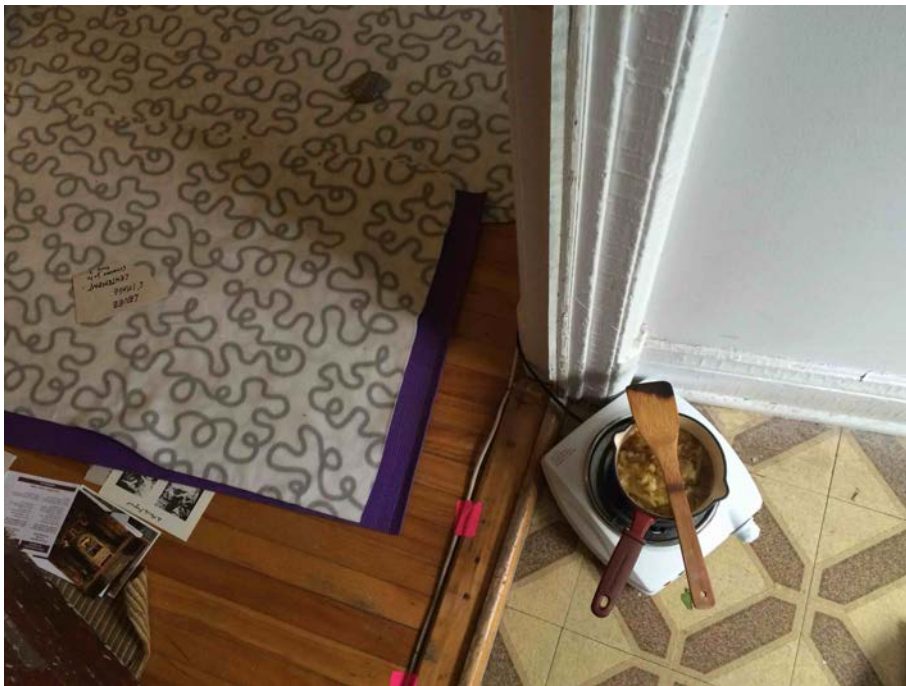
Situated in my apartment, to the visitor the everyday, the familiar, becomes centered and de-centered, partially hidden, partially reordered, and partially restored. The aim is to infuse into the performance a vector of quick recognition that flows into defamiliarization. This technique of covering/uncovering toys with the apartment's force as a site that "comes with" a history and a practice of looking, habitual modes of action and locating oneself within it.⁸³

⁸³ Designation is a "strategy that seeks to create place in conformity with abstract models." de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29. In other words, designation is an a priori linguistic operation that gives a general categorization to a space.

3.1 Glimpsing

When the audience-guests first enter the front door, I silently gesture to them to take off their boots, coats, and bags. I wait as they do so and then hang their coats. (This proved comical, at one point, as one audience-guest arrived wearing red high-top sneakers with elaborate laces that went as high as her knees. Undoing these spectacular shoes took many minutes, with no conversation to break the ice).

There is a small hotplate in the entrance on which I am beginning to cook a soup. The audience-guest has to walk around this oddly positioned cooking apparatus.





The first thing I offer each audience-guest is a warm, moist towel to wipe their hands. Most of them accept it. Next I offer a small black box, and a little note that says:

Open me.

As the audience-guest opens the little box, a colourful brooch is revealed. I gesture to a similar brooch, which I am wearing, and the guest figures out that I am requesting they wear this brooch. Most audience-guests attach the brooch to their shirt, but some do not.

As I hand the audience-guest these various notes, which they unfold and read, I notice many guests darting their gaze about the room as a way of getting their bearings and checking the place out. This glimpsing-about seems furtive, the gesture of someone unsure they have permission to do so. It is a clear, embodied response connected to the particular circumstance of seeing and of knowing that one is being seen.

What conditions of looking does *Surface Rising* propose? The glimpsing-about seemed to me a somatically intelligent expression of my audience-guest's agency, while seeking to remain polite. Significantly, it happened with guest after guest, the degree of furtiveness shifting slightly. There was "too much" to look at. The apartment's abundant contents could not be taken in in an instant, especially while attending to me respectfully as well as to my invitation to focus on the little note that I placed in their hand, even as they sought to figure out "where" they were. Glimpsing about was an embodied strategy for observing, in quick progression, a complex set of proximities and distances.

I realized that I was in competition with the site for the attention of my audience-guest! My choreographing of the situation demanded a movement, on the part of the audience-guest, of backgrounding and foregrounding points of focus: for the guest, I came into focus as the apartment receded, and then I receded as they surreptitiously scanned the apartment. With quick movements of the eyes, from peripheral vision to forward focus, the audience-guests got their bearings and developed a general sense of their location in relation to the surrounding space.

Certain time restraints pertaining to the glimpse proved important for thinking through power relations of territoriality. As a condition of being a guest, the territory is incomplete. It is obscured by power relations in regard to what is chosen to be offered, or

not offered, by the host. Glimpsing is a slight trespass on the part of the guest, an attempt to grab a glance at something more than what is offered to them to look at.

Glimpsing connects movement, vision, and power. The act of looking here is not disinterested or conceptualized from a fixed point of view; it is a body grasping to know where it is. It is looking as embodied navigation. The quickness of the glimpse is the audience-guest's being in time as conditioned by power, a projection into their next move with muscular readiness, moving with agility into the immediate future. It is a sign that the audience-guest is on the move, and so there are multiple points of direction to be in relation to. In this case, glimpsing produces vague, blurry patches of space in coordination with close-up points of focus, a kind of space-making inseparable from the embodied subject.

“Activating zooming in and zooming out—the space becomes huge and tiny, my body becomes huge and tiny.”

—Adrianna D, audience-guest feedback, October 2015

If, as Potrović suggests, “movement makes the body,”⁸⁴ then glimpsing allows for the guest to move as a *becoming-body*, a new body. The situation organizes this guesting-glimpsing agile body, which zooms into and out of focus points, expanding and contracting in relation to the room.

In short, glimpsing occurs where territoriality and choreography intersect. It is the emergence of a combined mode of attention and of navigation. The glimpsing guest goes about undoing a relation of clearly legible and geometric space in a precomposed body, shifting the scales of both the body and the space. Glimpsing makes a new map.

⁸⁴ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 107.

3.2 Silence, Bodyings, Imagined Movements

I roll out two yoga mats side by side and toss some comfortable pillows onto the mats.

I hand the audience-guest a little note. It reads:

Please lie down. I know it's a bit awkward, but it won't last too long.

The guest lies down and I approach the doorway of the room. I lightly brush my hand along the door jamb, tracing smoothly up from the floor, across overhead, and down the other side. I lie down beside my audience-guest. The soup in the entrance has begun to boil, filling the apartment with a savoury smell and the sound of simmering liquid. Many sounds, in fact, emerge through the silence: faint sounds from the open window, the wind, birdsong, my neighbours' taps and footsteps, the guest's and my own breathing and movements.

Lying side by side, I slow my breath. My awareness is focused along the side of my body nearest my audience-guest: ear, cheek, neck, shoulder, arm, and down along the side of my torso to the legs and feet. My skin, able to sense heat and movement, becomes activated and multiplies the attunement of a body becoming form(s).



How do silence and bodily stillness compose with the guest/host/site situation here?

What new kind(s) of bodyings and attunements are emerging from this trying-to-be-still-and-silent situation?

My choreographic insistence on silence is a compositional force that heightens the range of finer, surrounding sounds, increasing the audience-guest's attunement to distances beyond the apartment. At the same time, silence amplifies the body's non-verbal sounds (of breath, fluids, pulse, etc.) As such, it is a technique of expanding and contracting awareness into farther and nearer scales and landmarks.

Lying down for approximately five minutes relaxes the reflexes that sustain standing. Standing is, in fact, a balancing act,⁸⁵ which demands muscular tension and mental alertness. Lying down probes another distribution of the relations between weight and gravity.

Though lying down may seem like a less goal-driven position, a softening of muscle tone, in fact coming to stillness and silence directs the significance of the performance toward the dynamic of guest and host in proximity. There is less a focus on signifying action "out there" in the apartment as upon the subtle complexity of shared space in a room. The fragility of the pact of not speaking, so easily broken, enlivens the mutuality of sustaining it. A delicate balance is at play, as the guest and host receive (are moved by) each other's silence as much as they offer (move) it to one another. The choreographic insistence upon *not speaking* investigates hospitality as a delicate mutuality, an immediately felt co-creation, always with the potential to be sustained or ended.

⁸⁵ Manheimer, "Steve Paxton's 1977 Small Dance Guidance." See: <https://myriadicity.net/contact-improvisation/contact-improv-as-a-way-of-moving/steve-paxton-s-1977-small-dance-guidance>.

I am probing how my audience-guest might sense the flow of tension/ease in the situation. On the one hand, she does not know what will happen next; on the other, she has accepted the invitation to participate in my performance. This unknowing inside the knowing dynamizes the event. It is a moment in which elements of risk, fear or discomfort might intensify as expectations unfold as to what might or might not be asked of the audience-guest. Experiencing thresholds of unknowns and knowns is a means of gently provoking imagined movements threaded into actual movements. My request for stillness is a technique for emphasizing a future-oriented imaginative spectrum of what-will-come-next.

The choreography of lying down and intensifying proximity may reassure the guest and direct them toward a state of relaxation, or it may instead heighten tension and alertness. It does not predetermine exactly what bodyings it will produce, but it does organize ways of attuning as a looping between actual positions and imagined movements. As Potrović writes: “Body, constantly oscillating between the actual and the virtual—is never finished.”⁸⁶

3.3 Postcards

After we have been lying still for some time, I hand the audience-guest a series of little notes. Numbered 1 through 4, each gives a word or shape to act as a focus for the viewer.

- 1. the sky*
- 2. a box*
- 3. a hook*
- 4. a scribble in the shape of a crack on one of the apartment’s walls*

⁸⁶ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 106.

The audience-guest reads each note and then casts about for the corresponding item. For guidance, I point them in the general direction.



I then hand over some personal mail, which I have received while staying in the apartment. Some postcards depict: the lenticular image of a horse (very amusing to angle back and forth and make it magically trot); a Catholic church in Venice; an exhibition of art in the Dutch city of Haarlem; an archival image of the mountain Mont-Royal from the 1930s; a selfie, from the Internet, of a young nude woman sitting crossed-legged and listening to music; a Christmas note from my parents; a love letter; a folded credit card bill in an envelope; and an election notice.

I was surprised (though it seems obvious in retrospect) when, during my first performance as I showed my guest the postcards, they flipped them over and read the private messages on the back. Most of my guests, performance after performance, did the same. I had assumed they would simply look at the images. But I had wanted to hand them over to the guests so that they could hold them.

With such a slight, quick action, the flip of the postcard sparked an uncertainty of roles.

Momentarily, I am following the guest's lead.

I was interested that “more” had been taken than what I thought I had offered.

With my guest's flipping-over of the postcard and reading the back, I feel a brief flicker

of trespass—of my privacy and of my expectations. I feel a little exposed, though not that something is now missing. I am merely startled, as I had thought that I was leading the course of events.

How to attend to the movement that constitutes hosting and guesting? To think of hosting and guesting first in terms of movement is to release the conceptualization of these terms from firm roles. A guest may suddenly propose a hospitable gesture, become temporarily a guest that hosts; and, equally, a host may be undone by the process of following the guest's lead.

To consider hosting and guesting as modes of moving is to step out of a quantifying habit of measuring precisely what is being offered and received. The postcard flip may be understood as simultaneously a receiving and an offering. As the guest flips, they receive “more” and the engagement is extended, a reaction that initiates new stakes about which I was unaware. In the overlapping of offering and receiving, and beyond a who-did-what inter-play, each movement initiates and emerges from the other.⁸⁷

3.4 Attuning to an amplitude

I hand my audience-guest an 8 x 11 piece of paper, and motion for her to raise it above their face. I do the same. The image printed on the paper is an unnamed portrait. Though unnamed, it would be a very familiar image to someone who was aware of Quebecois history.

⁸⁷ For a detailed material-discursive analysis of the movement of guesting and hosting, see Pull-out text 1, “Embodiment of Guest, Host, and Site,” page 110.



The image that I ask the audience-guest to hold is a portrait of the French colonial explorer Samuel de Champlain (1567-1635). He is considered the key figure of the founding of New France, in 1608.⁸⁸ I do not name the figure for my audience-guest. Without a name, I am aiming to involve his image not as a distinct character, but as an iconic force, a force that is acting upon this moment. By not naming him directly, I am aiming to draw out a relation between the image, myself, my audience-guest and the apartment, a relation as the fold of the past towards futurity. I take up colonial theorist Paul Carter's term "amplitude" as the apt intention I have for including this image. Carter attends to the ground not as abstracted as "surface but as manifold surfaces, their different amplitudes composing an environment [...] uniquely local, which could not be transposed."⁸⁹ Amplitude implies the possible resonances of a relation—and may be considered an expression of forces flowing through the past, the present and future. The

⁸⁸ See: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/new-france>

⁸⁹ Carter, *The Lie of the Land*, 294, quoted in Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, 99.

image is offered as a relation; I do not know the extent of the audience-guest's awareness of Champlain's influence on this moment. It is a "loud" or "quiet" resonance in the apartment, dependent on the audience-guest's own knowledge of the founding (foundational) violence of Quebec. By not naming the figure, I seek not to "inform" but to probe how this amplitude might or might not be received.

3.5 Probing: Not-Yet Relations between Guest and Objects



I ask the guest to sit down at the table in front of a cloth that is draped over a few objects, revealing only their lumpy shapes. I gesture to the guest that they are to remove the fabric, which reveals five personal objects: an antique farm tool, a pair of clean underwear, an unidentifiable object wrapped in green bubble wrap and pink tape, a ceramic owl, and a rolled-up sheepskin. It is important to me that the revealing of these items be enacted by the guest, so that the objects "come into appearance" through their gesture.

I hand the guest a little note:

Please touch each object and select one.

Then I hand over another note:

Please hold this object for a short while. Feel your body through the object. I will leave you for a few minutes and will come back soon.

I received feedback on this part of the performance from a guest who felt that the objects were available to her yet were somehow impersonal, that she was both inside and outside of her contact with them. She felt invited into proximity with the objects (to touch them), but did not know their specific, intimate stories. She had not been invited into their narrative meaning, yet knew nonetheless that they were mine. This approach resisted the item's peculiar charge and encouraged guesswork as to their value. This "guesswork" represents an emergence of the potential ways in which the objects could be in relation to the situation. It is also the virtual movement that ensures the audience-guest's awareness of their position as a visitor insofar as certain aspects of the objects make them seem somewhat foreign and as the situation is somewhat uneasy. With the directive to touch and hold, I insist on an unfamiliar dimension of my things, and perhaps in so doing assign importance to an unfamiliar dimension of the role of the audience-guest. The objects are de-territorialized from their usual roles in the apartment, and they have not yet found new uses.

While in process with the work, I was not sure at first why I chose not to reveal my personal relationships to the objects. However, as I performed day after day, I realized that the piece returns to this rich push-and-pull of recognizing and not recognizing an everyday item, an everyday space, an everyday gesture.

