Title: *Dancing with dirt and wires; reconciling the embodied and the digital in site responsive collaborative practice.*

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1. Introduction

Acknowledging the practitioner-researcher model and collaboration inherent to 21st Century contemporary performance practices, this co-authored chapter is offered as an extension of an ongoing collaboration between two dance artists and a photographer working in outdoors performance under the project *enter & inhabit*. The writing process and resulting chapter moves between a reflection on process, a document of practice and a theorization around live and digital composition thus inviting a reconsideration of the relationship between the real and the virtual.

Positioning site responsive work as *emergent* through time and collaborative dialogues, the work of *enter & inhabit* is considered here as an example of outdoor performance practice that resides in a creative exchange across the live and the virtual, the embodied and the digital and the hand written and processed. In this, the process of art making as unfolding across extended time and through collective activity is entertained. Specifically the RSVP Cycle, a conceptualization of collaborative creative processes by American outdoor movement artist Anna Halprin, is discussed as a way to position technology in a flattened hierarchy of resources for art making.

In dialogue with the work of performance studies scholar Professor Susan Melrose, (2003, 2005a, 2005b & 2005c), artists' activity and achievement is argued to rely upon what might be referred to as inter-subjectivity between artists and situation, rather than wholly situated in an embodied singular self.

Acknowledging the ontological provocations that lay amongst the creative approach of *enter inhabit* this chapter concludes by briefly considering the work of performance theorists Peggy Phelan (1993) and Rebecca Schneider (2002) to chart the significances of a collaborative process that resists casting the live or virtual as 'document' to the other and instead positions each as a creative act in companionship. Offering case study examples inherent to the work of *enter & inhabit*; the digital image, web space creation, remote score writing and virtual dancing, this chapter argues that technology is both a constitute part of the work itself and a reflective (or perhaps refractive) tool embedded into our creative process that contributes, alongside other elements, to the play of relationship between bodies and site.

2. *enter & inhabit*

enter & inhabit is an ongoing collaborative project which explores the creation of live and mediated events for spaces and places that can be characterized by flow and transition. Begun by dance artists Natalie Garrett Brown and Amy Voris in 2008, principally as a site responsive movement project in the city landscape of Coventry, the project has subsequently evolved to include a photographer, Christian Kipp and, until her recent passing, dancer / writer Niki Pollard.

Drawing on durational movement improvisation, photography and a range of writing registers, *enter & inhabit* explores the possibility of presence in sites of flow and transition with an interest to reveal *versions* of the site. The work is underpinned by an interest in the different modes of perception invoked by somatic informed movement practices, specifically Body-Mind Centering[1] for both

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[1]For an introduction to BMC® see Cohen (1993) or Hartley (1989). The words 'soma' and 'somatics' were first coined by philosopher and somatic practitioner Thomas Hanna (1928-1990) in the late 1970s to speak about the body as experienced from within, as a 'felt, sensed, lived entity. In using this term he advocated a balancing of first and third person perspective, rather than a replacing of the one with the other.

making artists and invited or accidental audiences. This activity recognizes and foregrounds inter-subjectivity as a state of being and explores how embodied population of sites, real and virtual, can invoke new and the yet-to-be known encounters of familiar space and place, rendering the familiar unfamiliar for both artists and witnesses. Within this is to be found inquisitiveness around the possibility for kinesthetic empathy[2] between audience and performer or what might be termed a corporeal response. Central to this practice has always been an interest to develop a collaborative process in which each art forms' and artists' particularity constitutes the work equally, and one whereby collective creativity permeates the process. In working terms, photography is not there to 'capture' the dance, the dance is not created to symbolize the landscape and the written word is not bestowed to offer authority. Rather the live and mediated events created through the *enter & inhabit* project are culminations of these streams in dialogue, an emergent moment rooted in many hours of practiced conversation. Within this approach we are interested in the way that *technology* can be embedded (as a resource) within the design of the creative process, rather than positioned as something that documents the work. Thus the relationship between technology and practice within the *enter & inhabit* project can be seen to reside in creative exchange across the live and the virtual, the embodied and the digital and the handwritten and the processed whereby technology constitutes the work as an equal but is not the leading dimension.

