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Territoriality and choreography in site-situated performance

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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.

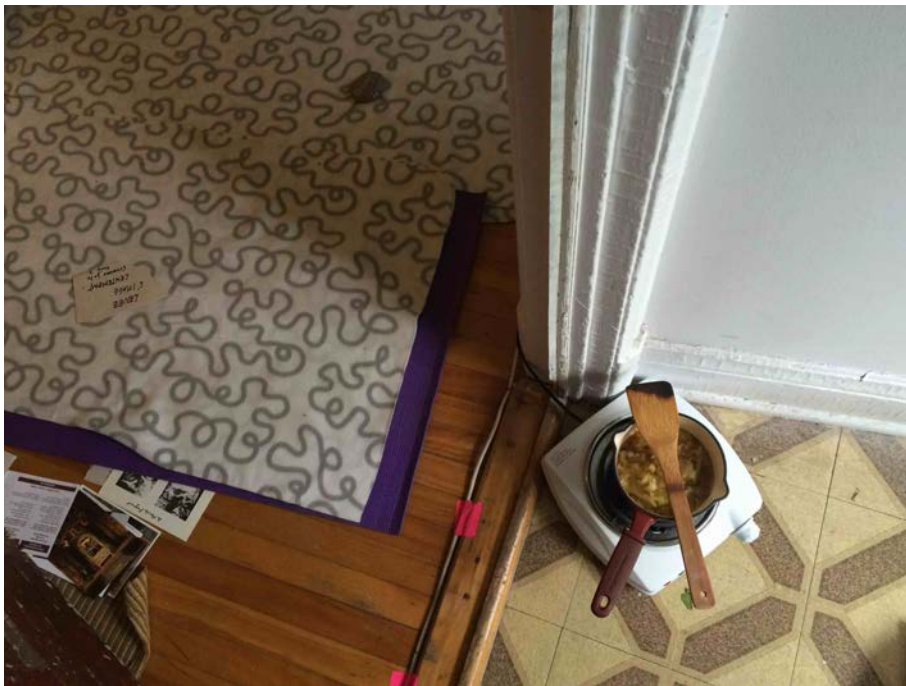
Situated in my apartment, to the visitor the everyday, the familiar, becomes centered and de-centered, partially hidden, partially reordered, and partially restored. The aim is to infuse into the performance a vector of quick recognition that flows into defamiliarization. This technique of covering/uncovering 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

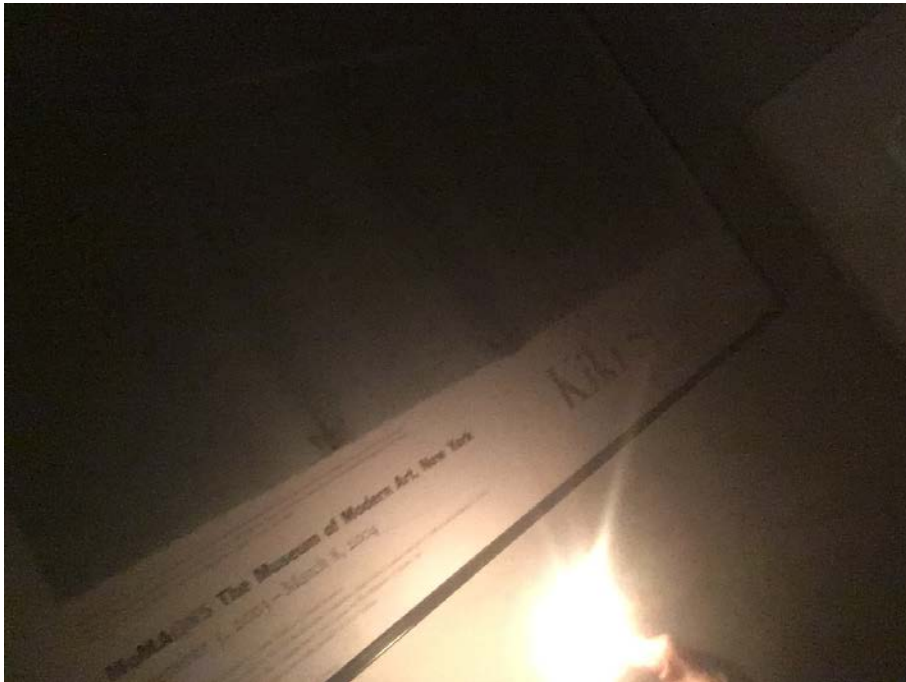
I hand the audience-guest a little note:

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.