The proposal to hold the objects became a continuous play between permitting and prohibiting the audience-guest access to my intimate domain, facilitating and

resisting the tendency in our contemporary Western practices toward looking as quantifying—that contemporary discerning eye, which swiftly assesses and classifies the worth and context of the apartment and its contents, a default mode of looking that does not necessarily take into account the reciprocal and somatic dimensions of looking. If the objects on the table are proposed to the audience-guest as an experience of probing (touching, holding, seeing), will this invite the guest to search for a not-yet relation in regard to knowing the objects, and a not-yet knowing of how to guest?

The act of holding probes a sensory encounter of temperature, texture, shape, and mass. Holding is oriented around the aesthetic pleasure of the hand. It is a task that immediately links the internal sense of one's body with external stimulation. The object articulates its weight through the muscular tension that the body requires to balance itself in relation to the new added mass. Ever so slightly, the object shifts the body's points of balance. The coolness of the objects makes one aware of the relative warmth of one's body. Perhaps the proprioceptive experience of scale looms up, the volume of the body compared to the size of these handheld instruments. The contact with the object becomes a kind of tether, which becomes a new point of awareness that shifts the orientation of the entire room. The clear demarcation of object and hand blurs into a dynamic of sensing.

Holding an object is a technique for sharpening focus upon both the internal sensations of the body (interoceptive) and the external stimulations of bodying (exteroceptive). German-American neurologist Erwin Straus writes: "In sensory experience, there unfolds both the becoming of the subject and the happening of the

world. I become insofar as something happens, and something happens (for me) only insofar as I become.”⁹⁰

As the audience-guest breathes, her points of contact with the objects shift ever so slightly. The never-still vibration of the body can be felt up against the object. The effortful task of holding a weight intertwines with the touching of its surface. The texture of touch contrasts greatly with the experience of looking at the object with objective distance. Touching and holding an object encourages the audience-guest to attend simultaneously to inner and outer movements happening in this encounter. “Sensation,” Straus continues, “is neither in the world nor in the subject but is the relation of unfolding of the one for the other through a body created at their interface.”⁹¹

Sensory experience, as it flows within an emerging present, is a means of assigning importance to the audience-guest’s potential dynamic shifts, the creation of new bodyings. By gently proposing the internal and external zones of awareness of holding as the audience-guest proceeds through the performance, I am urging them toward the perception of minor shifts, probing further and further the unknown dimensions of a familiar-seeming space. In doing so, my aim is to loosen, to trouble what seems to be the sharply defined edge between object and guest.

3.6 The Cat

I gesture for the audience-guest to stand, and we walk down the hallway. About at this point, the cat is often spotted by the audience-guest.

⁹⁰ Straus, *The Primary World of the Senses*, 351, quoted in Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 8.

⁹¹ Ibid., 202, quoted in Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 72.

The cat resists my choreographic framing of the performance, yet somehow coexists with it. I feel her presence as in-between. As the site is transformed for sensorial experience, she becomes absorbed into it. The audience-guest pets her, heightened and integrated into the haptic qualities and tempos of the experience I am proposing. However, the cat makes it clear she wishes to not be choreographed, choosing to jump about or exit the apartment at her own rhythm. In this way, she is understood as unframed, an uncontrollable force, part of the “chaos that is the earth”⁹² from which the performance frame draws.



3.7 Candy Wrappers: Guests Marking the Space

We enter the living room, and I motion for the audience-guest to sit in a chair that has been pushed into the corner so it stands facing out into the room. I have already emptied the room of most of its furniture.

⁹² Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 8.

Next to the chair is a suitcase, and on the suitcase are a few empty candy wrappers, carefully arranged. I disappear into the kitchen for a few moments and reappear with a glass of water and a bowl of candy. These I offer to the audience-guest.

Guest after guest unwraps the candy and places the empty wrapper next to the other wrappers. I did not take note of who was the first guest to do this, but when I did begin to notice the newly placed wrappers, I decided not to clear them away.

The wrappers became markers of presence communicated between the guests, coordinates of the accumulated days of the performance. This accumulation oriented the guests to a sense of the project as a whole, connecting to the space-times of earlier guests who had sat in the chair. If one needs landmarks to navigate in space, then to navigate in time one needs references as well. The wrappers here do not represent exact measures of time, but the temporal markings of a collective event.



3.8 The Bathroom

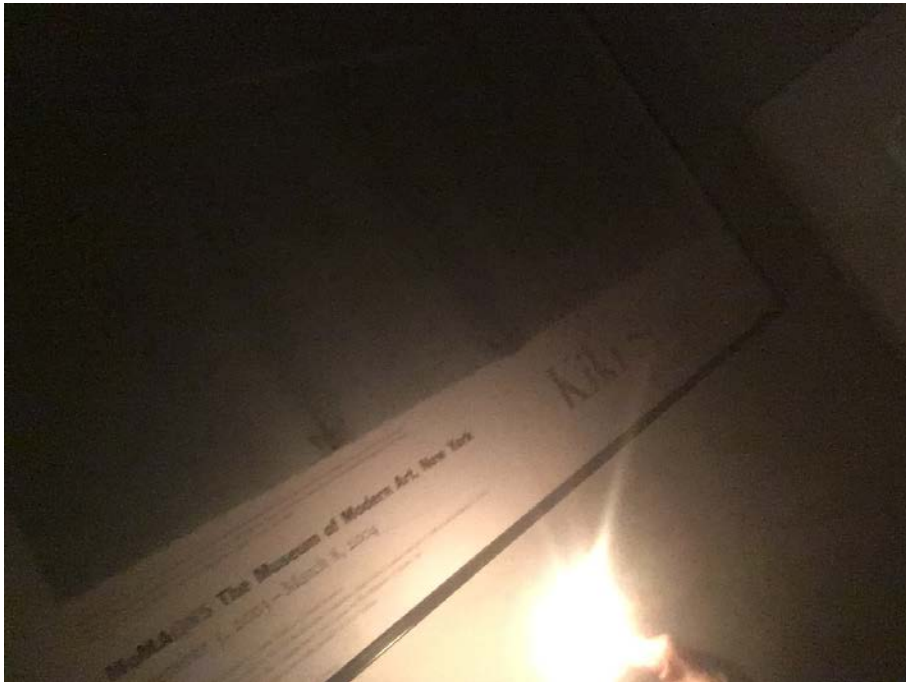
I hand the audience-guest a little note:

Please come this way.

I usher the guest into the bathroom, and then follow her inside and shut the door. We are in darkness, together. I wait. The audience-guest waits. At this point, I know I can wait in the darkness. I have gained a certain trust of my audience-guest, and I am hosting the dark room with calm energy.

Both audience-guest and dancer-host are enveloped in a certain volume of darkness.

I pick up some matches, strike one, and hand the package to the guest. I move the light toward a Kiki Smith poster on the wall. The guest follows suit, lighting a match and holding it close to the poster. By the matchlight, we illuminate certain scratchy drawings, printed words, patches of colour.



Quickly, the matches extinguish, and each of us lights another to see more details, but the light is not sufficient to apprehend the entire poster, all its detail at once. The matches extinguish once more and we hang out in the darkness for a few more moments. Then I open the door and we exit.

The bathroom experiment enabled the choreographing of the experience of a glimpse, affording an opportunity to learn from its improvisational unfolding at the beginning of

the piece. I explored this exercise in the bathroom only after performing the piece over a few days and becoming more and more curious about how to deepen and harness this way of looking.

In a 2019 interview with dance scholar Noémie Solomon, we discussed how to choreograph a practice to make the “visible flicker ... one that keeps on oscillating at thresholds of visibility.”⁹³ Degrees of visibility invite the opening-up of a plane of what remains unseen or barely seen, the dimension of experience that accompanies perception but is not always deemed valuable.

I obscure the poster in darkness and show it piecemeal, by flashlight or with matches. I choreograph the conditions of the poster so that it appears with a specific luminosity. The audience-guest knows there is “more” to see, but also that I am restricting this “more” using time and light. I am expanding my ways of hosting, organizing a very specific relation of light, time, and proximity.

The inaccessible and vague dimensions of poster and bathroom emphasize a processual threshold—the site coming into appearance and disappearance by degrees, the visible in relation with the not-yet-visible. This crafting of thresholds of visibility aims at linking the audience-guest’s process of looking to navigation, to seeking oneself out in relation to room, object, and host. It is a choreographic proposal wherein the audience-guest is prompted to consider looking as navigation, to negotiate how to go forward or how to attain one’s bearings with incomplete information.

3.9 Rainbow Glasses

⁹³ Solomon, “k.g. Guttman in conversation with Noémie Solomon,” 7.

I give the audience-guest a pair of “rainbow” glasses to put on as well as a note. The note directs the audience-guest to climb up onto the ottoman and put on the glasses.

The glasses are cheap cardboard with clear plastic “prism glasses,” an optical tool that separates light into many colours. This is the peak moment, where I aim to destabilize the audience-guest’s equilibrium, both through the guest’s vision, through the glasses, of the refracted light, and the not-entirely-firm ground of the ottoman.

Proprioception, the manner in which the body senses and orients itself in space, forms a thread of questioning in *Surface Rising*. As contemporary dance scholar Jeroen Fabius describes it: “It is a sense mediated by receptors located in muscles, tendons, and joints and stimulated by bodily movements and tensions.”⁹⁴ Proprioception affects the conceptualizing of the sphere of space around the body, and “presents an experience of space that is not in accordance to the Euclidean parameters of height, depth and width but instead is constituted through trajectories made up from individual displacements of the parts of the body.”⁹⁵

The technical difficulty in maintaining balance with one’s vision impaired while standing on an uncertain ground crystallizes the effort required to sustain one’s position. As with the work in the bathroom, here I am attempting to trouble the notion of static looking, to draw attention to, and to augment, the movement involved in the looking process itself. Using the rainbow glasses is an obvious tool to distort the vision and enhance it with tracings of colour from a light source. It echoes the glimpsing-about, in

⁹⁴ Fabius, “Boris Charmatz,” 5.

⁹⁵ Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” 179, quoted in Fabius, “Boris Charmatz,” 6.

the first part of the piece, in that it links the guest to a novel experience of space through precise, crafted conditions of proprioception and vision.



3.10 The Foreignness of the Host and the Foreignness of the Guest

As my guest stands atop the ottoman wearing the rainbow glasses, I slowly lower my knees to the floor. I tuck in my chin, I curve my spine, I lower my head and hands onto the floor, and I execute one simple summersault. I am upside-down.



In *On Hospitality*, Derrida writes of the foreignness of the foreigner. “The Foreigner fears he will be treated as mad (manikos) ... literally mad, manikos, a nutter, a maniac, who is upside down all over ... a crazy person who reverses everything from head to toe, from top to bottom, who puts all his feet on his head, inside out, who walks on his head.”⁹⁶ As Derrida puts it, the foreigner fears they will be misunderstood as a crazy (non-rational) person. Foreignness is considered as unknowability.

Through my eyes as I summersault, room and guest become inverted, become upside-down, and I am, in fact, the one right-side-up, in relation. As I topple-summersault-flip, surprisingly, so does the room topple-summersault-flip and so does the

⁹⁶ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 11.

guest topple-summersault-flip. As I did not rehearse the movement beforehand, my summersaulting produces unexpected feelings: as room and guest flipped, I felt my vision blur, my organs exposed, my control over my body momentarily undone. As the host who decides to summersault, to risk being understood as mad, who “walks on his [her] head,” I am heading toward the unknowability of my own hosting, as well as toward its effects on the entire situation.

As I summersault, my hosting moves toward becoming guest, becoming strange. I stretch Derrida’s conception of foreignness being directly grafted onto the body of the guest into a foreignness/unknowability within and across the relation of guest and host.

According to Derrida, the foreignness of guest and host implies an ethical moment in the thinking-into-being of hospitality: to move forward not with a hostility toward the other (born of fear, and of the pretense of knowing, in a final sense, what the other is) but in the determination not to presume to know the guest already, not to presume to know what hosting and guesting may become. Experiencing the strangeness, the unknowability of my own hosting is to consider hosting as movement—movement that moves us beyond what we thought we knew.⁹⁷

Hosting and guesting in *Surface Rising* aim at becoming a dance that actively cultivates a mode of unknowing. “The body,” Potrović theorizes, “does not dance from the place of knowing. It dances from the unknown. What it generates are unforeseen movements, as well as unforeseen bodyings.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ For further discussion on Derrida’s concepts of hospitality in context of *Surface Rising*, please see Pull-out text 2, page 117.

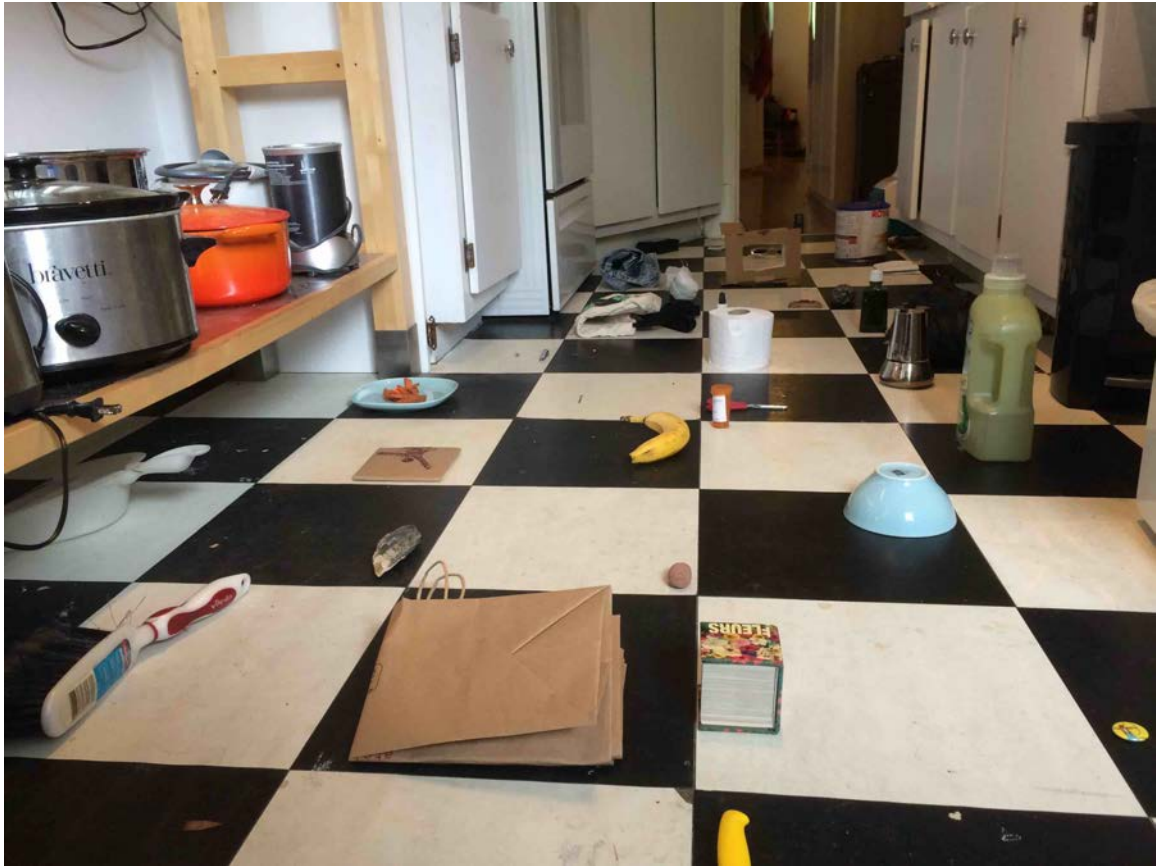
⁹⁸ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 287.



