



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Territoriality and choreography in site-situated performance

Guttman, K.G.

Citation

Guttman, K. G. (2020, November 10). *Territoriality and choreography in site-situated performance*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138189>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/138189>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/138189> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Guttman, K.G.

Title: Territoriality and choreography in site-situated performance

Issue Date: 2020-11-10

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)

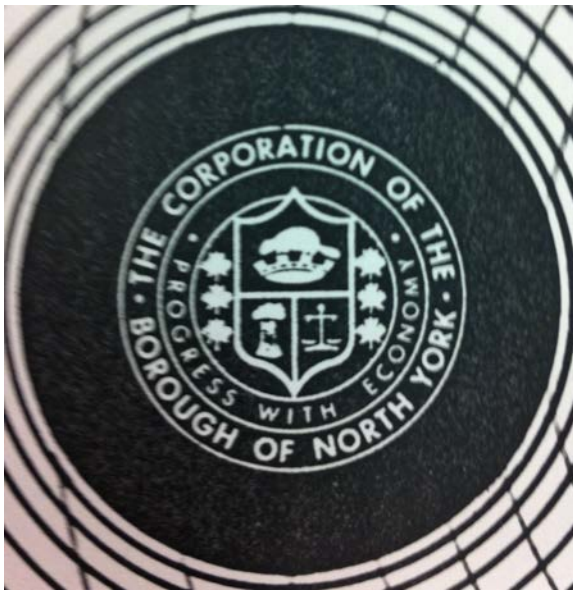
Thinking through territoriality involves understanding how I came to have access to the site. My parents moved to Toronto in the 1970s for academic appointments at the University of Toronto. Theirs is an inter-faith marriage. My father is a first-generation Canadian, the child of Eastern European Jewish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

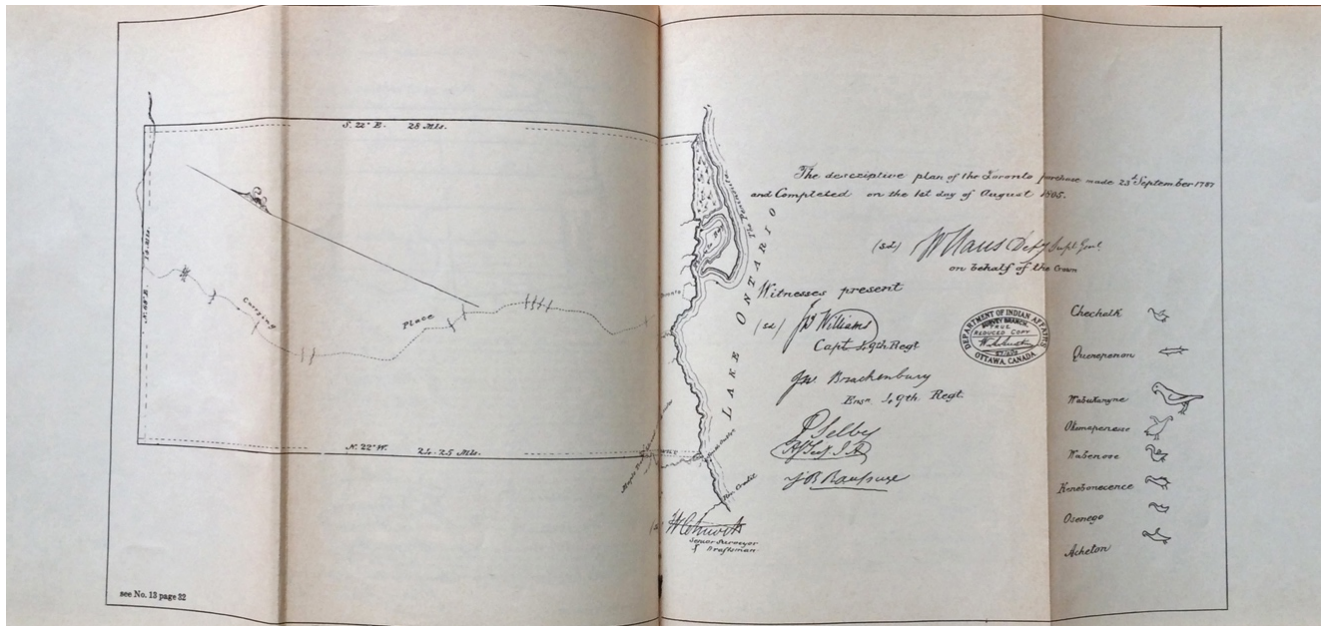
and raised.³⁴

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.



Map of the Toronto Purchase, created 23 September 1787. The treaty was concluded on 1 August 1805.

Treaty No. 13, the “Toronto Purchase,” consists of two parts: a legal contract, in English, securing the ownership of the land; and a surveyor’s map depicting the parcel of lands claimed by the Crown, with the signatures of colonial officials in one column, and the signatures, with animal dodem marks,³⁶ of the Mississaugas of the Credit in another.³⁷ The land surrender is purposefully misleading, as the initial document, apparently signed in 1787, was later found to have been blank, while a renegotiated contract, dated 1805, was interpreted by the Mississaugas not as a sale of property but a lease for use of the land in exchange for goods in perpetuity.³⁸

³⁶ *Dodem* are drawn animal clan figures associated with Mississaugas of the Credit signatories, which configure individual identity along with kinship and responsibilities to land, to animals, and to other clans. Clan structures are part of the social and political systems in Anishnabeg societies (the greater network of First Nations in which the Mississaugas of the Credit are situated). “Relationships were the underlying principle. This included land and community-based relationships.” McGuire, “Restorative Dispute Resolution,” 5.

³⁷ “There is significant scholarship on aspects of the problematic Mississauga land surrenders in the Toronto area.” Freeman, ““Toronto Has No History!””, 23.

³⁸ “In 1788, several chiefs described their land cession as a gift rather than a sale, with the expectation that the British would be obligated to reciprocate in perpetuity.” Freeman, ““Toronto Has No History!””, 59.

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 Mamer, “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