

Entangled Affects:  
Site-responsive Experiments Using Actor Training Methods

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## Abstract

### Entangled Affects: Site-responsive Experiments Using Actor Training Methods

This thesis is an ethnography and critical analysis of a practice as research project that I conducted in the Fall of 2017 to investigate three interstitial sites nested around the Concordia University campus in downtown Montreal. I began with the premise that the body, sensitive and responsive to a site, could engage with it through movement and in so doing, render important aspects of the site palpable. I asked: if the body is available to being moved by the site's affect, what may be understood about the site through that engagement? In order to explore this notion, I conducted a series of experiments which facilitated participants' site-responsive movements, as generated through exercises drawn from theatre acting training and from a class in somatic approaches to movement.

This interdisciplinary research is grounded in my theatre practice and informed by theory based in the empirical study of performance methods. By applying the training methods towards engagement with the site, I extended them towards a framing as spatial practices, thus creating a platform for critiquing the site. Through this study, I seek to illuminate connections between the site's social, historical, and economic contexts, its materiality, and the affects that thread into the participants' experiences. I aim to underline the importance of affect in interstitial spaces, to demonstrate the potential of embodied performance practices to engage with that affect, and to contribute a methodology for generating and analysing qualitative, embodied, site-responsive data.

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## 2 Introduction

This thesis is an ethnography of a practice as research (PaR) project I conducted between October 1 and December 7, 2017. In it, I explored the potential of utilizing embodied performance methods to engage with and investigate three interstitial sites nested around the Concordia University campus in downtown Montreal. The project was comprised of a series of twelve experiments wherein I facilitated workshops designed to cultivate participants' somatic responsiveness to space. The attendant responsiveness was then applied to and brought into conversation with the three sites. This study is focused on a critical analysis of findings that emerged through that process.

To begin, I define the sites as interstitial due to their architectural forms either between buildings or the primary parts of buildings. This formal aspect is the first and clearest signal of their interstitial nature. Looking more closely, I will observe that the sites are also between spaces with designated uses: they are not destinations. In two cases, they are also between stages in their development as real estate properties. In the pages that follow, I will address the actual sites of the experiments in greater detail and build on my definition, exploring some of the social and political implications that emerge due to their interstitiality.

I use the term embodied performance methods to describe the set of theatre actor training exercises that I utilized in this study, namely: corporeal mime as developed by Étienne Decroux, and Jerzy Grotowski-influenced impulse work. I complemented these with somatics exercises influenced by the work of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen. While my experience in those latter exercises was gained in the context of a performance training program at Concordia University, they were not designed as a preparation for performance. I will discuss this distinction in the pages that follow. Descriptions of a sample of these exercises will appear in Chapter 2. By grouping these practices together and terming them as embodied, I am alerting the reader to an expanded understanding of what, in acting curricula, falls under the deceptively simple heading of movement training. These practices do indeed shape the performer's body and prepare it to be a conduit for performance material. More importantly for this study, these approaches to movement training also have the potential to integrate and fuel the performer's



perception, cognition, and action *through* movement. For these reasons, I see them as a fertile source for generating data about the experience of and with the sites.

This study marks the intersection and entwining of my two passions. First, I have a lifelong interest in theatre, particularly physical theatre, image theatre, and embodied performance practices. I come to this research firstly from a theatre perspective, as an artist. My lineage as a researcher is through my own theatre practice, as a student, a performer, a writer, and a director. I have trained in various embodied performance practices including those I explore in this study. This experience has deeply influenced my body-first, practice-first approach to this study.

Second, I have always been a *flâneuse*, a walking explorer of the city. I borrow this term from Benjamin, who in turn followed Beaudelaire in his rendering of the *flâneur* as avatar for curiosity and “felt knowledge” (416, 417). I find walking to be a meditative practice of participatory observation, an ambulating immersion in everyday life. Walking is experienced at street level and at a pace that affords the possibility of encounters with landscapes, people, things, and forces that move and affect the walker. Over time, one can perceive a multitude of changes happen as the city transforms.