3.11 The Kitchen

The audience-guest and I enter the kitchen at the back of the apartment. There we encounter, on the floor, an eclectic distribution of household items. The kitchen floor is checkered black-and-white, and each item is placed in its own square. Not every square has an item; only about half are so occupied.

Many of the items are kitchen items: a full plate of food, a banana, a paper bag, a knife, a coffeemaker, a bowl, a container of cat food. There are also various personal items: a rock, a piece of cardboard, folded denim shorts, a cloth bag, a small book, a CD, a bottle of massage oil, a bottle of laundry detergent, a pin, a necklace, a folded piece of paper, a piece of bark.



Obviously, these common household and personal objects have been displaced from their usual placements and uses. This displacement evokes what I have earlier termed *entangled space*—space that is in between its former use and its current use. The kitchen is destabilized ever so slightly, its coherence still quite evident—and yet, the space evinces the feeling that it is on its way to becoming something else. Oddly, the objects on the floor open up a new possibility for a room mode in which the objects “belong” on the floor, in which they create a new sense of their relationality to the kitchen’s architecture. The kitchen, appearing via the displacement of objects, appears as containing many potentials. As much as the objects, it is the kitchen that is in movement.

In order for *the movement of the apartment* to become both intelligible *and* chaotic, the measured constantly probes the non-measured, the concrete location is unhinged and then becomes concrete again, the recognizable becomes unfamiliar and then recognizable again, the determinate becomes indeterminate, and so on. In other words, a territory is constituted with qualities that exceed the bounded, measured, and localized setting, qualities in movement that emerge, disperse, deepen, and extend. And yet, to facilitate the intelligibility of these qualities as they unfold, territory depends on the precise location from which these qualities arise.



I have placed a chair in front of the rear doorway, which looks out into the alley. I offer my audience-guest a hot tea as they sit in the open doorway. I move behind them, out of view, and begin doing the dishes. The audience-guest takes a seat.

“I listen to the final preparations of the soup, the steps in the kitchen, clinking dishes in the sink. I turn my back, and I watch the cat and the alley.

“I’m thinking about the performance—it surpasses, here, its proper limits. It is completely invisible, entirely relational. It becomes so intimate that I ask myself if it is still a performance. But what else would it be?”

—Claudine H., *audience-guest feedback, 2015* (author’s translation from French)⁹⁹

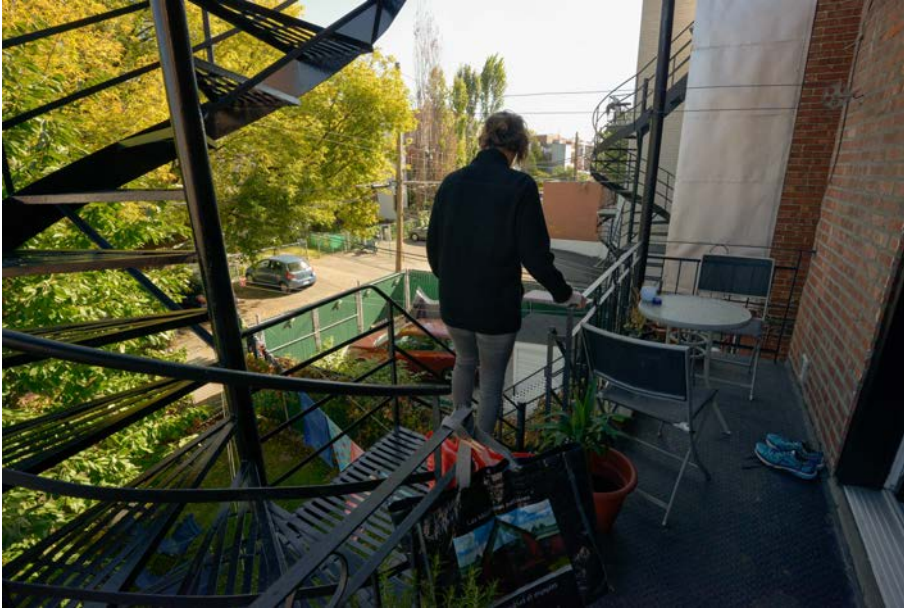
The framing of the performance has not ended, but the difference between a performance and a social visit between two people in a kitchen, one sitting and drinking tea and the other doing the dishes, is so infra-thin that it almost seems that the frame has dissolved. The performance frames the apartment as a site full of qualities: colours, sounds, smells, sensations. And so, according to the comments of audience-guest Claudine, above, these qualities become *understood* as the performance.

For this audience-guest, the ordinariness of the apartment feels *as though I might have* carefully composed it. Would these “ordinary” qualities have been noticed without my orientation of the frame to organize perception? Framing activates and organizes relations. “The earth can be *infinitely* divided, territorialized, framed,” observes Grosz. “Framing is how chaos becomes territory. Framing is the means by which objects are delimited, qualities unleashed and art made possible.”¹⁰⁰ The performance frame attempts to territorialize these qualities and thus draw them into performance.

3.12 Exit

⁹⁹ “J’écoute les derniers préparatifs de la soupe, les pas dans la cuisine, la vaisselle bardassée dans l’évier. Je te tourne le dos, et je regarde le chat et la ruelle. Je pense à la performance; elle dépasse ici ses propres limites, elle est complètement invisible, entièrement relationnelle. Elle se fait si intime, que je me demande s’il s’agit encore de performance. But what else would it be? Claudine H, *audience-guest feedback*

¹⁰⁰ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, 17.



At the end of Surface Rising, I hand the guest a note informing them that I will exit the back door and inviting them to stay in the apartment awhile, finish their tea, and leave when they're ready.

I exit.

My exit is the movement of a boundary—a boundary expressed as a gradual transition.

My exit probes how the precise edge between the performance and the apartment may or may not be felt.

Hi kg!

...

At the end, after you left, I wanted to hang out more in your apartment but Julien 'felt weird' about being there without you (I think?). And after we 'cleaned up', we left.

Julie L., audience-guest feedback, 2015

After I performed the piece for a friend and her boyfriend (who I had never been introduced to beforehand), the couple stayed drinking their tea for a while. However, my

friend's boyfriend "felt weird" staying in my apartment, and the couple left soon after. Another audience-guest didn't feel right to use the bathroom after I had exited, and so immediately took off to find one in the neighborhood. On one occasion, two guests stayed for many hours before they left. On most of the occasions, guests had written a short good-bye note, and re-arranged a few objects inside of the house in a playful spirit of good-bye. For some, my apartment as a welcoming space continued for a bit and dissipated gently. For others it shifted immediately to discomfort with the incertitude of their status of a guest without a host.

The choreography of the exit was a probing of the contract of the performance. I wanted to explore if a sensation of trespass would or would not emerge, a sense of comfort or discomfort would enter (as I exited). I had an intuition that my exit would allow the temporal nature of the agreement of the performance to become evident, to allow for the audience-guest to "end" the performance as they wished. The aim of the exit was to peel back a static notion of the apartment, to expose an ongoing reciprocity of felt sensations between myself and my guest-audience. A desire to activate territoriality as constituted through negotiation, through practices.

The notion of contract refers back to the fundamental condition of *Surface Rising*, that is that it takes place on unceded territory traditionally cared for by the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) First Nation. Unceded territory is tremor of the very ground of the performance. Acknowledging unceded territory is affirming territory in terms of amplitude of pastness and futurity, acknowledging the ongoingness of settler colonialism.

A territoriality of relations, the performance is a series of attunements towards undermining the certitude of a place. If the term “settler” connotes a sense of permanence¹⁰¹, *Surface Rising* attempts to trouble this temporality.

Surface Rising choreographs the question; *Where are we?* Through a silent passage inside my apartment, modes of looking, holding, touching are crafted. A sequence of angles, positions, pauses, and prompts are offered up to the audience-guest to experience. This question; *Where are we?* is approached through choreographing experiments in sense perception, and through critically exploring the territorializing forces of host and guest.

¹⁰¹ Cavanagh and Veracini, “Introducing,” 6.

Pull-out Text 1

Embodiment of Guest, Host, and Site

In this text, I reflect speculatively on the forces of guesting and hosting in site-situated performance at a precise moment in *Surface Rising*. I examine guest, site, and host as a threshold form; that is, I do not think of guest, site and host as having preassigned, fixed differences, but examine *how they move together* and produce difference as they move.¹⁰²

Here I follow theorist-physicist Karen Barad's theory of intra-action in not assuming "that there are individual independently existing entities or agents that preexist their acting upon one another. ... the notion of 'intra-action' queers the familiar sense of causality (where one or more causal agents precede and produce an effect), and more generally unsettles the metaphysics of individualism (the belief that there are individually constituted agents or entities)."¹⁰³

The guest steps into the process of becoming guest the instant she enters my apartment. She is stretched into a guest-form, shifting as she receives, and offers her reception to the host. The host steps into the forces of becoming host the instant the guest enters the apartment. I am stretched into a host-form, shifting as I offer, and receive the offerings of my guest.

¹⁰² The etymology of the word guest; Old English *gæst*, "guest; enemy; stranger," overlaps with the Indo-European root of the word host: *ghos-ti*, meaning "stranger, guest, host". The "strangeness" evoked by both the guest and host carries a charge of fear of the unknown, as well as the transformative potential of an encounter. "The stranger" is produced only in the moment of meeting (strangeness appearing in relation to another), positioning the roles of guest and host as intrinsically reciprocal and contingently determined.

¹⁰³ Barad, "Intra-actions," 77.

Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena.¹⁰⁴

The guest and the host emerge through the material-discursive forces of offering and receiving.

To examine the guest-host-site dynamic through a material-discursive lens implies abandoning of the modern idea of the individual as a discrete identity, and instead studying embodiment through relational forces. It involves less a consideration of representational distinctions and more an understanding of an entangled dynamic of a body emerging from forces.

I contextualize discursive forces here as the social and cultural practices that inform gisting and hosting in the West. A traditional conception of the guest is, of course, the stranger, the foreigner, the newly arrived. The guest, then, occupies a role that exhibits less knowledge of the site than the host; therefore, the power relation between the two cannot be equal. This inequality produces a slight tension, between the one who knows more and the one who knows less. If, as Larkins has it, “territory refers to the dominant geographical expression of social power and control,”¹⁰⁵ the guest is emerging and intra-acting within these discursive circumstances.

I contextualize material forces here as the never-ending movement of matter to configure and reconfigure into new entities, boundaries, and meanings, to “materialize in intra-action.”

In the front room, about twenty minutes into the performance, I hand a little note

¹⁰⁴ Barad, “Posthuman Performativity,” 823.

¹⁰⁵ Larkins, “The Idea of the Territorial State,” 41.

to the guest. The note says I will be exiting the room and returning in a few minutes. I exit, and the guest is left with her own vital presence in a new room. With my exit, I propose to the audience-guest to enter into relation with her embodiment, with her choices of how to attend to this uncertain situation.

Whatever the guest decides to do, she emerges anew from the movement of my exit. She “could get up,” she “could close her eyes,” she “could look around,” etc. My exit places some pressure on the audience-guest’s sense of speculative movement, of how to fulfill her role as guest, of who she is becoming in the moment.

My exit is a proposal to question how to continue being an audience-guest as one’s host-performer disappears for some minutes. Alone in this room, is one still being received or is one feeling oneself a hostage to the situation? How one decides to embody the guest role, and to what degree, is how one engages with the forces of hosting and guesting. To receive the situation as an offering implies the vector of becoming guest, while to receive the situation as a demand implies the vector of becoming host (to the host’s request).

The proposal of my exit is meaningful for my inquiry into the material-discursive forces that create embodiment. I would imagine that the audience-guest feels both the presence and absence of my hosting, and must therefore feel herself simultaneously a guest (due to the host’s presence) yet with the potential to cease being a guest (due to the host’s absence). To my mind, the exit creates a threshold space, with the host present not in material form but in potency, as a force to be embodied by the guest.

I am experimenting with a force of hosting that might extend from the notion of a stable body and linger in the space as I exit. I am experimenting with a force of guesting

that might extend from the notion of a stable body and linger in the space as I exit. (The limit between oneself and the context is not precisely known.)

Exceeding positions is the felt force-potential that energizes this exit. The exact edges where guesting, hosting, and the site meet are troubled by this exit. “A choreographic proposition,” Potrović observes, “is always about the in-act, about the verge, the force of form that generates position but always, to some degree, exceeds it.”¹⁰⁶

What if the guest relaxes into the comfortable chair and looks out the window for some minutes? She would be embodying a way of receiving, a way of becoming guest to the situation. A way of spreading into the room.

Or could this enactment be considered as an offering to the host—a hosting of the host’s exit? What if the guest decides to stand up and leave? Would she be embodying a way of receiving the proposal, of becoming guest to the situation? Or could this enactment be considered an offering to the host?

It is not clear precisely where the embodiment of receiving ends and the embodiment of offering begins. A guest who relaxes in her chair or who stands up to leave is receiving and offering simultaneously. With her actions, she will create a new room within the intersecting forces of guesting and hosting. As Gil theorizes: “Embodiment would have to be thought as a rippling transmission taking shape immanently to the planes that are being transversed.”¹⁰⁷

How to think about receiving and offering in terms of embodiment? About embodiment as configured beyond the bounds of an identity, beyond the Western liberal

¹⁰⁶ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 285.

¹⁰⁷ Gil, “A Study on the “Intervals of Perception,”” 134.

notion of the individual—and towards embodiment as intra-action? And about how the forms (of guest, host, and site) might exceed themselves within the forces of their intra-action?

Agency

Receiving the empty room holds potentials for the audience-guest's creativity; in Barad's conception of agency as intra-active, agency arises *in* the situation, reconfiguring one's position via shifts of shared experience. The guest is still in the front room of the apartment, and the door through which the guest has entered is a few feet away. This may relax the guest's feelings of being imposed upon, as the possibility simply to exit the room remains accessible. I would speculatively propose that the guest is curious as to what will happen next, intrigued by the newly crafted circumstances. The guest might stare at the bookshelf for a bit, might take the cushion from the floor and place it behind her head, might stand up and grab something from her purse. "Agency," as Barad observes, "cannot be designated as an attribute of 'subjects' or 'objects' (as they do not preexist as such). Agency is not an attribute whatsoever—it is 'doing/being' in its intra-activity."¹⁰⁸

The qualities with which the guest accepts or refuses the situation affect my position as host. We are entangled. Destabilizing the position of one involves the destabilization of the other. In this view, guest and host both enact agency within their respective roles, though always with the potential to exceed those roles. As Barad

¹⁰⁸ Barad, "Posthuman Performativity," 827.

continues: “Agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices in the enactment of a causal structure.”¹⁰⁹ Our positions are simultaneously embroiled in forces beyond us.

Place: A Site Is Both a Force and a Form

And what of the room itself—this Euclidean room, its walls, floors, and window? Does it shift as I exit? Does it become host to the presence of my audience-guest? Does it carry a charge of qualities in the absence of my immediate physical presence?

With the possibility of the exit, above, the site emerges as a discursive and material force—not simply Euclidean in regard to space and time, but shaped and shaping with the continuity of my movement. In other words, a space is a material-discursive force, unfolding as do both guest and host. It becomes, simultaneously, a space of possibility and limits. Clearly, the room is becoming in the forces of hosting and guesting, of offering and receiving. In its duration, it unfolds how it might offer to the guest its materiality, its discursivity, and how it could receive the guest’s movements.