3. Creative and Conceptual Ground

Mosaic in its spread of references and lineages, the creative and conceptual ground for this approach to technology coheres around the approach to collaboration it takes. Specifically it draws on Anna Halprin's model of collaborative working: the RSVP Cycle. Formulated in partnership with Halprin's architect husband Lawrence Halprin in the late 1970s, the RSVP Cycle offers a map or model for collaborative working across disciplines and in outdoor practice. As its title suggests, particular to this process is an inherent acceptance of the cyclical nature of art making, through

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[2]In introducing term, kinesthetic empathy we acknowledge the research project and resulting collection of essays which speaks to themes of that which we and others have theorized as a corporeal response or bodily transmission. Of particular interest is the cross art and cross cultural perspective this brings. See Reynolds, D. & Reason, M. (2012).

and across four key stages termed as Resourcing (R), Scoring (S), Valu-action (V) and Performance (P), whereby the creative act is understood as ongoing and continuing past the moment of a 'first performance'.[3] This formulation is depicted visually, an architectural plan if you will, and thus allows for the articulation of, arguably inherent, characteristics of the creative process, for example the mapping of the inner individual artistic journey in relationship to the collective journey as the project moves through and across the different stages.

For us, implicit within this model is a celebration of collective response and thus too an undoing of hierarchies between art forms and artists. Similarly an investment in reflection as an integral aspect of the creative process is also highlighted in this modeling of collaborative making. It is these characteristics, which therefore inform our approach to the live and the digital or virtual indicated earlier.

The digital is not used to record, capture or archive the work but rather our creative process invites a dialogue between the embodied and the digital image, between dirt and wires as an intrinsic feature. Thus, technology is both a constitute part of the work itself and a reflective (or perhaps refractive) tool embedded into our creative process that contributes to the play of relationship between bodies and site. In this flattened hierarchy of artists and art forms, the word 'technology' in the last sentence could be interchanged with 'dance' or 'writing'… *And thus the dance is both a constitute part of the work itself and a reflective…* For instance, movement scores devised and moved in certain sites are collectively revised / re-imaged in virtual space and then folded back into the live realms of the project which are not bound by project / performance deadlines but rather feed into months or possibly years of movement and photographic practice on a particular site. Images created from inhabiting sites become the slide shows of the website and project installations of live events, but also fuel the resourcing cycle of movement-score writing and project

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[3]For further discussion the RSVP process and Halprin's work more generally see Poynor, H, & Worth, L, (2004) & Poynor (2009).

reflection.

As the discussion thus far indicates perhaps, an embodied relationship to site and a reliance on reflection grounded in the ongoing enactment of our respective arts forms, are central to our collaborative process. [4] This approach draws on simple movement explorations inside and outside to enhance awareness of the perceptual senses and different systems of the body. Central to this is an interest to explore how 'embodied seeing' might facilitate a dialogue between individual and collective consciousness in the creation of poetic image for the page, body and camera. The RSVP cycle thus become the tool for us to navigate a continuous folding in and expression outward of embodied knowing within the collaborative process. If we are to follow theories of *inter-subjectivity* as theorized by dance scholars Ann Cooper Albright (2001), Erin Manning (2007)[5] and others, we can begin to see how cultivating a *somatic mode of attention* or a balance between a being with self and other, or more broadly, perhaps activity and receptivity, enables a porosity of boundary between bodies, site and embodied imagination of both artists and audience in the context of a movement practice[6]. However in the context of *enter & inhabit* we can experience how this *somatic mode of attention* when applied to the process of collaboration enables a play across and between discipline boundaries allowing an inter-subjective space for a collective response to site. In this process for example our enhanced receptivity enables a noticing of that which is ordinarily filtered or seeing afresh the familiar enabling an openness to others perception and understanding.