In declaring myself a *flâneuse*, I acknowledge my privilege as a middleclass white settler<sup>1</sup> to be free in this practice: as I wander the streets I rarely feel fear, threat, or suspicion of my intentions. I align myself with the feminization of the term *flâneur* and in so doing inform the reader not of an overtly feminist framing to this study, but my tacitly feminist perspective. I do this with the understanding that within the context of the word’s origins, this may seem paradoxical: *flânerie* was long the domain of men only. Thus, I participate in the appropriation of the term. Lastly, I recognize that the *flâneuse* has been critiqued as being overly detached from her environment. Here I emphasize that while I am indeed an observer, through my walking practice I also aim to implicate myself in my surroundings, and I invite my surroundings to affect me.

I raise these points to situate myself: I am not a sociologist nor a geographer and yet my curiosity has led me to read and draw from these fields. I am not a dancer but rather a mover. Nor am I a dance scholar, but it is clear that by working primarily with movement as a medium through which to engage in this conversation between the

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<sup>1</sup> I follow Indigenous scholar Chelsea Vowel’s definition of settlers as “the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European descended sociopolitical majority” (16).

body and space, the field of dance has a tremendous amount of literature and practice to offer. I will draw from a small but significant sample of works written by key figures in the field.

My research began with a curiosity about what constitutes the unique and ineffable qualities of urban sites, the moods and atmospheres generated by *the-things-already-there*, and about the agency of those things. For me, these come together as the site's affect. Gender and cultural studies scholar Melissa Gregg and communications and theatre scholar Gregory J. Seigworth locate affect "in those intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* the very passages and relations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (1). If, for a moment, we can imagine the space as a "non-human" body, these intensities and resonances gather force. Then, "in its ever-gathering accretion of force-relations (or, conversely, in the peeling or wearing away of such sedimentations) lie the real powers of affect, affect as potential: a body's *capacity* to affect and to be affected" (italics the authors', 3).

It is in these passages and relations that I am interested: between the participant's body, which I approach through practice first – moving, perceiving – and the spatial body affecting one another in kind. I begin with the premise that the body, sensitive and responsive to a site, can engage with it through movement and in so doing, render important aspects of the site palpable. I ask: if the body is available to being moved by the site's affect, what may be understood about the site through that engagement?

In order to explore this question, I devised experiments wherein I adapted training exercises that are designed to expand the participants' sensitivity towards and capacity to be moved by affect, as well as to generate it. Conventionally, the exercises are directed towards the material of performance – the text, the movement score, the audience – however, I have turned them away from these objects and extended them towards the interstitial sites. In doing this, I propose that, through embodied performance methods, the body can be brought into conversation with the space. Together, I argue that these constitute a form of embodied knowing that engages with affect and accounts for the spatial, constituting a spatial practice. This approach values

an engagement with and a consideration of the site as an “interlocutor and collaborator” (Janssen 126).

This kind of intersubjectivity has been explored at length in the field of site-specific theatre and performance. In his introduction to *Site-Specific Performance*, performance scholar and practitioner Mike Pearson traces the evolution of site-specific practices, and of several conceptual threads in this field. His account begins with his first-hand experience producing site-specific performance in the 1970s, as the co-director of one of several theatre companies in the U.K. that were staging performances outside purpose-built spaces. Pearson created “special events... The accent was on the occasion and the audience” (2). He explains that artists creating site-specific work at the time quickly came to recognize the rich influence of the site, and of the potential in engaging with the site in a reciprocal relationship. Among other shifts, Pearson marks this move as being from “expositional to relational modes” of practice and engagement with the sites (8).

This relational approach to the site provides a point of departure for my investigation. The embodied responses of the experiments are attempts in developing the capacity to “hear” the language of the site in the body. In order to extend the experiments beyond the participants’ responsiveness to the site, and to meet the site as a subject, I frame them as a method of generating conversation *with* the site. I use these methods in order for the site “tell its own story” (Macauley 8) through the impact of its affect on the participants, rendered observable through their movement. I complement these embodied exercises, which “speak” primarily in the voice of the participants, with reports on my own experience of each site. Additionally, I take a macro perspective in which I provide social-historical and material contextualization of the sites, as I consider these factors as major contributors to the production of their affects.