How is a room a space of simultaneous offering and receiving? With my exit, I am proposing how to consider offering and receiving as entangled material-discursive movements—“offering” moving the movement of receiving, and “receiving” moving the movement of offering.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

To move as one does within a guest-host relationship is potentially to “move as one never has moved before,”¹¹⁰ to encounter the limit of the planned, and, within the planned, to explode the unplanned at every turn.

¹¹⁰ Potrovic, “What a Body Can Become,” 290.

Pull-out Text 2

Hospitality in *Surface Rising*



I am flipping over, my feet in the air, my head on the ground. My upside-downness reassembles with gravity—a new bodying, a new point of view. I am slipping out of a usual alignment. I am taking new shapes—curling, splaying, and curving.

In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida addresses the notion of the foreigner, the stranger—

l'étranger—as a key notion for thinking through what is at stake in hospitality.¹¹¹

According to Derrida, the host sustains her identity as a host through acts of hospitality.

What this implies is the ability, on the part of the host, to receive a foreign presence within the home (without losing one's identity as host). Indeed, Derrida defines the role of host as fundamentally constituted through the capacity to host difference.

However, a tension at the crux of hospitality as outlined by Derrida is as follows:

¹¹¹ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 5.

if one is required to host in order to maintain one's identity as host, and yet hosting always entails hosting difference, then to what degree does this difference affect the host's identity, transform her into a "new host," and destabilize where/what is being hosted?

Derrida makes a distinction between two degrees of hospitality: absolute and conditional. Absolute hospitality requires that the host asks nothing of her guest, approaching her with radical openness. It also involves a complete giving-over to who the other is, a refusal to distinguish between guest and host. Per Derrida: "absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner, but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names."¹¹² For Derrida, absolute hospitality entails a commitment neither to demand of the other what she is, nor what she may become.

Conditional hospitality, as conceived by Derrida, entails asking your guest's name and remaining master of your house. This occurs in the realm of the juridical, the power at work in a given territory that distributes rights and obligations. With conditional hospitality, notes Westmoreland, "the state establishes rules through which people can be divided into citizens and non-citizens, citizens and foreigners, hosts and guests. It can identify individuals; and therefore, it can include or exclude whosoever it chooses based on the laws, which it has created."¹¹³

¹¹² Ibid., 25.

¹¹³ Westmoreland, "Interruptions: Derrida and Hospitality," 2.

Conditional hospitality is bound up tightly with its counter-force: hostility. Either of these two forces might be activated should a decision be made as to who will be welcomed in peace, who will be refused entry, and who will have the right, in the first place, to act as host—to call home, exclusively, their own home. The conditional, juridico-political notion of hospitality is built on the definition of territory as nation-state and the subject as an identifiable legal figure, an individual with rights and responsibilities. The modern nation-state system sustains the rule of law through the policing of an inside and an outside, through borders.¹¹⁴

For Derrida, conditional hospitality is haunted at every moment by absolute hospitality. The call for absolute hospitality is a call for a justice, for the (seemingly impossible) abolishment of every exclusion afflicting the foreigner.

How to think with guesting and hosting in site-situated performance along with Derrida's concepts of absolute and conditional hospitality?

In *The Politics of Touch*, Erin Manning argues that the moving body is a powerful force for resisting the state's concept of the stable body. Her concept of the body as processual, as emerging anew in each situation, works against a model of identity that is fixed. A processual body may move in unexpected ways, which resists the state's attempts to pin it down. Manning emphasizes that to write about the body, there must be an engagement with writing as to how a body moves: "Without a commitment to the ways in which bodies move, bodies become stabilized within national imaginaries in preordained

¹¹⁴ Sociologist Max Weber defined the state as an "organization that successfully upholds the exclusive legitimate right to exercise the means of violence for the maintenance of order over a defined territory." Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 78, quoted in Larkins, "The Idea of the Territorial State," 8.

categories.”¹¹⁵

The movement of bodies matters because movement is always the not-yet of experience, the qualitative threshold of what might become. “Movement,” Manning notes, “is the qualitative multiplicity that folds, bends, extends the body, becoming toward a potential future that will always remain not-yet.”¹¹⁶ To consider the body in movement is to cast the body dynamically, as acting alongside the forces shaping what is to come.

I cannot open my home without creating relations with my body. In order to open my home, I am compelled to open my relation to my own potential, to my own capacity to apprehend the not-yet. To my own capacity to become differently. I do not know the stranger in front of me, but equally, I do not know the stranger I will become as I encounter her.

Attuning myself to how a relation may transform me as the guest enters is to recognize, indeed, that there has never been a foundational moment of secure, fixed identity, that relation is the transformative dispersion that has always composed and is composing me. “Relational body can never be ‘a single body,’” explains Potrović, “because ‘to be relational’ is to ‘be multiple,’ therefore, a relational body is always more-than one body.”¹¹⁷

To return to Derrida’s assertion that absolute hospitality haunts every act of conditional hospitality, I understand this as a challenge to the very idea of a stable body and secure identity. To give place to “the absolute, unknown, anonymous other,” I need

¹¹⁵ Manning, *Politics of Touch*, xv.

¹¹⁶ Manning, *Relationscapes*, 17.

¹¹⁷ Potrović, “*What a Body Can Become*,” 285.

to give place to my own unknowability, to the unknowable movement forth from which many potential bodies may emerge.

As I summersault, I feel myself being undone and experience my disassembled-reassembled alignment as a portion of experience that remains slightly foreign. Who is the secured “I” in the momentum of a roll? If I cannot completely account for myself, then I have no right to account for a boundary between myself and another.

Unknowability as Reaching Toward What May Come

At the same time, crucially, conditional hospitality haunts site-situated performance. As experimental potential unfolds during a performance, the site’s social and political conditions flood into the scene and inform the meaning of hosting and guesting. “The place I offer”¹¹⁸ as host involves acknowledging what Rosello calls “the historical position that deprives others of the pleasure and pride of taking their place.”¹¹⁹ The historical and contemporary concept of foreignness-as-threat¹²⁰ is always present and informs the performance.

To think with guesting and hosting in site-situated performance along with Derrida’s concepts of absolute and conditional hospitality means to stretch a situation’s present moment toward both the past and the not-yet. Site-situated performance encounters the future-present-past of hospitality’s forces and moves, as it does so, between the two poles of absolute and conditional hospitality.

¹¹⁸ Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

¹¹⁹ Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality*, 167.

¹²⁰ At work in conditional hospitality are discursive forces that turn foreignness into criminality: the historical and contemporary forces of racism, white supremacy, and colonialism.

Chapter 4

Borrowing: *Surface Rising*

Images documenting Surface Rising, November 15, 2015, photographed by Go Eun Im



In November 2015, after researching and performing *Surface Rising* in Montreal, I travelled back to the Netherlands for a period of study. There I met with Igor Sevcuk and Go Eun Im, the coordinators of *Klupko*, an artist initiative of curated events and

exhibitions taking place in their apartment. *Klupko* is their collective project of “a situation in which everyday life, hospitality and art practice are intertwined. ... a certain entanglement.”¹²¹

I recounted my experience of *Surface Rising* in Montreal. Igor and Go Eun thought the project would be a good fit for the opening of *Klupko*, as both projects shared curiosities of “interpersonal encounter that merges art and real life situations.”¹²² I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to think through the site-situatedness of my project, to explore consistencies and contrasts as they emerged.

I was invited into the apartment for one week of preparations and one week of daily performances. The first steps of the process were to observe the apartment closely and explore its possibilities, its relations, its new trajectories, and intensities. My relation to the space was as an invited artist. Not only was I welcomed into the space, I was also invited to explore and use any of the apartment’s objects for my work.

I felt a depth of welcome from Igor and Go Eun, as we shared a curiosity and a desire for this artistic experimentation. My relation to the space felt akin to short-term borrowing in that it was made clear that I could make use of anything “at hand” (books, plates, records, posters, blankets, etc.) with the expectation that I would return everything in good condition.

Borrowing in this chapter will be considered as choreographic practice, the craft of composing and perceiving movement. Borrowing activates the movement of materials and foregrounds the entanglement of objects and spaces with people. As a choreographic force, borrowing infuses felt relations into movements, borders, objects, surfaces, and

¹²¹ See: <https://klupkorooms.wordpress.com/2015/11/01/klupko->.

¹²² Personal communications between k.g. Guttman, Go Eun Im, and Igor Sevcuk, 2015.

bodies.

Borrowing creates relations. Borrowing happens in the midst of other relations. This movement of relations may be called *assemblages*. A key concept in Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's *A Thousand Plateaus*, the philosophers define assemblages as the dynamism of many heterogeneous components, movement that intensifies connections. A situation is not just an accumulation of many parts, but, as Guattari notes, "the different components are swept up and reshaped by a sort of dynamism."¹²³ To consider borrowing, then, as a movement of relations, to understand it as a dynamism of an assemblage, is to study the effects of borrowing in both an immediate sense and in terms of effects not yet imagined.

Thinking dynamic systems rather than precise structures creates an emphasis on how territories are constituted by practices, in continual motion. A shift of one practice within a territory animates diverse and, probably, unintended effects. Borrowing, then, sweeps through the designated space of Igor and Go Eun's apartment and becomes an assembling force. Assemblages gather up multiple relations to make a territory. "We will call an assemblage every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow—selected, organized, stratified—in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally; an assemblage, in this sense, is a veritable invention."¹²⁴

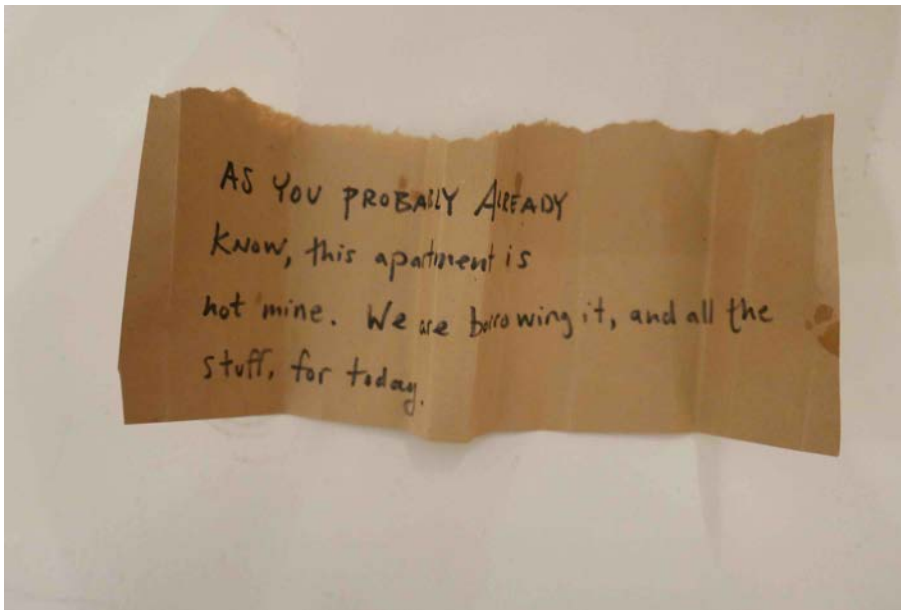
The apartment transforms, for a time, into a borrowed apartment, *extracting a territory from a milieu*, animating multiple expressions of this temporal territoriality.

4.1 Entrance

¹²³ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, 35.

¹²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 406.

A guest enters—a big white man, with blond hair and glasses. He says hello, and I nod and say nothing. I know he has read my introductory email, but perhaps he's forgotten about the code of silence. He catches on very quickly, though, after I nod in a friendly manner a few more times but do not speak. He stops talking.

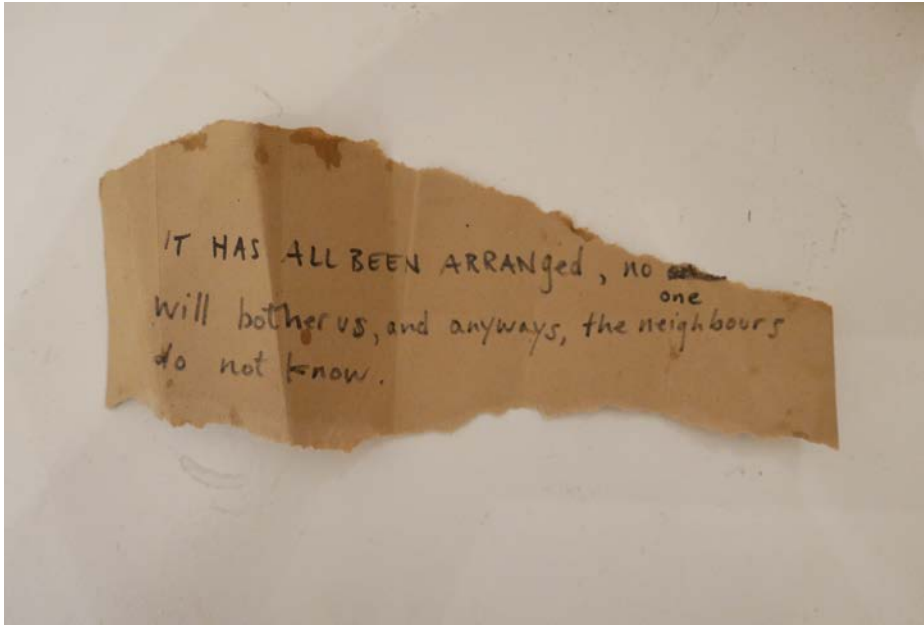


I hand him a note:

As you probably already know, this apartment is not mine. We are borrowing it, and all the stuff, for today.

I hand him a second note:

It has all been arranged, no one will bother us, and anyway the neighbours do not know.



The notes aim at a touch of complicity. (I used the word “we,” meaning myself as host-performer and my audience-guest.) I am also aiming at a gentle reminder that the apartment is ordered according to municipal codes for residential spaces, and this encounter is neither specifically official nor specifically permitted. The note signals how the performance brushes up, quietly, against the force of law, against ambient conduct in appropriate spaces.¹²⁵ The force of law is operating behind a cultural activity, which provides a sense of legitimacy and security.

The scribbly, handwritten notes on bits of brown paper point to a contrast; our purpose here is not neatly known and we will be experiencing the apartment differently. We will be “out of time” in the sense of being disconnected from the living metric of going about everyday business. We will be nudged out of normative regulations.

¹²⁵ Relations of power and discipline are “inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life.” Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 6, quoted in Larkins, “The Idea of the Territorial State,” 48.

I welcome my audience-guest into the space, already coded with expectations and responsibilities. The notes act effectively as a sort of contract—it has all been arranged. But the notes also withhold details (the character of the negotiation between myself and Klupko, who the neighbours are, etc.) and so are lacking in information as to how access was negotiated. This may hinder a precise understanding of what is to be expected here.

Entering into the territory of someone else (somewhere). Entering not into the neutral space of a black box, but a space that expresses its territoriality, articulated through everything one may be invited to touch, handle, and experience. Entering not as a dispassionate neutral viewer (well, perhaps), but into a space of relation and of constraint, of the immediacy of an absent owner, and of the illicit knowledge that the neighbours do not know.

4.2 Small Slipper, Big Foot: Embodiment

I gesture for my audience-guest to take off his shoe. We sort through some slippers, but they all seem too small for the width of his feet. I give him the biggest ones, a white, terrycloth pair. He tries to put them on, but they are quite tight so he takes off his socks. His wide feet stretch out the fabric a bit. In one direction, his heel sticks out past the edge of the sole; in the other, his toe hangs out a bit. Generously, he doesn't seem too bothered.