The process of art making we are honing within *enter & inhabit* resonates, with the work of performance studies scholar Professor Susan Melrose, (2003, 2005a, 2005b & 2005c), who casts

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[4]See Garrett Brown, N., Kipp, C., Pollard, N., Voris, A. (2011) for further discussion of this point.

[5] Here we are drawing on a theorization of the term inter-subjectivity as offered by dance scholars informed by corporeal feminism. However this term is used by others working in the fields of Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and Philosophy, specifically Phenomenology when formulating understandings of relationship. For further discussion of this point see Garrett Brown, N. (2007) & (2011).

[6]For further discussion and examples of this way of working in the outdoors see Garrett Brown, N. (2012).

the collaborative process as one of 'chasing angels' and reliant on 'expert intuition'. In developing these metaphors she articulates the significance of artists in relationship when they are making, and also positions intuition as reliant in part on the embodied knowledge of the performer. In doing so she offers a philosophical perspective on the significance of Halprin's RSVP process as a model for reconciling the embodied and the digital in collaborative practice.

Central to her discourse is the contention that, to define an art object as a text to be read, is to mistakenly align the process of art making with other, arguably dominant forms of production.[7] In the context of performance she argues that not only do these approaches insert a problematic distinction between the reader, viewer, or meaning-giver, and the work, but she also contends they are unable to account for that which is particular or 'singular within its composition'. Developing the work of cultural theorist and philosopher, Brian Massumi (2002), Melrose draws on his discussion of 'qualitative transformation' to demonstrate the detrimental effect of the coupling of art as text and the ontologizing, ordering effects of words which cite objects as known, pre-existing, thereby drawing a distinction between 'the looking back of words' in contrast to the potential of performance to look forward, invite, entertain, and seek the new, the unknown and the unnameable. Thus Melrose argues for recognition of the specificity of art making as opposed to any other type of production, which in its most reductive form often constitutes a reflection back on something already categorised as found, often time in the written forms of knowledge production. Art making she claims, in contrast, is fundamentally concerned with a transfiguration of the discipline. Summing this idea up she states:

> …most disciplines are constituted after evaluation of something or things produced and classified; stand still and look back, or reproduce new insights with regard to the already known…In complete contrast are those creative practitioner disciplines whose production processes are calculated not so much in terms of that discipline's past, but on their capacity to provide the potential for singular, qualitative transformations of it.

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[7]The collection of Melrose's writings cited here share a concern to bring into question the usefulness of a discursive approach when engaging with art practices wherein the art object is a text to be read through what she terms "spectator theories of knowledge".

(Melrose, 2003)

In taking this view, Melrose asserts that this allows the possibility that choreographers who approach performance making in this way do indeed theorise in their searching for the yet unknown. However they do so differently from philosophers, an approach situated in a multi-dimensional mode rather than one rooted in a logical linear narrative as common to traditional western culture word-based expression[8].

Drawing on the model of Kantian 'symbolic exhibition', Melrose proposes that the creative act reconfigured as collaboration and 'thinking in multi-dimensional, multi-schematic, multi-participant modes' includes three interrelated phases which chime with the *enter & inhabit* project.[9] The first of these, the conceptual order, includes the application of compositional tools to the aim of creating an art work infused by 'expert intuition' which necessarily sits, for the most part, outside of rational enquiry but is situated in learnt, practised and honed tacit knowledge. For Melrose this first stage is followed by a phase of capturing that which has emerged, reflecting upon it to finally re-engage with the conventions of making that first informed the process. Once the inclusion of all artists (dancers, musicians, lighting, set) are allowed into the process, the infinite number of possible works this enables becomes apparent leading Melrose to state '…the 'new work', as it appears – will surprise the makers, who literally could not, individually, have imagined it' (Melrose, 2005c, p.5). Accordingly, in phrasing the idea of 'expert intuition', Melrose's work begins to acknowledge notions of generative art making as necessarily moving between and across different registers of

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[8] In making this point we acknowledge other experimental writing practices that critically engage with established modes of writing. For example Feminist philosopher Helene Cixous' *Ecriture Feminine* alongside the ongoing interrogation of the writing and practice relationship central to late 20th Century developments in Practice as Research and Performance Studies more widely.