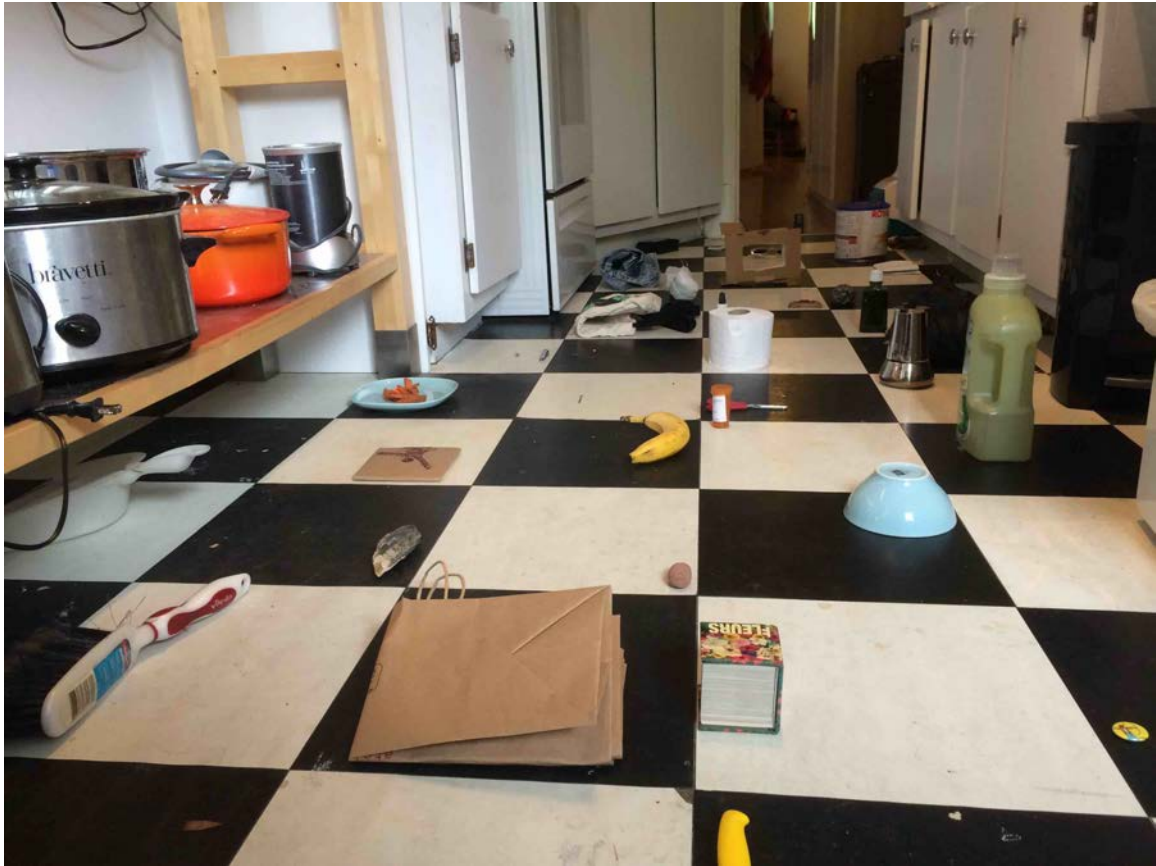
⁹⁸ Potrović, “What a Body Can Become,” 287.



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 guesting 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.