This is one of the first corporeal and aesthetic manifestations of borrowing that emerges: a non-perfect fit that creates an aesthetic of tightness, of too-smallness, a heel hitting the cold floor as one walks, a palette of the makeshift, of slightly uncomfortable sensations.

Due to this vaguely imperfect fit, distinctions are legible between slipper and foot, and quite soon it is possible to notice how the object affects the foot, and reciprocally, how the foot impacts the object. The foot stretches out the front of the slipper. The too-small slipper disrupts its wearer's ease of walking ever so slightly, tips his weight back gently onto the heel, prevents the foot from spreading into the floor. This destabilizes the audience-guest's way of walking somewhat, causing him to shuffle more than step, and places the size of his feet in relation to smaller feet. Borrowing evokes imaginative relationships to other bodies, a material way of exploring someone else's scale and proportions compared to one's own.

Borrowing some ill-fitting slippers becomes a proposal on my part to the

audience-guest to experiment with moving differently. It is corporeality extended to the multiple, to many bodies, to the many bodies imagined alongside the actual flesh. “Each body,” Potrović observes, “holds within itself an experience of being another body, and even more, it holds within itself infinite modes of bodying.”¹²⁶ A body, considered here via its ways of expressing, a never-finalized body—a “bodying.”¹²⁷

It is also a way to grapple with the entanglement between movement and bodying: the tight slippers produce new movement, and new movement produces a new bodying, and so on. As Manning writes, “the body becomes through forces of recombination that compose its potential directionalities: When I take a step, how the step moves me is key to where I can go.”¹²⁸

How the step moves me, the capacity to be affected, to be transformed, to head in a new direction, is a key inquiry into borrowing. The audience-guest is being asked to engage with that which might *move him* (differently), to move across the thresholds of corporeality and relations. With borrowing, a potential opens up to embody otherwise.

4.3 Making the Bed (Dancing)

¹²⁶ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 263.

¹²⁷ Manning, *Always More Than One*, 19.

¹²⁸ Manning, *Relationscapes*, 6. Quoted in Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 165.



On the third day of the performance, Marianna M., a young, smallish woman, is my audience-guest. After welcoming her and giving her some slippers (which fit her well), I ask her to wait in the main room.

I exit the room and re-enter some moments later with some blankets and comfortable pillows. As part of the action of the performance, I begin spreading out the blankets and making a temporary bed on the floor. At several junctures while making the bed, I pause, slow down to the point of stillness, and sustain my position through a couple of deep breaths. I then resume the flow and finish making the bed.

In those extended moments of bed-making where I am near-still, the context keeps flowing through the moment—the apartment, the performance, the expectation to move, to continue making the bed. A mode of production (the performance) is flowing through my stillness. My major bodily movements are stilled, I become a shape hanging in the air, I seek to come impossibly close to the apparent inertia of the bedding, I become just a bit more sweater and pants than breath and skin.

I am unsure whether my audience-guests are aware that I consider *Surface Rising* to be a dance; I have not presented the space of production in the strictest categories, and

Klupko is a platform for contemporary art rather than for dance. Thus, being still might not necessarily be understood as dance here, but in my framing of the situation, being toward *still* affords me an opportunity to emphasize *Surface Rising* as dance!

For a few moments, I am pruned apart from my instrumental relationship to the objects, and occupy space as a pulsing, warm shape. My body aims to stall purposeful action and become a quality, an abstract shape, a duration beyond the temporal norms of the apartment. My near-stillness perhaps propels a shift in the audience-guest's perceptions of me, allowing me to draw her attention away from the objects and toward my movement and non-movement, knowing that the qualities of my movements would normally not be perceived in everyday contexts. With this deliberate focus on my body and how it is (not) moving, I attempt to craft her attention such that it extends beyond everyday utility toward the aesthetic experience of moving.

The extended moments of stillness afford enough time, perhaps, for my audience-guest to take in my body's stance, my way of touching-holding the bedding, and my own attention toward gently and calmly breathing while sustaining a form. The stillness might open up an infinite field of ways in which I might move next, or it may arouse impatience.

Is there an enduring opposition that connects dancing with expressivity and non-dancing with functionality? Choreographer and theorist Elizabeth Dempster writes on how the category of the pedestrian in dance enlivens the notion of everyday movement and expands modernism's strict definition of dance. "The pedestrian functions to confuse or disable entrenched oppositions upon which dance modernism is founded, in particular, the oppositions between dancers and non-dancers, dance movement and everyday

movement, and the choreographic scheme and the performance.”¹²⁹

If dancing is considered as creative world-making—inventing sensibilities and rhythms of living, modes of physicality that gesture at other, unknown purposes and desires—then a dance beckons to another world, a differently organized world. A dance does not only enact a physical movement of the body, but forms a relation with the world. A dance acts *upon* the world, producing contrasts, qualities, and desires, a world becoming, a “worlding.”

I am halfway through making the bed, an ordinary task, yet I am suspended. My slowed-down embodiment demonstrates a deep connection to economic and political forces that habituate rhythms and conform the body, and its possibilities, to the site—a body closely bound to the world of progress and production. And yet, my slowing of time is a gesture that is opening up some new world, some new aesthetic pattern between the bedding and my body. The apartment’s world is simultaneously being made and unmade. The space between dancing and non-dancing is being explored.

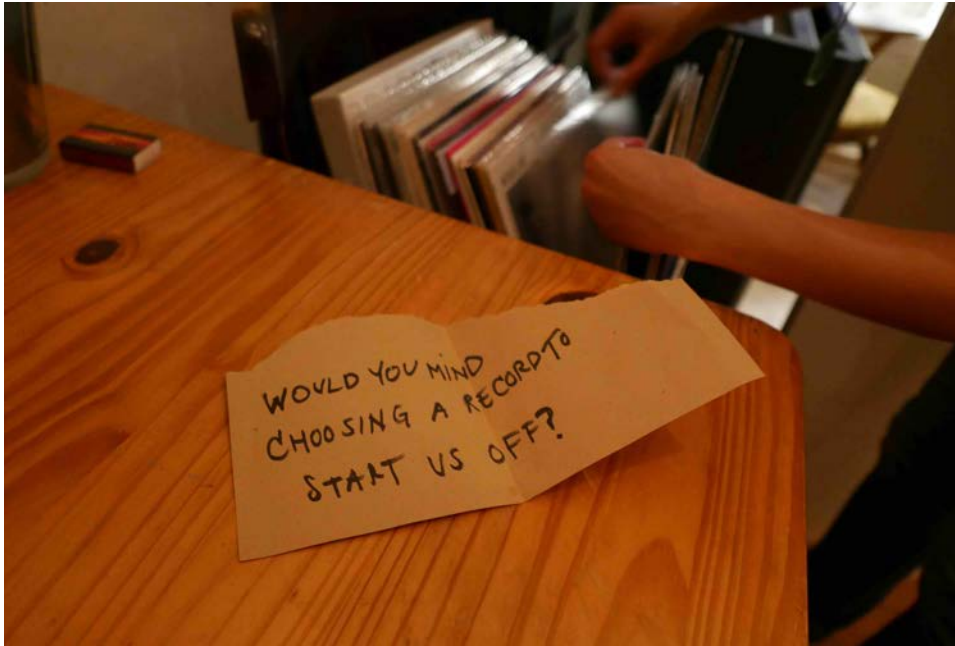
And then, finally, I finish making the bed.

4.4 Choosing a Record

Before we lie down upon the newly made floor-bed, I usher my audience-guest across the room toward a table, a record player, and a box of records belonging to Igor and Go Eun. I am unfamiliar with most of these records. I hand the audience-guest a little note that says:

Would you mind choosing a record to start us off?

¹²⁹ Dempster, “The Choreography of the Pedestrian,” 24.



Tasking each audience-guest to select a record to start us off was an effective way to convey the fact that I am not invested in total aesthetic control of the situation, but am more interested in exploring thresholds of agency within the guest-host-site dynamic. It was also a way to explore the belongings of Igor and Go Eun.

Audience-guest Marianna M. picked *Winterreise—6 Lieder*, a work composed in 1827 by Franz Schubert.¹³⁰

We lie down upon the makeshift bed to listen.

The music's romantic aesthetic, contrasted with the intimate performance, provoked a burst of laughter between us. The laughter took hold as the music surrounded us with its lush power, and both host and guest were swept up in an uncontrollable fit of giggles.

¹³⁰ Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Jörg Demus, *Winterreise—6 Lieder*, by Franz Schubert, Deutsche Grammophon, 1977, vinyl LP, <https://www.discogs.com/fr/Franz-Schubert-Dietrich-Fischer-Dieskau-J%C3%B6rg-Demus-Winterreise-6-Lieder/release/4577712>.



Admittedly, this was a temporary loss of composure, but it did not disrupt the general vector of the performance. Still, the stability of who was leading and who was following became slightly blurred. The site had unexpectedly shifted us into becoming joint shaking-laughing-bodyings together.

Borrowing helps me and reminds me, as a performer, that unexpected things will happen. Borrowing values the unexpected.

As a host-dancer, borrowing heightens the need for agility, the ability to move along with the circumstances. This agility, however, must be balanced carefully, between the task of moving along with new circumstances, while also sustaining the consistency of the choreography.

While I was swept up in the laughter of my guest and myself, and in my enjoyment of Winterreise, I did not speak. I did not break this particular parameter of the

performance; in this way, I practiced intentionality even within the spontaneity of the laughter.

The agility of the host-dancer is the agility of one who *insists or persists* upon an invented mode of moving (a choreography), yet must remain open to the infinite becomings of how to move (a dancing). This skill enlivens the dance.

According to Contact Improvisation founder and somatic scholar Nita Little Nelson and performance/ anthropology scholar Joseph Dumit, a dancer may train to become aware of a “field of attention,” an ability to hold many possibilities for movement within the readiness of one’s body. A field of attention is facilitated by a “soft focus or a distributed extension of awareness in order to catch the *initiation* of new action pathways within ourselves, our partners, or within a field of activity.”¹³¹

Because Contact Improvisation is a technique based on dancing with others, the readiness of the body is necessary for sensitive dancing. This technique of attending is a multidirectional skill, a simultaneous ability to follow, to seek, and to offer. The aim is never to lead too much or to follow too much, but to become so absorbed that one’s movement is both following *and* initiating the given situation. This simultaneous following and initiating creates a relational space of attending and being attended to. When dancing with others, the host-dancer attends sharply to what is already moving in order to move.

At one point in a subsequent performance, I was not able to get the record player to work. My audience-guest, being familiar with the model, fiddled around and, after some excruciating minutes, got it to work. All the while—unbelievably—both of us sustained our silence.

¹³¹ Nita Little Nelson and Joseph Dumit, “Articulating Presence: Attention is Tactile,” in *Thinking Touch in Partnering and Contact Improvisation* (forthcoming, 2020), 2.

An interruption of how things were supposed to go, a material breakdown, and a guest who suddenly knows more than I do. The tasks of knowing how to sustain my own choreography (of silence) and how to move with new circumstances becomes quite perplexing. A new situation where I knew less and less exactly how to move as a host-dancer.

In “Moving as some *thing* (or, some things want to run),” chapter 1 of his book *Singularities*, performance scholar André Lepecki addresses the principles of relation between materiality and the will of the choreographer.¹³² Lepecki cites seminal choreographer Yvonne Rainer’s engagement with questions of authorial will in her influential essay on her own dance work, *Trio A*, in which she described her choreographic motivation as being to “move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself.”¹³³

Lepecki takes up Rainer’s prescient call to question the authorial role of the choreographer¹³⁴ in order to allow for an exteriority to enter, to engage with the forces of the unseen, the material errancy of bodies and objects, “the wild autonomy of things”¹³⁵—in short, to move away from a notion of the author as the most important agent in emergent movement. This radical reorganization of the choreographer’s deployment of objects and space shifts their role away from the convention of being the

¹³² Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance*, 26–54.

¹³³ Rainer, “A Quasi Survey,” 263–73.

¹³⁴ Looking back on Rainer’s prophetic essay through the contemporary socio-economic lens of neoliberalism, Lepecki asks: “How does one choreograph and think freedom beyond the bounds of liberal individualism?” Lepecki, *Singularities*, 13.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

one who masters and commands, and instead toward being the one who attempts to become oriented through unpredictable movement.

Critically, Lepecki distinguishes an object from a thing: an *object* is a known entity that may be manipulated or that manipulates the prescribed world, while a *thing* is errant, “less an object than a mode of actioning the absolutely unforeseen.”¹³⁶ This distinction points to a structuring value within Rainer’s artistic practice: to aim at an impossible, vague thing, a mutual surrender of subject and object into a dynamic, unforeseen assemblage of matter, audience, performers, and choreographer. To abandon the limit that we call *oneself* in order to be implicated into the greater project of the not-yet-recognized, the not-yet-valued. “Between these two poles, between ‘some thing’ and ‘oneself,’ a point of singularization, a critical move, or a teetering event is defined; the project of making dances moved by things, not selves.”¹³⁷

To “move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself,” as Rainer writes, and which Lepecki affirms as “a mode of actioning the absolutely unforeseen,” is a very ambitious and difficult goal for a choreographed performance. In proposing that my audience-guest selects a record to play, I do not claim to have achieved this. A record is a recognizable object in the world. However, considering that Marianna M.’s choice of record yielded such surprising, involuntary laughter, I am curious to attend to the distinctions between moving and being moved through the experience of the choreographer-dancer.

I find that Rainer’s aspiration “move or be moved by some *thing* rather than oneself” attests, in part, to the experiential roles of dancer and choreographer, both of

¹³⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 33.

which were implicated in creating her self-performed solo work *Trio A*. The dual role of dancer-choreographer engenders very specific intuitions while dancing, immersed in the experiential emergence between planned and unplanned of a choreography performed.

What is being moved and what is moving? Dance scholar Diego Gil describes “movement as an immanent becoming of relations between different entities. Its potential to transcend the conditions of the given actual situations is folded *with* and *through* the actual.”¹³⁸ Movement has the capacity to exceed the actual, to unfold into further, unexpected dynamisms. Movement is always in excess of its capture, beyond its (choreographic) predeterminations. Movement is always moving beyond a limit of that which was already experienced. If movement is considered as a force of the new, as a force exceeding the given, then the choreographer-dancer may be considered to be caught up in an excess, in forces that she is moving and being moved by.

With my request to the audience-guest to select a record unfamiliar to her, and in the event of the record player’s malfunction, I attempt the agility, the readiness required to continue performing with and through the emerging relations and forces. Here, the distinctions between moving and being moved become diminished. Or, as Potrović puts it: “How to think choreography as a relation between the body moving the movement and the body being moved by the movement?”¹³⁹ I move my body into a relation with the act of borrowing. And my body is moved by the relations that borrowing unleashes.

4.5 Postcards and Flyers: Exterior Relations

¹³⁸ Gil, “A Study on the “Intervals of Perception,”” 13.

¹³⁹ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 290.

We are lying on the makeshift bed and the laughter has finally subsided. I hand my audience-guest some postcards and mail, including a lenticular image of a horse, a flyer from a 2008 Morton Feldman music event in Amsterdam, a brochure from a 1976 Montreal art show by the artist Freda Guttman, a found notebook containing a to-do list, and a postcard depicting a 2014 art exhibition in nearby Haarlem.