I utilized Practice as Research (PaR), a methodological framework for generating meaning and knowing that places practice at the “heart” of the inquiry (Nelson 9). PaR is an approach that engages creative praxis, what performance scholar Robin Nelson describes as “theory imbricated in practice” and “material thinking” (5). By researching with this framework, I explore thinking that circulates and emerges through the embodied practice of the experiments. For me, a key advantage to this approach is that these embodied performance methods operate non-discursively, though the participants’ felt and sensed experiences of and with the site. I argue that these are

forms of embodied knowing which tap into the space in ways that are not available to intellectual and textual analysis alone. To only *think* the site risks occluding what the body has to offer, which is to sense, feel, and *experience* the site. Ethnographer Dwight Conquergood argues powerfully for a qualitative approach that recognizes the need for this kind embodied engagement in research. He states:

Subjugated knowledges have been erased because they are illegible; they exist, by and large, as active bodies of meaning, outside of books, eluding the forces of inscription that would make them legible, and thereby legitimate... What gets squeezed out by this epistemic violence is the whole realm of complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, co-experienced, covert—and all the more deeply meaningful because of its refusal to be spelled out (146).

This research gives credence to embodied knowing, and in so doing, aims to uncover affective meanings that may lie nascent in interstitial sites.

The sites that I explored in this study were located around the Concordia University downtown campus. For me, the capitalist influences on the sites were impossible to ignore. To give an important instance, real estate speculation figures prominently in their narratives; the first two sites were clearly being held by their owners to be developed, and the third site formed the anchor for the neighbourhood's transformation, which began in the late 1960s. In order to situate the experiments within a broader context of the political economy, I have found it useful to frame the experiments as a spatial practice. Sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre used the term to articulate how everyday activities contribute to the production of space, which in turn contributes to social reproduction and represents a lived aspect of the economy. I will discuss this notion in more detail shortly, but first I will introduce the embodied practices that were utilized in the experiments.

## 2.1 Embodied Performance Practices and Embodied Knowing

The embodied performance exercises that I used in this study were drawn from my experience as a student and practitioner. I selected them primarily based on the impact they had on me, and on my previous experience using them in workshops. They

were not explicitly designed to facilitate the performers' somatic engagement with space. However, both the somatic and the spatial are embedded in the exercises. First, the exercises unquestionably work through the body. They concur with Thomas Hanna's definition of somatic phenomena as the "human being as experienced by himself from inside" (343). As I understand it, this perspective highlights a human's consciousness of her body and its phenomena. Whether with direct intention or not, the exercises engage the body's anatomical and biological systems in activities that can lead to greater somatic attunement and perception. Moreover, of particular interest to this study is anthropologist Thomas Csordas' observation that somatic attention awakens intersubjectivity (*Somatic Modes of Attention* 138).

Second, the exercises are spatial, though this is not their primary or even secondary purpose. As was articulated above, actors are trained to perform in relation to several components of theatre. They relate to self and the text, which could be a literary text, or a movement, action, or other score. If there are other performers onstage, they relate to the ensemble, and they relate to the audience. All of these have impacts on spatial relation, but rarely ask the actor to attend to the space itself. Grotowski, for instance, wrote that the actor aims to compose "a score whose notes are tiny elements of contact, reactions to stimuli from the outside world: what we call 'give and take'" (102). This mention of the outside world offers the promising suggestion that the space might have a role to play in this score. However, the training Grotowski describes in the pages that follow are meant as "a process of research leading to the annihilation of one's body's resistances" (114) and do not address the site, place, or space wherein such annihilation occurs.

### 2.1.1 Decroux, Barba, and Grotowski: disassembling and the pre-expressive

Novice students to theatre performance training are often confronted with the limits of their habitual physicality and behavior. They bring into the studio what they know, which is shaped by their previous psychophysical experience and enculturation. This palette of expression can bind the student to their ingrained patterns rather than open them to the diverse demands of performance work. Barba describes this problem starkly, stating that, "A performer who draws upon what she already knows involuntarily immerses herself in a stagnant pool" (53).

In Barba's analysis of intercultural performer training techniques, he observes a mode that he terms as "pre-expressive" (*Dictionary* 216). In that mode, the performer develops the physiological foundations of practice prior to the addition of meaning. In the field of Theatre Anthropology, which Barba helped to originate, the pre-expressive "is at the root of various performance techniques" (*Dictionary* 218). I find this approach to thinking about practice useful for the experiments. Because it is not intended to be representational, a pre-expressive mode creates the potential for performers to work with non-conditioned embodied forms. Moreover, the pre-expressive suspends any move towards fixing meaning. Barba describes the pre-expressive as a seeking of "the energy of actions" and explains that it is "an operative level: not a level that can be separated from expression, but a pragmatic category, a praxis, the aim of which, during the process, is to strengthen the performer's scenic *bios*" (Italics the author's, *Dictionary* 218). Barba credits corporeal mime practitioner and theorist Étienne Decroux with a "knowledge of the actor's pre-expressive level, and how to articulate the transformation of energy unequalled in Western theatre history" (*The Hidden Master* 40).