[9] As the following discussion will demonstrate, while Melrose's position is in sympathy with the approach to making locatable within the *enter & inhabit* project, her theorisation has come through engagement with dance performance intended for the theatre wherein the notion of 'the choreographer' is still pertinent. Given this, however, her insights as to the relational contribution made by all participating artists including the embodied expertise of those who perform are particularly illuminating. As discussed further on, I would argue that her application of Massumi's notion of 'catalyst' is particularly useful to understandings of artistic collaboration.

knowing- bodily, cognitive, experiential, reflective. Thus each event or unfolding of the work available to the audience member, at that moment in time, is not 'the' work but rather, 'no more than one momentary instantiation,' (Melrose, 2005c,p.5) conceived by the maker(s) to be 'incomplete, as non identical with her own larger epistemic enquiry, which will drive her (them) to make yet another new work' (Melrose, 2005c, p.6).

Writing in 2003 Melrose cultivated a metaphor of 'Chasing Angels' to describe this alternative understanding of art making wherein creative production is not a guaranteed process but rather 'fragile', a 'gamble' wherein the success, or not, of catching an 'Angel'/art work is known only in the moment of the emerging event. Drawing on the 'Angel'/art synonym the performance event is seen to be marked by luminosity, rather than substance, not attributable to any one performer or creator, not owned by any one individual but rather specific to that moment in time and the collaborative result of a 'relational emergence' catalysed by the artists in relationship. Melrose uses the term 'relational emergence' to express a particular understanding of the collaborative relationship, an understanding which resonates with the approach to collaboration, outlined here within the work of *enter & inhabit*. Citing Massumi's use of the word catalyst to refer to 'the resituating of variation' (Melrose, 2005b), the choreographer (artist) guided by a combination of practice-specific expertise, intuition and a desire to theorise is seen to put in place 'ingredients', 'fragments' of possibilities for interaction and effect rather than creating constant general conditions for an event (Melrose, 2005b).

Thus, for Melrose, any artists' activity and achievement is reliant upon those circumstances, parings and collaborations colliding his/her way rather than wholly situated in an embodied self, what might be referred to as inter-subjectivity between artists and situation. Consequently the collaborating artists skill and concern becomes one of recognizing, remaining open and available to possible "relational emergence" in the process of creative production.

4. Dirt and Wires; some examples

The work of *enter and inhabit* can be situated within a wider shift in cultural and creative practice, reflecting what has been theorized by others as a mediatized society[10]. However as discussion so far as indicated, within the *enter and inhabit* project there is an interest to continually return audiences to their own lived sensorial presence when engaging with the virtual realms. Writings, poetic scores and images generated through processes of bodily knowing inhabit the virtual dimensions of the project. These are offered as provocations to the senses, an invitation to those visiting the site to inhabit their own materiality in the act of engagement through a focus on their own sensorial experience. Thus integral to the artistic inquiry of the project is the development of process and production modes that enliven this. With this in mind the following discussion seeks to illustrate how this interest and commitment relates to the dirt and wires of the *enter & inhabit* project. Offering some examples of where this can be identified currently, the closing section of this chapter outlines the *enter and inhabit* approach to digital images, development of the web space, remote score writing and virtual dancing[11].