It is left to the audience-guest to inspect, or not, the source of each postcard. There is no specific order—each card is offered and the audience-guest contends with how it might have arrived and why it is being presented. I am not proposing a representational

meaning for the content of each card or brochure, but presenting them as indexes or landmarks to exterior relations, a selection of correspondences (distant or close by) to the moment. The flyers and cards become a processual mapping of what is gathered together here, the co-presence of events at the edges of this performance.

I am aiming at a composition of near and far in time and space, of a backgrounding and a foregrounding of here and there. In this way, I am exploring a cartographic dimension to borrowing—how it composes temporal and spatial relations. I am mapping out and mixing up *what is at hand* with *what I have brought with me*, a sequence of local Amsterdam events with Montreal references, gently and randomly collapsing, yet sustaining, the separations between my collection of postcards and flyers, and those of Igor and Go Eun.

A borrowed apartment may be navigated as a plane of composition, a territory of here and there, of co-mingling presences. A territory expressed not through homogeneity or dominance of a single voice, but through multiple, co-existing references of dispersed spatial and temporal distributions.

4.6 Image in the Bathroom

I hand the audience-guest a little note:

Please come this way.

I usher the audience-guest into the bathroom. (On the day of documenting the performance, Go Eun squeezes into the bathroom next.) I follow inside and shut the door. The shutting of the door floods the borrowed bathroom with darkness.



My audience-guest, Go Eun and I are immersed in this borrowed-bathroom-darkness.

In the darkness, a powerful force of disorientation manifests itself. The room can no longer be navigated by sight; sensory perception must draw upon listening, smelling, and touching to seek out where one is. Scale becomes elastic as the edges begin to melt, inside and outside become uncertain. In this moment, “what” I am borrowing loses its

clear dimensions. The darkness allows the room to flow, “the flow of matter-movement, the flow of matter in continuous variation.”¹⁴⁰



*I pick up my lighter and, in the darkness, hand the audience-guest a booklet. Quickly, I flick on the lighter, revealing the booklet's frontal image—a black-and-white photograph, the work of Dutch documentary filmmaker Johan van der Keuken.*¹⁴¹

The lighter throws its light across a certain sphere in the darkness, onto hands, fingers, a bit of arm, and the image, partially illuminated. After some time, I take my thumb off the lighter, and we return to the darkness of the enclosed space.

¹⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 406.

¹⁴¹ A booklet that happened to be in Igor and Go Eun's apartment: *Johan van der Keuken, Tegen het licht*, exhibition booklet (Amsterdam: Eye Filmmuseum, 2013).
<https://www.eyefilm.nl/en/exhibition/tentoonstelling-johan-van-der-keuken-tegen-het-licht>.



In the borrowed-bathroom-darkness, room-image, the audience- guest, the host-dancer, and the performance-site become assembled. Go Eun is present (as photographer), truly

the host of the host, in the darkness. And I feel Igor's mingling presence too, gathered in the dark, his absence as a presence invoked through borrowing, a nonlinear system of relations.

I open the door, and all of us exit.

4.7 Teacup: Commodity

On the fifth day of the performance, I am hosting an audience-guest named Mari. After we exit the darkened bathroom, I gesture to her to sit in a comfortable chair by the window. I hand her a pair of cardboard glasses, the plastic lenses of which refract the light into a rainbow spectrum of colours. I also give her a pair of noise-cancelling headphones.

I retreat into the kitchen to give her time to adjust to observing with these new props. After some moments, I offer her a choice of two teas. She chooses one, and I go to prepare it. When I return carrying Go Eun's dainty little mug, embellished with what appears to be a multicoloured daisy, suddenly Mari erupts and exclaims a strange word. I do not understand the word, and do not react.

Figgjo!

Later, Go Eun explains to me that the mug is from the Figgjo daisy series, a well-known Norwegian brand. My audience-guest recognized the daisy and was excited to see it, as the series was in production in 1969 and is nowadays quite rare.



The piercing of my audience-guest's voice, exclaiming the name of a brand in the midst of the silence, was admittedly startling—a sharp reminder that I am engaged in a territory already deeply inscribed with economic, aesthetic and social values, choreographing amidst the powers of brand recognition¹⁴² to shape perceptual experience.

I had offered my audience-guest the tea, along with the glasses and headphones, in a composed sequence. The noise-cancelling headphones have a slight disorienting effect; they muffle the wearer's contact with the room. The glasses, which flare out in rainbow prisms when the wearer looks directly at a light source, produce a similar, slight disorientation, albeit as a visual effect. These minor alterations of the audience-guest's sense perceptions, purposefully crafted, were at play when the tea was offered.

¹⁴² Within late capitalism, brand recognition is a form of affective power that serves as an assertion of consistency, an operation that “develops market presence and maintains customer loyalty.” Moran, *Identity and Capitalism*, 147.

In that moment of brand recognition, however, the teacup, offered as a particular mode of relation—of teacup-glasses-headphones-silence—loosened its newly invented attachment to my experimental performance. It is parsed out from the relations within which it has emerged, and its prior status is again foregrounded. In short, with this utterance of recognition, the teacup is deterritorialized from the performance and appears again in its mode as commodity. “Territorialization,” writes Larkins, “signifies the regulation and coding of flows of material bodies and desire by social and political ‘machines.’”¹⁴³

A commodity ushers in the world of goods and services, the world of the market, of property, power, and control, which define and govern producers and assets. A commodity harnesses the material potential of an object into a very specific perceptual mode, inscribing the object into an economic system of use, exchange, and circulation. The teacup is embroiled in a generalized way of seeing, an entire orbit of circulation and relations ordered and governed by capitalism.

Theorist Guy Debord, in his 1967 critique *The Society of the Spectacle*, situates the commodity as a world-making force of the spectacle, a discourse of what is deemed worthy of being seen within the logic of modern capitalism. “The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: Everything that appears is good, whatever is good will appear.”¹⁴⁴ The commodity, then, following Debord, may be understood as mode of appearance oriented toward future profitability and future value exchange.

¹⁴³ Larkins, “The Idea of the Territorial State,” 56.

¹⁴⁴ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 15.

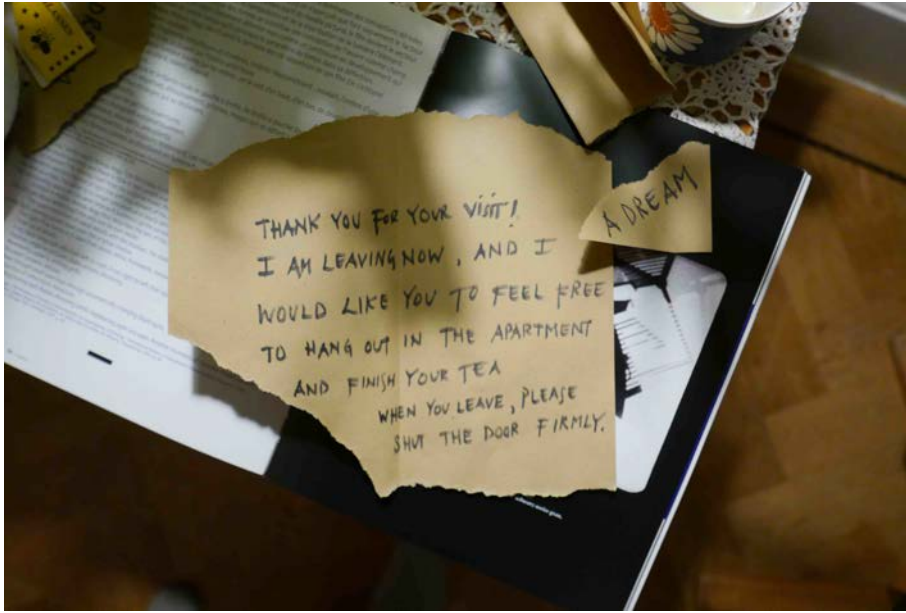
The commodity as a force that influences perceptual acts
(within-across)
A performance as a force that influences perceptual acts.

A Figgjo teacup, appearing in the overlap of two orbits: the micro-orbit of a performance and the macro-orbit of the economic relations in late capitalism. I had not even attempted to mask the various brands of items in the apartment. In hindsight I realized that the objects in the apartment awaited the activation of the audience-guest's recognition, the powerful, territorializing force of the commodity threading through the space. "Territorialities, then," explain Deleuze and Guattari, "are shot through with lines of flight testifying to the presence within them of movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization."¹⁴⁵ The potential of deterritorialization and reterritorialization within the objects engage the stakes of borrowing in site-situated practice.

4.8 Exit

My audience-guest sips her tea. I walk to the other end of the apartment, leaving her be for a few minutes. I return, and I hand my guest a small note stating that I will leave the apartment. My guest is invited to take off the glasses and headphones whenever she wishes, and to stay for a while, finish her tea, and leave when she is ready.

¹⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 55.



What moves with the movement of my exit?

As I leave the apartment, the tea is still warm in my audience-guest's hands. She is still wearing her (perhaps ill-fitting) slippers. The lights are still on. The smell of the soup that I cooked still lingers in the rooms. The bedding and pillows of the temporary bed on the floor are still lying about. The flyers and postcards are on the floor, and small, handwritten notes on brown paper are scattered about.

The consistency of the performance might sustain a plane of intensity without my physical presence. The capacities of assemblage are more than human, as Guattari observes: "The notion of agency to create a plane of living is made of micro agencies that pass through wider and more multiple planes than the human conscious mind."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, 18, quoted in Gil, "A Study on the "Intervals of Perception,"" 87.

Within my choreographic proposal, many heterogeneous elements are still composing with one another. For a brief “while,” the apartment as unfolded through the guesting and hosting might be still “captured” by the world of the performance.

My exit brings into awareness how my presence formed a relational body with the apartment. My exit is a continuity of the relation between myself and my audience-guest, between myself and the site. As I shift out the door, everything I touched, moved, or attended to also shifts.

Writes Potrović: “Relation makes the idea of beginning and the end of the body – at the level of its edges – impossible. Relation is a movable edge, fluid edge, porous edge.”¹⁴⁷ How I moved inside of the apartment is inseparable from the apartment. I *moved with* the apartment (moving). The apartment *moved me* (moving).

The tea cools in relation to the moment it was given. The soup smells grow fainter in relation to the moment I turned off the stove. Fresh air enters through the window in relation to the moment I opened the window. I exit, and the apartment moves *with* my exit. *Moving with* is expressed as the qualitative transformation of elements.

¹⁴⁷ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 180.



I go down the stairs and out the door. This apartment does not have a back door, as did my apartment in Montreal, and so I am obliged to exit the same way I entered. I need to pull instead of push, I need to step down instead of stepping up.

4.9 Assemblage

Borrowing foregrounds the multiple temporalities and relations of place. It is a fold of simultaneity, in that the apartment is at once “mine” as it remains belonging to Igor and Go Eun. Analyzing the technique of borrowing as assemblage, the concept from Deleuze and Guattari that entails the gathering up of singularities that generate unexpected events, a dynamic of deterritorializations and reterritorializing forces, has been helpful to evaluate how borrowing as choreographic process has been in excess of what I initially thought I was borrowing. I wasn’t so much borrowing the *form* of the apartment but I was borrowing its multiplicity of *forces*, entangling myself to unexpected relations.

Borrowing, then, creates new territories of relations. As Deleuze and Guattari observe; “Every assemblage is basically territorial.”¹⁴⁸

The cluster of forces (which I call the apartment), will be returned. The entire time I am borrowing the apartment, I am oriented to this idea of return- the way in which I take care of the place in each moment is aligned to the knowledge of this eventual return. Borrowing is clearly not an act of ownership. It is about enjoyment and activation, multiplying the connections, and for which the daily care is applied predicated on returning the something borrowed in good condition. The idea of return is key to understanding a form of receiving that is not consumption or accumulation. As a borrower, I receive what you have lent to me, but I will eventually return it to you. This mode of pleasure and indebtedness provokes a way of thinking territory that puts relation

¹⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 503.

front and center. (With the return of this something that I have borrowed, I am transformed, affected, a connection intensified that lingers beyond the actual moment of return). It is a return that generates new possibilities.

4.10 Site-situated Performance

As a settler (Canadian) artist working on this project in the Netherlands, I am keeping in mind ways that build generative, sustainable relations, and engagements with resources that are not oriented towards the familiar colonial-capital mode of accumulation and consumption. *Surface Rising* at Klupko, as choreographic production, admittedly participates in the broad colonial- capital infrastructure of which the contemporary art world is constituted. However, practices invested in relations and an engagement with materials that are not transplanted for yet another re-production, might be a way to tweak the conventions of professional touring in the field.

Situated art practices avoid a homogenizing tendency of a standard of meaning to be made anywhere at anytime. They are practices that tend towards valuing the circumstantial. The work traveled from Montreal to Amsterdam. The material needs for the project had been transported in one bag, and the remaining material needs were what was available, at hand. The performance sustained some consistency but was re-activated through new, local materials and relations. The situated, non-transportable making of meaning in the performance may be considered a minor way to engage in the vast and urgent task of de-colonizing contemporary art production. Decolonization, the “unearthing of seemingly invisible colonial agendas, apparatus and narratives,”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Decter and Taunton, “Addressing the Settler Problem,” 33.

includes attending to the ecology of relations already in place as a way of drawing meaning from an artwork. The practices of borrowing in site-situated performance rely on a mutuality- being bound to others in order to produce the work. This indebtedness is a very key part of its very meaning and value.

Conclusion

The thesis, positioned as a project in the field of artistic research, articulates the intricate relationship between a material practice and written, theoretical reflection. Articulation, as a mode of differentiation, is not considered solely as a capacity through written language, but as non-linguistic expressions made possible through movement and materials as well. Written reflection, then, as I consider it, is not simply a direct and transparent accounting of what has happened, but a specific mode of differentiating and organizing the world. The movements of bodies and materials are another such mode of differentiation, producing qualities and distinctions that writing may approximate but not reproduce.

Both modes of articulation, then, (material, artistic practices and written, theoretical reflection) produce different modes of meaning and value. One mode advances the other. Artistic research is expressed throughout the thesis as written reflection stimulated through practices, and practices stimulated through written reflection.

In the thesis, I have considered how intertwining the concepts and practices of territoriality and choreography may create new knowledge and practices in site-situated performance. The research has been largely organized through the creation and analysis of four performances in residential locations in Canada and the Netherlands. Site-situated

performance refers to research that develops on-site, through and across the specific constraints of a location.

Territoriality

The concept of territoriality has been explored in this dissertation in multiple ways. I have considered it through the expressions of the everyday, through the reciprocal relations of the guest, host, and site, as well as considered through territorializing forces. Accounting for how aesthetic, social, economic, and political circumstances of the modern Western nation-state have shaped the sites that I work with has been essential to creating and critically reflecting on the performances. Colonial and settler colonial conditions that have informed ways of sensing and moving have been the object of critical consideration.

I have expressed territoriality in site-situated performance, in part, through the relationality of guest, host, and site. This includes the territoriality of the everyday, a concept of Michel de Certeau, which approaches the everyday lived experience of social bodies in governed spaces as sites of creativity that are in excess of regulations. Furthermore, guest, host, and site are understood as contingent relations, erupting only in the moment of meeting, each element affecting the other. Guest, host, and site engage with territoriality as a concept constituted through relations.