For Decroux, the pre-expressive mode comes into play through a practice of "disassembling" or, as theatre scholar Marco DeMarinis puts it, "unforming" human movement (12). The intention here is to free the body from the constraints of habitual movement – and its representation of a limited presence – as well as to create a practice where the actor can be re-formed. With the re-formation, Decroux proffers that the performer becomes capable of movement that exceeds the daily and so becomes artful (DeMarinis 12). To disassemble, Decroux breaks movements down into their smallest constituent parts and then practices those parts before reconstituting them into sequences of movement. Leabhart and Chamberlain explain that Decroux "reimagined the human body in a musically analytical way, breaking it down into a keyboard that could, he hoped, play any melody the actor imagined" (5).

Like Decroux, Grotowski was interested in working with the forms created by the performers' bodies. The two drew on training methods from several common sources, including Charles Dullin's imaginative exercises wherein actors would explore the expressiveness of animals, and practitioner-theorist François Delsarte's for creating "vectors of opposing movements" and "contrasting images" in the performers' bodies (Grotowski 16 and 107). However, from there their methods differed. On one hand, Decroux worked within his meticulously indexed system of embodied forms, including

the scales, planes, undulations, and sets of micro-positions which were exactly re-assembled in service of his archetypal mime sequences. On the other hand, Grotowski worked with his own extension of “classical European” gymnastic exercises which he termed “plastiques” (107). During their daily practice, he insisted that the actors adapt the exercises to their own associations, going so far as to rename the techniques to correspond to personal imagery (102). Moreover, while Decroux developed forms that would be practiced towards a precise external semiotic result, Grotowski’s forms were inextricable from the actions and images that were ascribed by the performer herself as they were produced, and so were endlessly mutable, unfixed. For the experiments, I employed both approaches, beginning each session with Decroux’s dissembling, which I find to be technical and impersonal, but also a straightforward entry-point to the practice. As the participants warmed up, I worked with the more loosely improvised and personal approach of Grotowski.

### 2.1.2 Somatic Improvisation

I have so far mentioned sources from theatre and indeed, this is my main field of training. However, a directed study in somatic approaches to movement with dancer and pedagogue Angélique Willkie provided me with important tools to guide the participants towards the development of their embodied engagement with the sites. For instance, movement generated in concert with the visualization of specific anatomical systems can loosen the grip of habitual physicality and provide a functioning, tangible, embodied metaphor for engaging with the space. Thus, in support of and in dialogue with the propositions raised by theatre practitioner-theorists Decroux, Grotowski, and Barba, I will draw on the lessons from Willkie, which were in part influenced by the work and observations of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, the originator of Body Mind Centering™<sup>2</sup> (B.M.C.), and her approach to somatics. Here, I would like to circumscribe the tiny part of the vast field of somatics with which I engage.

As with the roots of the embodied theatre practices I have described, the beginnings of somatics can be found at the turn of the twentieth century. In her book *Choreographing Empathy*, choreographer and scholar Susan Leigh Foster traces the evolution of the term kinesthesia, which was initially defined as the awareness through

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<sup>2</sup> In this writing, I am using Canadian English spellings. As “Body-Mind Centering” is a registered trademark, I include it here with the American English spelling.