Digital Images

Digital images have formed a central axis for the project from early on, including a variety of formats such as: photographic exhibitions, digital projections and hand crafted postcards. For each project the chosen format of their manifestation has been responsive to the site and to the context of the public event. However, what remains constant is the way in which the images wrap or fold back into the live work, to use Halprin's language as 'resources' while simultaneously constituting the work itself as culmination moments of our exploration on site, which have included invited audiences. When working in a village in Devon, UK as part of *River Walking* (2010) the images

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[10]See for example Auslander, P. (2008) Liveness: Performance In a Mediatized Culture, UK, Routledege

[11]In writing this article collaboratively via in person conversation and on the page through virtual communications, the continuation of the RSVP process and project development is acknowledged. See Garrett Brown, N, G., Kipp, C., Pollard, N., Voris, A. (2011) for a further example of this point.

informed our score writing and shared reflections, off and on site, but also manifest in hand crafted post cards that formed part of the installation that accompanied the live event. Earlier projects such *as Multiples of Two* (2009), which explored the underpass system of Coventry's infamous ring road saw large-scale projections of digital images as part of the event, images which had also informed the two years onsite resourcing stages. In 2011, we began a project in Kenilworth Common, Warwickshire, UK. In the woods of the common –– a popular thoroughfare local to one of our homes –– we began to translate processes from previous sites and projects, further afield. As with previous projects we worked in this site for a sustained period of time, over more than a year. One culminating moment from this was a photographic collection *Everything Is At Once (2011)* shown as part of the Dance & Somatic Conference at Coventry University (2011). Continuing and developing our collaborative practice, the photographic collection for the conference was collectively selected and designed. The process took place over an extended period, sometimes in real time working in an indoor space nearby to the site, other times we worked virtually. Words and associations experienced by Amy Voris and Natalie Garrett Brown from our first encounter with the photographic images fed back into subsequent movement explorations and scores on site. The spatial arrangements for the photographic collection emerged from a play with the exhibition site as environment, an attentiveness to the architecture and light of the space. Later, a slide show version was created for the website with the same collective approach and attention to the intended environment. As part of this project, too, writing generated through moving in relationship to the photographic collection manifested in a journal article exploring the notion of embodied photography further extending our collective understanding of the collaborative process we are evolving (Garrett Brown, Kipp, Pollard, Voris, A. 2011).

Web Space

The *enter & inhabit* website was generated for a number of interrelated reasons.[12] It began in part as an extension of an interest around how to write about and from practice. We also held an interest in how to invite others in to the full range of artistic activity that was happening as part of the project, including photographic images, text objects, performance scores, audience responses and writings. These initial intentions informed the design and navigation choices for the web space as it exists today. Approached with the same method that we use when working outdoors, each detail of the design was choreographed collectively via the RSVP Cycle, its structure and intent moved and trialed on the page, in the studio, as projections and in the outdoors before appearing in the virtual world.

We explored how the web space design might invite visitors to experience each discipline as a strand of artistic practice in its own right. Photographic collections on the web for example have been curated specifically for that format, not necessarily reproduced in the format used for the live events. The web site is not *of* the project but *is* the project. And as it developed, the web space has became both an art object in its own right and a further tool for collecting, refining and responding to shared resources, between and during our intensive periods of working outdoors together.

Remote Score Writing

The dialogue between the embodied and the virtual is also present in the activity of developing movement scores, *remotely*. Simply speaking, these are email exchanges which generate a movement score – a poetic set of instructions from which we move or walk in our immediate, home or local environments with shared temporality, but not necessarily within a shared material space. Pragmatically this serves the project well as all members live in different areas of the UK, creatively it continues our interest to explore links between the various spaces and places we inhabit. The

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[12] www.enterinhabit.co

virtual space is used to collaboratively generate writing from the experience of enacting the remote score. The *Longest Day Remote Score* (2009) took place on the shortest day of the year, but took its title in response to an earlier event that had included two performance scores, in two different cities during one day, midsummers day. Thus, the shared reference space for the *Longest Day Remote Score* was layered and enmeshed in what had come before. Implicit within this virtual happening were the practices and processes developed collaboratively in a shared actual space across a sustained time. In this way of working the spatial and temporal play enabled by the virtual space offered us another dimension in which our collective understandings of place and space significances could emerge, and our interest in the RSVP principles of resourcing and reflection were further facilitated. In developing the *Longest Day Remote Score* email exchanges over a number of days fed into the short score which read 'on the longest NIGHT of the year, i am treading lightly, re-tracing steps walked before....' and shared email reflections on the enacting of the score became a writing entry on the website serving as a further reflective tool to understand the collaborative process we were (and are continuing) to develop.