The writings on territoriality by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have been central to the thesis. The philosophers define territoriality as that which is not static but composed of complex movement, of deterritorializing and reterritorializing forces. “The territory, and the functions performed within it, are products of territorialization.”¹⁵⁰ Thinking territoriality in terms of forces, movement and relation has been a fundamental orientation for this research in site-situated performance. It has facilitated a research focus on the qualitative expressions that create space.

Choreography

Choreography is broadly defined in the thesis as observing and organizing movement. Choreographic process in the thesis refers to a Western contemporary aesthetic practice of making dances and articulations that proceed through stages of preparation and planning, to the moment of an encounter with audience.

Observing movement is a process that involves configuring the body’s sense perceptions and proprioceptive capacities. Observing movement applies to both cultivating awareness of internal sensations within the body, as well as extending one’s observational capacities outward to the relations of which the body moves. Organizing movement is the act of composing, differentiating, arranging and orienting. Organizing movement is not limited to the movement of the body of the dancer, but applies also to the ways in which the audience and site may move.

¹⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 315.

The organizing of movement is of course outside of the choreographer's complete control, as it is not possible to capture movement. Movement moves beyond its (choreographic) predeterminations. Movement is constantly exceeding the actual, multiplying, and emerging. Organizing movement, then, as I consider it, is a process of that which organizes *along with* the emergence of movement.

Attunement(s)

“Attunements” refers to the ongoing, sensed connections between body and world. The bodies of the host-dancer and the audience-guest are considered in their capacities to select, intensify and respond to what is unfolding. Attunements craft sense perception to compose ways of attending. Attunements explode the boundary of the inside/ outside of the body, as the way of attending to one's body actively shapes the entire situation. Attention may be invented in multiple ways, through multiple configurations of sense perception and conceptual frameworks; through techniques that amplify certain selected dimensions of an experience. As the work of somatic scholar Nita Little Nelson reminds us, “sensing is active”,¹⁵¹ it means ways of attending simultaneously receive and extend a situation.

Material-Discursive Relations of the Guest, Host and Site

¹⁵¹ Nelson, “Articulating Presence,” 58.

My conceptualizations of and experimentations with guest, host and site dynamics evolved throughout the thesis. With each of the four performances discussed, I probed a new choreography of attunements, exploring ways of intensifying and inventing connections and differences between the guest, host, and site. I refer to the work of physicist and philosopher Karen Barad, who examines how boundaries and differences are matters of practice, and not inherently given. Barad's term "intra-action" proposes the inseparability between material and discursive agency to create meaning. Instead of conceptualizing the guest, host, and site as pre-given entities who then "interact" with each other, the notion of "intra-action" suggests each element comes into existence through and across a practice of making and observing differences, assemblages, and boundaries. The notion intra-action moves the understanding of guest, host, site out of a representational register of generalities, and explores the agency and becoming of each element as deeply entangled. Barad writes "phenomena are contingent configurations of mattering."¹⁵² Guest, host, and site are considered as coming into existence through intra-actions.

Throughout the course of the research, I developed experience and articulated my perspective as a settler (Canadian) scholar and artist, engaged in identifying "entrenched colonial attitudes."¹⁵³ One of the primary ways in which I critically engage colonial attitudes is to examine how the understandings of a modernist, colonial notion of embodiment endures as a vestige of Cartesian practice, separating out inner processes (mental, vital) from the external feedback of an environment. To counter this tendency, I

¹⁵² Barad, *What Is the Measure of Nothingness?*, 7.

¹⁵³ Decter and Taunton, "Addressing the Settler Problem," 33.

engage in an approach to embodiment that is material-discursive, addressing the continuity and inter-connectedness of the human body to the world, the one animating the other. It is a way of conceptualizing that disrupts a Cartesian habit of separating the two. Materiality is considered as the expressions and agency of the movement of matter, conceptualizing matter as force rather than as something inert. Discursivity refers to how the relations of power are expressed, from macro-political structures to micro-encounters. Material-discursive understandings of embodiment, then, do not separate out the form(ing)s of matter from forces. A body understood in a material-discursive framework is a body in process, taking multiple form(s) continuously, as a body-room, a body-house, a body-guest, a body-settler-dancer, a body-settler-dancer-room, etc.

A material-discursive approach to choreography is not seeking a mastery or control of bodies. It considers organizing movement as a probing of how agency might erupt across the planes of body-site-context, erupting across the guest-host-site dynamic. Attuning to diverse connections and configurations of sense perception and expressions of power, the aim of a material-discursive choreographic process is to compose and differentiate new relations and forms.

Site-Situated Performance

In chapter one, with the dance event *Fear of Losing the details*, I describe a series of experimental embodied ways to look, to seek the details of habitual perceptions. In this chapter I begin to articulate research as encounter, acknowledging how I am indebted

to the presence of the site and of my audience for an engagement in trans-individual research.

I express how Michel de Certeau's concept of the everyday provides a register of meaning and history through which I might respond. It provides an understanding of residential spaces as a practice that participates in the broader political structures of society, and yet is the realm of resistance and creativity. Constraints of each everyday location allow for contextual meanings to emerge, and to illuminate how the potentials to move are always more complex than a dancer's will.

The dance event reveals, in a manner of speaking, a blindness; my guests are confused about the exact edges of the house and the artistic installation, and my own blindness is revealed in my assuming that the edges and rationales of the event would be evident. This confusion became productive, allowing me to experientially understand how acts of looking and seeing produce all kinds of subjective tendencies and (mis-)classifications. It allows me to critically reflect on a colonial tendency of looking through a representational register, objectively identifying things by marking out their differences from others.

A dance event as an inquiry into the intertwining of the concepts territoriality and choreography facilitated the emergence of the hybrid roles which I then carried throughout the whole project; my dancing body becomes a host-dancer, and my audience becomes an audience-guest.

In chapter two, I engage in a somatic and critical process of exploring my role as a guest in a sublet in Amsterdam. I define how choreography may be a process of articulating the circumstances. In articulating the circumstances, new configurations may emerge. Through a choreography of touching, sensing, and moving, I describe the aim of troubling the boundary making practices of inside/ outside. I aim to transport myself out of a Cartesian configuration of distinct subject and object, of considering space as object, and move into a relational engagement.

I foreground my experience of touch inside the sublet. As I begin to touch and to move inside the sublet, I become a guest who dances, a guest-dancer. Touching, a sense perception that may not directly and immediately produce a clear representation, produces a connective sensation that is difficult to seize or measure. Touch involves engaging with the unknowability of what one is touching.¹⁵⁴ It involves an uncertain quality, of not knowing exactly what is being exchanged.

Touch in the sublet becomes more than an act of sense perception. It is a plane of experience that expresses new boundaries. Touch territorializes. In doing so, it experientially troubles presuppositions of embodiment and subjectivity in modernity.

I refer to modern subjectivity broadly defined as the Western social and legal production of the subject, a coherent unified sense of identity. I refer to modern

¹⁵⁴ “What I touch is an intouchability.” Manning, *Politics of Touch*, 11.

embodiment broadly described as the creation of the figure of the individual. These principles, set in motion, reinforce an I-it separation between mind and body, and a I-world separation between body and world.

I describe the sublet experience as that which articulates the multiple connections and continuities between myself and the space. The sublet territorializes my dancing body, and I territorialize the space. The experience enables a multiplicity to arise; moving and sensing differently produces multiple subjectivities and embodiments, multiple expressions of the entanglement between the sublet and myself.

In chapter three, I analyze the site-situated performance *Surface Rising*, a silent choreography for one audience-guest at a time in my apartment in Montreal. The performance asks of an audience-guest to step into my apartment, and to be willing to let go of a discerning critical distance. The choreography aims to stimulate the audience-guests' capacity and habits of receiving—towards a mutual implication. It investigates how the embodiment of reciprocity and incertitude might be expressed. The performance attends to the apartment with questions of access, position, and incompleteness. With my hosting-dancing body, I foreground how attention is creative, not pre-given, and that it builds rhythms, textures and sensations. I aim to build a “field of attention”:¹⁵⁵ a field of possibilities, where one does not demand a precision of exactly what is, but that, guest and host attend together to what may unfold.

¹⁵⁵ Nita Little Nelson and Joseph Dumit, “Articulating Presence: Attention is Tactile,” in *Thinking Touch in Partnering and Contact Improvisation* (forthcoming, 2020), 2.

The performance weaves the dimensions of the visible into the not-yet-visible, and probes the question of what was intended and not intended to be seen. It offers, withholds, covers and uncovers the everyday contents of my domestic space. The performance produces multiple modes and positions of looking, listening, holding, and touching. It is a mode of looking that I describe as glimpsing emerges - the audience-guest engaged in a form of navigation.

The relationship between sensing and moving,¹⁵⁶ the question of how one affects the other, is the ongoing study of somatic experience as described by Clinical Somatic Education founder Thomas Hanna. This key fluctuating relationship to one's embodiment is proposed as a way of conceptualizing hosting and guesting, forms that continual shift along an ebb and flow of offering and receiving.

I extend the analysis of the performance into two short pull out texts. In the first, I address the material-discursive forces that run through the guest and the host at a moment in the performance where, as the host-dancer, I exit the room and leave the audience-guest alone for some minutes. In this moment, I am experimenting with the forces of hosting and guesting as sensations that linger in the space as I exit.

In the second short pull out text, I explore philosopher Jacques Derrida's definitions of conditional and absolute hospitality as it plays out between host-dancer and audience-guest in the very particular circumstances of performing a summersault for the

¹⁵⁶ "Reciprocity between sensing and moving is at the heart of the somatic process." Hanna, "What Is Somatics?", 6.

audience-guest. As I summersault, the momentum briefly pushes my body into an unknown form, a moment where I acknowledge a transformation, my own capacity of “becoming strange” to myself. The experience of “becoming strange” is the exercise of placing unknowability (of the guest, of the host, of the site) as the central ethic of any act of hospitality. Giving place to unknowability is giving place to the unknowable movement yet to be realized.

In chapter four, I re-perform *Surface Rising* in very different circumstances, which allows me to reflect on the specificity of site-situated performance. In a borrowed apartment, I re-explore the performance, allowing significant shifts to occur in order to make meaning and intensify the circumstances within which I find myself in. I describe the act of borrowing as choreographic practice, the observing and organizing of movement. The operation “assemblage”, from Deleuze and Guattari, becomes a key concept to understanding the choreography of the act of borrowing as a dynamism that produces unexpected connections. I explore how economic, material and social forces thread through the borrowed apartment, and how my dancing-hosting manifests in relation. I conclude the chapter with an understanding that I was not simply borrowing an apartment conceived of as inert matter, but that I was engaging in a field of relations and forces.

In the epilogue, I address the most recent manifestation of intertwining territoriality and choreography of the research project. *Visiting Hours*, the performance exhibition that took place in Toronto in 2019, explores the technique of visiting,

specifically of visiting a single image from another artist's work. The process was one of embracing constraints. The work was to decenter the notion of an image itself as the thing-that-makes-meaning, but to choreograph a way of looking at the image. Putting attention to a process of looking foregrounds the relationship of guest and host between two artists. The image becomes a site to consider hospitality, access, and difference.

I keep catching myself making the error over and over again that the "sites" to which I arrive are self-contained, fixed, and already-there. Re-writing and re-practicing the key value that observation territorializes, means shifting this fundamental assumption at each arrival. The "site" becomes (becomes different) the moment I arrive. If territoriality, as I consider it in this thesis, is a process of material-discursive movements, forming and (un)forming, then there is no site "itself", but site-as- infinite manners in which to engage, for site to become. The notion of site in site-situated performance then, turns and folds back onto my own subjectivity and embodiment, to my capacities to receive. The "site" in site-situated performance, in my case, turns out to be how I move and move with what I perceive.

The experiences outlined in this research project have been one of a profound fluidity between modes of guesting and hosting. The ways in which these modes of moving have influenced my capacities to observe, receive and transform have been powerful. The experiences have opened up dynamizing connections between embodiment and territory.

Decolonization

I articulate in the thesis a sense of impossibility in regards to, how, from someone in my position as settler, my artistic research may contribute to the greater and necessary project of decolonization. I keep this notion of impossibility as deeply inscribed to my way of observing myself and the way I move. I acknowledge that artistic practices cannot even approach the broader ongoing and historic injustices of colonialism and settler colonialism, and yet I articulate this impossibility in order to problematize it further.

The project of de-colonization concerns Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, the fundamental core of decolonizing acts. I am careful to not position settler narratives as central to this priority of focus, and yet, to probe how, as a settler, I may participate in this project. As settler colonial artist Carla Taunton suggests: “A fundamental component in the mobilisation of processes of decolonisation is for settler societies to engage in, commit to, and take responsibility for learning colonial histories and understanding contemporary legacies that support and maintain white-settler privilege on stolen Indigenous lands.”¹⁵⁷

By situating choreographic practices as expressed through the figures of host-dancer, audience-guest and performance-site, I have proposed that an engagement with colonial histories is being practiced. I have examined settler colonial and colonial operations that have entailed emptying the ground of relations, the creation of a *terra*

¹⁵⁷ Taunton, “Performing Resistance/Negotiating Sovereignty: Aboriginal Women’s Performance Art in Canada,” 75–76, quoted in Igloliorte, *Decolonize Me/Décolonisez-moi*, 22.

nullius, self-sufficiency of the individual, and modes of looking at “objective space” from a critical distance.

Attuning to questions of how to be a guest, or how to be a host that is foremost a guest, are profound trajectories through which to question a settler colonial heritage that has erased the historicity of settler-as-in-fact-guest. Choreographing modes of hosting and guesting have been ways to interrogate indebtedness and acts of reciprocity.

As Métis artist and scholar David Garneau writes in his essay “Extra-Rational Aesthetic Action and Cultural Decolonization”: “Cultural decolonization is the perpetual struggle to make both Indigenous and settler peoples aware of the complexity of our shared colonial condition, and how this legacy informs every person and institution in these territories.”¹⁵⁸ I attempt to take up Garneau’s call through the engagements I choreograph.

How may an intertwining of territoriality and choreography affect the production of practice and knowledge in site-situated performance? Intertwining territoriality and choreography in site-situated performance produces “a mode of engagement” at the intersection of political, social and artistic practices. It is an (ongoing) process of taking into account and inventing modes of moving.

¹⁵⁸ Garneau, “Extra-Rational Aesthetic Action and Cultural Decolonization,” 15.

Epilogue

Visiting Hours

In 2019, I was invited by curator Kim Simon to produce a performance exhibition¹⁵⁹ at Gallery TPW (Toronto Photographers Workshop). The project, which I titled *Visiting Hours*, moved my research from the personal realm of residential spaces to the institution of a publicly funded gallery space.

To extend the techniques of guesting and hosting to this new context, I needed to turn my attention toward the potential of creating relationships within the work. The “white cube” of the host gallery intimidated and disoriented me with its presupposed “neutrality.”¹⁶⁰

I decided I would need to approach artists working in the city to get a feel for what practices were already happening around the gallery. The resulting series of “studio visits”—understanding the Toronto context through the artistic processes happening there—was rich and exciting for me.

I developed the choreographic proposition of “visiting” another artist’s work for the exhibition. I cultivated relationships with six artists associated with Toronto, spending time with their practices in order to catch details and understand their work in depth.

After some months of conducting interviews, viewing works, and exchanging much

¹⁵⁹ The performance exhibition takes on the modality of a contemporary art exhibition, in which dancing is experienced through the apparatus of a gallery. The format “contests the dichotomies of object and experience and introduces a notion of exhibition-as-performance.” Cramer, “Experience as Artifact,” 25.