and of the body moving in space (7). Foster connects early understandings of kinesthesia and the arrival of somatics. She notes that “pioneers of dance pedagogy” H'Doubler, Martha Hill, and others found that “kinesthesia provided verification of the natural organization of physicality. It enabled students to delve beneath the habits acquired in socialization, many of which inhibited motion and produced deformities of posture and erratic or incomplete motion” (112). This desire to reconnect with natural or pre-conditioned movement in therapeutic, pedagogic, and dance modalities was manifesting in practices in Europe (Laban, Pilates, Delcroze, and Wigman), Palestine and later Israel (Feldenkrais), and the United States (Duncan, and Alexander, who arrived via Australia and England). All of these techniques have since been formalized, with systems of teacher-training and certification. Perhaps because of the decades-long span in development, a broad geographic reach, and the diversity of its applications, somatics existed in practice long before the field began to coalesce. During the 1970s and 1980s, philosopher and movement therapist Thomas Hanna developed a definition of the term. He prosaically begins with a definition of the soma as “...the body as perceived from within by first-person perception” and contrasts this with the third person, objectified perception of the body from outside the body (341). He states that these perceptions are equal, and equally factual, and are “two separate... irreducible modes” (343). Hanna’s writings, as well as the journal that he published titled, simply, *Somatics* were instrumental in bringing this wide range of practices together under the somatic umbrella (Eddy 5).

I have drawn on the above-mentioned sources from the field of somatics, as well as Bainbridge Cohen’s monograph *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*. My embodied understanding of somatics arose in the context of the studio class with Willkie. Here I would like to underline that, in the context of the experiments, I am not “doing somatics” but rather, borrowing exercises from my experience with Willkie in order to work from a more somatically-informed perspective. To be clear: throughout my analysis, when I use the word somatic, I am describing a form of attention, engagement, and response from the participants. I am not referring to a specific school of practice. When I use the word somatics, I am referring to the field, and the literature of that field from which I have drawn.

A key aspect shared by the embodied methods used in this study is that, when used in performance training, they aim to bring the performer towards movement that



originates from the body's inherent intelligence. Barba describes this as a kind of life force which he terms *scenic bios*, and Grotowski aims towards non-conditioned embodiments through a stripping away of socially conditioned movement. These strategies speak to the body's natural organization, as well as its sensitivity and responsiveness.

Working somatically does this even more directly, without artistic material as the motivator for its practice. Somatics describes the body's self-organization, through interdependent systems that function without conscious effort in tandem with cognitive and animate processing, as a kind of "self-regulating... resource... that is often overridden by thoughts and lifestyle practices" (Eddy 8). From a somatics perspective, healthy movement *is* the body's inherent organization. I think of this aspect as paying heed to the body's evolutionary, developmental, and biological functioning. Somatic practices use movement to bring body and mind into a holistic existence and vice versa – they use the mind-body awareness and balance to generate and facilitate movement, not for its own sake, but as a method that foments overall wellbeing. This is important, as extrapolating from this point suggests that the embodied exercises may speak more clearly – or one could say honestly, without the constrictions of socialized presence – with the space.

The movement exercises operate through this perspective. The participants are first invited to observe and attend to their somatic phenomena – in other words, what is happening for them somatically – and then to open their attention to the space. The theatre exercises provide strategies for engaging with the soma. An important example of this is through the technical practice of corporeal forms, or prescribed shapes and movements meant to be embodied by the performer in training.<sup>3</sup> In the warm-ups for the experiments, I use these corporeal techniques to facilitate bringing the performers into play with the space. Once in play, the last step for the performer is to attend to their impulses, which will drive the play.

From my own experience in the studio, I understand impulses to be internal, unconscious drives that are constrained in normative social behaviour. As small children, we act almost entirely on impulse. Running, spinning, rolling; dancing, taking

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<sup>3</sup> In Western theatre training, major sources for these include early-20<sup>th</sup> century practitioner-theorists Charles Dullin, Jacques Copeau, and François Delsarte who developed systems and founded schools for the training performers. Delsarte's work has also been drawn on by dance practitioners.

strange corporeal shapes and making abstract gestures can all originate from an unplaceable desire simply to *do*. Through socialization, we learn to sit still, to not make faces, to “behave.” Performers work with impulses in order to undo this conditioning, as put by Grotowski, “eliminating those elements of ‘natural’ behavior which obscure pure impulse” (18). By becoming open to their impulses, the performer will have access to an internal source that may drive or shape action. Grotowski states:

Before a small physical action there is an impulse. Therein lies the secret of something very difficult to grasp, because the impulse is a reaction that begins inside the body and which is visible only when it has become a small action (*A Kind of Volcano*, 87).