Virtual Dancing

Perhaps the youngest of our explorations, the virtual dances of *enter & inhabit* have further developed our entwining of the live and the virtual, the embodied and the digital and the hand written and processed. This stream of our work began as part of our Kenilworth Common project. Working collaboratively over a long weekend we combined morning practice sessions – a continuation of our scored improvisation we had been developing on site – with image creation and creative writing as a durational event.

For this project, *Virtual Dance; a pageant for the everyday, dancing with dirt, dogs & wheels* (2012), emails which included some image and text generated on site were sent as invitations to others to join the dance, who participated either by moving in their own environments with the posted scores, and/or by participation through the writings and image galleries generated in

companionship to the live work. The email invite generated in-the-moment responses form virtual audiences further resourcing the movement, digital image and writings. Email responses for example fed back to us the virtual participants imaginative response to our writings and images posted on the web 'I imagine all the passings through and inhabitings of that place over the millennia, I wonder what layers and layers of inhabiting happen there now and have in the past....like a tapestry or a matrix' (virtual dance participant feedback 2012). Alongside the invited audiences this project was also a dance with, and for, accidental audiences, and thus a virtual performance in a second way through its transgression of performance as product for commercial consumption, and by its simultaneous reveling in the companion art enabled by the unannounced live dancing.

We have also explored how the posting of virtual dance scores, digital images and blog comments might offer a virtual plenary for a symposium or conference space. In this process our established practices of movement improvisation, score generation, writing and image creation offer a methodology for embodied integration. By reflecting back the literal and metaphorical spaces of the symposium or conference 'site', collectively inhabited by delegates, we seek to make conscious the days' shared discourses planned and otherwise. Returning subsequent days to the symposium or conference venue, we move with and in response to our shared conversations, journal writings, and digital images as a way to invite an embodied integration of the symposium themes. This operates much like taking a walk after hours engaged in writing or thinking which may allow connections and ideas to flow, settle or crystalize. As thoughts and provocations arise these are posted on the web space, inviting participant responses virtually, which subsequently fold back into our own reflections and assimilations of arising themes and issues, facilitating the RSVP Cycle further amongst a community of practitioners, which may or may not reside in the same spatial or temporal material realm.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the potential of some collaborative practices, specifically those informed by Halprin's RSVP Cycle, to position the embodied and digital as both the work and the conversational conduits of its coming into being. Exploring the example of *enter & inhabit*, a double interplay or exchange between dirt and wires can also be seen to bring with it an ontological investigation through practice, a questioning of where the work exists and resides.

In taking this approach our work converses with Schneider's interrogation of Phelan's oft referred to statement: 'Performance becomes itself through disappearance' (1993). Schneider (2002) critiques Phelan's position for its marriage to the culture of the archive which she suggests, includes an unspoken privileging of the document over body-to-body transmission, bone over flesh. Asking the question, is not the performance as disappearance argument guilty of failing to ask how performance remains but in a *different* way from those familiar to the culture of the archive? Schneider suggests performance is better understood as a 'ritual of reverberations' upholding the possibility for the work and memory to reside in the live or flesh of performance, and doing, not just within object orientated documents.

As discussion has indicated *enter & inhabit's* work positions site responsive work as emergent through time and collaborative dialogue. This serious play also evokes a championing of collaborative creation over singular authorship, not just between the artists and art forms involved, but also the sites and variant audiences that constitute the event. Following Schneider, this resistance to performance-as -object to-be-read, advocates that the live or virtual no longer operate as 'document' to the other. Instead this binary relationship is replaced with a model whereby each becomes a creative act in companionship, neither one in service to the other, the particularity of each celebrated in a flattened hierarchy of difference.

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