¹⁶⁰ One of my first moves was to ask the artist who had exhibited before me at Gallery TPW, Erika DeFreitas, if I could install in the gallery without repainting over the yellow wall colour she had chosen for her exhibition. She kindly agreed, and so my exhibition included the tiny holes where her photographic works had hung, and the field of yellow on the walls.

written and oral correspondence, I found myself lost in the intricacies of each artist's commitments, methods, ideas, and practices. How to visit another's experience? Another's point of view? Another's world? What right did I have to enter these worlds?

I arrived at the concept of visiting a single image from each artist's work. The notion of a single image seemed like a careful approach—a necessary limit in order not to trespass on another's work. I approached each image as a “site” and worked from a position as guest in their work, using the occasion of visiting to carefully activate and receive the layers of history—“to unstill the affects and possibilities held within the image's frame.”¹⁶¹

An image, of course, also provokes operations and conditions of ways of seeing. What would it “do” to the images, I wondered, to choreograph different ways of looking at them? And how could my visit offer something to the artist in exchange for their giving me access to their work, and creating a space for my experience?

An image is a capture, a moment, a fragment of the broader project of the artist. Attached to a whole world of making and thinking, it functions almost as a citation. The notion of visiting a single image opened up space for articulating a relation, a way of seeing the image, and not an assumption in which I re-enacted the work of the artist in some way. The gallery visitor would be given one clear but very limited element of an artist's work, so that the process of looking (always experiential, always incomplete), not the “image itself,” would become the subject of focus.

I hired six performers, and together we became host-dancers of the images. I developed six installations/choreographies to guide the gallery-guest's visit to each

¹⁶¹ Solomon, “k.g. Guttman in conversation with Noémie Solomon,” 9.

image. In collaboration with the dancers, I developed ways of touching surfaces, ways of looking from various viewpoints and proximities/distances, ways of entering and exiting the frame. The installations/choreographies proposed a “labour of embodied looking” and investigated how one might look/touch/listen/hold/move with an image.

Each artist that I selected has an investment with movement. Not all of them identify as dancers in a strict sense; however, the images I selected may be considered as documents of their actions. In this sense, the images are “stills,” each a brief surfacing of the artist’s ongoing practice and perspectives. Each image’s fragmentary aspect “intensifies, perhaps, the very limits in accessing or transmitting a given artist’s work or practice. It makes tangible what we cannot see: the many absences inscribed in the shadow of visibility, what constantly escapes the seen.”¹⁶²

The notion of the unseen dimensions of the image supplied the exhibition’s ethical and aesthetic operations. The installations/choreographies addressed a process of seeing as movement, always contingent, always in an embodied conversation between moving and sensing, sensing and moving.

Visiting Hours included sensorial cues and props for the visitor: oral instructions, handheld optical devices, simple digital greenscreen effects, comfortable mattresses and pillows, chairs on wheels, and oversize gloves with dangling fingers. All of this was developed to enrich and trouble the notion of access to another’s work and to heighten the temporal and experiential dimension of each image for the gallery visitor. The work examined the ethical dimensions of “visiting,” wherein the guest is always a bit lost to the depths of intimate knowledge connected with host and site, and is thus not in a position to

¹⁶² Solomon, “k.g. Guttman in conversation with Noémie Solomon,” 9.

“master” the content. I express this partial access to the work of others as the process of becoming guest.

Jacques Derrida has proposed that which constitutes hospitality is to be committed to seeking the not-yet-known, the unknown, the never-to-be known. He writes, “We do not know what hospitality is. Not yet. Not yet, but will we ever know?”¹⁶³ The not yet, not perhaps ever, is the call for openness to the other, openness to not knowing unforeseen possibilities yet to arrive. Visiting is positioned as a technique to heighten seeking, to become sensitive and alive to what is happening, to navigate the yet-to-be-known qualities of places to which you have yet to move.

My visits to each image involved distinct modes of negotiation and approach with each artist. This technique enabled me to work within many sets of constraints, to look carefully to potential as a way of considering someone else’s practice. It was a process of sustaining the yet-to-be-known or yet-to-be-understood aspects of the artist’s practice in relation to the yet-to-be-known aspects of my becoming in the encounter with the image. The process has taught me how to make work as a guest in this particular ecology of circumstances.

After working in this relational manner in developing the exhibition, on the opening day a drastic fold occurred. Not only was I still a guest to these images, but I became host to them as well. I felt an enormous responsibility and an anxiety that the artists who had offered their images would be disappointed or disturbed with the final version of their visits. (As a host, I was responsible to the commitments I had made to others).

¹⁶³ Derrida, “Hostipitality,” 6.

In a public dialogue about the exhibition held on July 31st, 2019, the artist Jessica Karuhanga (who had contributed one of the images) mentioned that for her, this process was one of “letting go”—of her practice in relation to another person, and of her specific expectations. This release was quite interesting to her, since in order to receive something new, she had to let go of what the work had been.

All the participating artists, lo bil, Seika Boye, Jessica Karuhanga, Matthew-Robin Nye, Joshua Vettivelu, and Francisco-Fernando Granados, expressed a general feeling that this experience was at once a demand and a gift. This reciprocity of relations and exchanges that the project had generated was revelatory.

How does one even attempt to step out from a system of pregiven economy—of transactions, choices, images, and identities—thereby to seek new ways of encounter, new relationalities? How does one “swing from stratification to experimentation”?¹⁶⁴

The technique of *visiting* foregrounds relations as being valued as much as the material site itself. In *Visiting Hours*, visiting animates relations by placing focus on acts of reception. As a guest, a mode of receiving in foregrounded. Receiving is a transformative process, a way to engage with relations that have yet to take form.

Visiting animates the immediate, the present moment, but also intensifies the past (the telling of how a place came to be) and excites the future (the telling of how a present place may shift and become something new). Visiting, I would suggest, not only heightens the reception of the present moment, but also activates a mode of receiving, at once, the world of the past and the world in becoming.

In *Visiting Hours*, as with the entire body of research discussed in this thesis, I

¹⁶⁴ Manning, *Politics of Touch*, 139.

carry with me, wherever and however I move, my subject-position as a settler (Canadian) artist and researcher, a cluster of forces and histories folded into my position, with which I engage, however tenuously, however impossibly, but persistently. Through this engagement, moving in these roles, guest and host, will lead me to new, as-yet-unknown relations.

My embodiment—comprised of a collision of dancer-host-guest-site-settler—makes the ground of *Visiting Hours*, and of all my projects, a specific one. This ground does not support or advance the abstraction of the site (white cube gallery, residential space, etc.) as a terra nullius, a homogenous space lodged within the colonial/settler-colonial framework wherein movement assumes a seemingly ahistorical, innocent quality. Rather, it is a way of working quite distant from the extractivist operations of settler colonialism, one that values reception as urgent and generative.

I engage with these urgent questions on the inflection of choreographic practice with the territoriality that is generated through the relations of guest, host, and site. These are ongoing questions—questions with the potential to deepen practices of receiving and offering, and to open up micro-trans-individual worlds of exchange.



Visiting Hours, Documentation, Gallery TPW, 2019 (photo credit: Henry Chan)



Visiting Hours, Documentation, Gallery TPW, 2019 (photo credit: Henry Chan)



Visiting Hours, Documentation, Gallery TPW, 2019 (photo credit: Henry Chan)

Link to video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/415156570> Password: Visiting1

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Summary

Territoriality and Choreography in Site-Situated Performance

The PhD project *Territoriality and Choreography in Site-Situated Performance* is conducted through artistic practice and theoretical inquiry. The project performatively activates a series of residential sites in Canada and the Netherlands.

Site-situated performance refers to an artistic process that begins and ends on-site, working within the specific conditions of a location. The key terms territoriality and choreography here represent concepts and practices that express and navigate space-time(s). The project animates qualities of territoriality through a choreographed encounter between host-dancer, guest-audience and site-performance.

Written and explored from the perspective of a Canadian settler scholar and artist, the project attunes to the material and discursive agency of the guest, host and site within colonial and settler colonial conditions. The project develops a critical and creative mode of engagement with the social, material and political characteristics of a site and with the world-building potential of performance.

Description of Artistic Component

The artistic component of the research project *Territoriality and Choreography in Site-Situated Performance* involves multiple elements, consisting of documentary images and video, a live performance, and a final thesis presentation.

Woven into the written thesis are documentary photographic images and drawings from the series of four performances in residential sites (2014-15). The images capture both the process of developing works as well as the final installations and performances.

Documentary photographic images of the exhibition Visiting Hours (2019) are included in the epilogue of the thesis. A supplementary documentary video of the research is also accessible here. (Link to video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/415156570>

Password: Visiting1)

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Due to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to travel to the Netherlands to perform in person. In this context, the thesis presentation includes a performance-at-a-distance for a solo audience member, entitled *I asked my guest to close one eye* (2020). The performance embodies the final artistic presentation of the research.

The performance *I asked my guest to close one eye*” must take place in a residential site. The participant must arrange, through their personal or professional relations, a visit to someone else’s residence, specifically, to gain access to one room that is not one’s own.

It must be a location where the participant, newly transformed into a guest, may be permitted to be alone for approximately one hour.

The performance *I asked my guest to close one eye* consists of an audio recording that the participant may download and listen to through earphones. The participant will receive a small bag, containing items that may be opened through the prompts of the voice on the audio recording. *I asked my guest to close one eye* choreographs ways of attuning to the material-discursive forces of one room in someone else's house. "Becoming guest" in this work seeks a heightened observation process of the material site, as well as an exploration of the responsibility and reciprocity implicated in the hospitality of this specific situation.

Through precise instructions of looking, touching, and holding, the performance expands a sensorial attunement for the audience, and probes the seemingly inaccessible dimensions of the site.

The project choreographs an encounter of relations of guest-audience, host-performer and site-performance. The use of documentary photographic images and voice recordings constitute a final form of the research.

Samenvatting

Territoriality and Choreography in Site-Situated Performance

Het PhD project Territoriality and Choreography in Site-Situated Performance brengt artistieke praktijk en theoretisch onderzoek samen. Het project activeert op performatieve wijze een aantal woonlocaties in Canada en Nederland.

Het begrip site-situated performance verwijst naar een artistiek proces dat ter plekke begint en eindigt, werkend vanuit de specifieke omstandigheden van een locatie. De sleutelbegrippen territorialiteit en choreografie verwijzen hier naar concepten en praktijken die ruimte-tijd uitdrukken en navigeren. Het project brengt eigenschappen van territorialiteit tot leven door middel van een gehoreografeerde ontmoeting tussen gastvrouw-danser, gast-toehoorder en locatie-performance.

Geschreven en onderzocht vanuit het perspectief van een Canadese kolonist, onderzoeker en beeldend kunstenaar, richt het project zich op het materiële en discursieve potentieel van gast, gastvrouw en plek binnen een koloniale context en de omstandigheden van de kolonist.

Het project ontwikkelt een kritische en creatieve modus van engagement met de sociale, materiële en politieke relaties van een plek of locatie tot het potentieel van performance om een wereld te construeren.

Beschrijving van de artistieke component

De artistieke component van het onderzoeksproject Territoriality and Choreography in Site-Situated Performance omvat verschillende elementen, te weten visueel documentatiemateriaal en video, een live performance en de presentatie van de dissertatie.

Documentaire fotografische beelden en tekeningen van de serie van vier performances op woonlocaties (2014-15) zijn door de geschreven dissertatie heen geweven. De beelden zijn een weergave van het maakproces van het werk alsook van de uiteindelijke installaties en performances.

In de epiloog van de dissertatie is documentair fotografisch beeld van de tentoonstelling *Vsiting Hours* (2019) opgenomen. Verder is er een documentaire video van het onderzoek. <https://vimeo.com/415156570> wachtwoord: Visiting1

Vanwege de COVID-19 pandemie was het mij niet mogelijk om naar Nederland te reizen om persoonlijk een performance te doen. Daarom is in de dissertatie een beschrijving van performance-op-afstand voor een soloparticipant opgenomen, getiteld *I asked my guest to close one eye* (2020). Deze performance is bedoeld als artistieke eindpresentatie van het onderzoek.

De performance *I asked my guest to close one eye* moet plaatsvinden in een woning. De participant wordt gevraagd om, via persoonlijke of professionele relaties, een bezoek te arrangeren aan de woning van iemand anders en toegang te verkrijgen tot een kamer. Dit moet een plek zijn waar de participant, die nu getransformeerd is tot gast, gedurende ongeveer een uur alleen kan zijn.

De performance *I asked my guest to close one eye* bestaat uit een audio recording die de participant kan downloaden op de mobiele telefoon en beluisteren via oordopjes. De participant ontvangt een kleine tas met items die geopend wordt op instigatie van de audio-stem. *I asked my guest to close one eye* choreografeert manieren om ontvankelijk te worden voor de materiële en discursieve eigenschappen van een kamer in het huis van een iemand anders. Het doel van het “gast worden” in dit werk is een verhoogde gevoeligheid voor een bepaalde plek, als ook het onderzoeken van de verantwoordelijkheid en wederkerigheid die eigen zijn aan de gastvrijheid in een bepaalde situatie. Door precieze instructies om te kijken, aan te raken en vast te houden, is de performance gericht op een vergroting van de zintuigelijke ontvankelijkheid, om zicht te krijgen op schijnbaar ontoegankelijke dimensies van de plek.

Het project choreografeert een ontmoeting tussen gast-publiek, gast-vrouw performer en plek-performance. Het geheel van documentair fotografisch beeld en geluidsopnamen een finale vorm van het onderzoek.

C.V.

k.g. Guttman is a settler (Canadian) visual artist working in choreography, video, performance and installation. Born in 1975, k.g. is based in Tiohtiá:ke/ Montreal.

Guttman holds both a BFA and MFA from Concordia University, Tiohtiá:ke/ Montreal in Interdisciplinary Performance and Studio Arts. In 2006 she was a visiting student at DasTheatre Masters Programme, at Amsterdam University for the Arts.

Guttman's research as a PhD candidate at PhDArts, the international doctorate program of Leiden University, in close collaboration with the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, The Netherlands, considers how territoriality and choreography are intertwined in site-situated practices. Her doctoral research is funded through Stichting de Zaaier, the Netherlands and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

k.g.'s role as educator is intertwined with her artistic practices. From 2008-2013, k.g. was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Contemporary Dance, Concordia University, and in 2015 she taught in the photography department at the Royal Academy of Art in the Hague. She was an invited tutor for Masters of Fine Arts in Scenography, University of the Arts, Utrecht, and has been a guest teacher in Toronto's professional dance collective the Love-in.

Diverse invitations that bridge dance and visual art contexts include exhibitions at TPW Gallery and Blackwood Gallery in Toronto, VIVA! Art action and Dazibao, Tiohtiá:ke/ Montreal, Musée d'Art de Joliette, Klupko, Amsterdam, Galerie Khiasma and Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Her choreographic residencies and commissions include the Canada Dance Festival, Dancemakers, Toronto, LeGroupe Dance Lab, Ottawa, the University of Sonora, Mexico, Buda Kustencentrum, Kortijk and Pointe Ephémère, Paris.

Her performance publication *Elapse I & II*, was launched at Art Metropole and Galerie LaCentrale, and is in the collection of the Library and Archives of the National Gallery of Canada.

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