The idea here is to foreground a body-first engagement with the space: soma, informed by embodied performance methods, becomes driven by impulse and the somatic response, and together these become sensed, expressed, and observed in movement. This is in contrast to other forms of engagement with space: for instance, through intellectual decision-making that drives movement through a space, or anxious, self-conscious engagement that turns the body inward.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty famously argues that perception is embodied. In this respect, working from somatic impulse can be understood as a *practice* of perception. This supposition is supported by the research of theatre artist and scholar Phillip Zarrilli, and his phenomenological approach to acting. He draws on the work of cognitive scientists Francisco Varela et al., who study “cognition not as recovery or projection but as embodied action” (172). Following Varela, Zarrilli argues that theatre acting must no longer be thought of as a form of representation. Rather, he describes acting training as processual, and terms the development of the performer’s capacity for and skill in embodied perception using Varela’s notion *enaction*, wherein “perception exists in perceptually guided action and cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided” (173). In this feedback loop, the world of the perceiver is shaped by her capacity to perceive. I will elaborate on this concept in Chapter 2.

Movement is a central aspect of enaction. Discussion of movement speaks to the actions through which our being in the world is constituted, as well as how they are expressed. As Bainbridge Cohen has shown, movement is developmental: it is through movement that the body finds its place in the world. Our relation to space, objects and

others, how we move towards or away from these forms, in our bodies, generates the foundations of ourselves. Additionally, psychologist and philosopher J.J. Gibson observes that kinesthesia – which he defines as the awareness of movement (33) – is key to the process of perception and the integration of perceptions. Together, these assertions suggest that improvised movement originating from somatic impulse offers a rich perceptual field for the mover, who may expand her perceptual palette and in so doing, more fully engage with her environment.

## 2.2 The Sites and Social Sciences Scholarship on Space

The three sites selected for the experiments are nested within the footprint of Concordia University in downtown Montreal. (Figure 1.1) That institution is enmeshed with the surrounding urban area, through the built spaces where teaching and learning happen, which are comprised of standalone buildings and leased sections of commercial properties; through the services and infrastructure of the university, including an underground tunnel that connects the metro station to five university-owned buildings clustered in a two-block radius; and through the homes and businesses that serve the university population. In the 2017-2018 academic year, there were 37,053 undergraduate students, 9,040 graduate students, 2,349 faculty members, 2,160 teaching and research assistants, and 1,941 staff persons, for a total of over 50,000 people (*Fast Facts*). Even accounting for those who work and study at the university's sister campus Loyola, which is located approximately seven kilometers to the West, these numbers amount to the population of a small city.

The origin story behind the downtown campus traces back to night classes that were offered by the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) beginning in 1873. In 1926, the night classes were formalized into a college program, first two years in duration, then four. Named after the founder of the Y.M.C.A., Sir George Williams College obtained its university charter in 1948 and amended it in 1958, to become Sir George Williams University (*Sir George Williams History*). Throughout this period, the college experienced steady growth while maintaining its original mandate to serve communities who would not otherwise have had access to post-secondary education.

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<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, I have followed the citation style prescribed in the eighth edition of the *Modern Language Association Handbook*. In-text citations of web sites include the author when one is credited, or the title of the page, sometimes in abbreviated form. This information directs the reader to the full citation, including the web address and date of access, which appears in the bibliography.

Specifically, the classes were intended for people working in downtown Montreal. Art historian and architectural researcher Anja Borck explains: “Because it was located close to the business district and courses were taught after office hours, employees could complete their education and learn new skills to boost their careers. That was not possible in existing universities with only daytime classes” (63).

The university was established in earnest with the Henry Foss Hall building, an imposing post-modernist high rise clad in reinforced concrete, that was constructed between 1964 and 1966 (Borck 61). It was built on a city block that was formerly occupied by Victorian Greystones. Together, the Greystones constituted a neighbourhood around Burnside Boulevard, which was renamed de Maisonneuve Boulevard in 1966, the same year that both the Hall Building and the Montreal metro opened. The area was a “fashionable upper-class neighbourhood” (Borck 66) adjacent on the Western side to the so-called Golden Square Mile, which is located a bit further up the slope of Mount Royal. It was occupied by Canada’s wealthiest anglophone “financiers and captains of industry” (*Golden Square Mile*, Larsen). To the Eastern side of that district sits McGill University, founded with funds bequeathed in fur-trader James McGill’s will. It is worth mentioning that the existence of that long-established institution has helped to shape Concordia University’s identity as a scrappy, street-smart younger sibling to the well-heeled and distinguished elder one. The “other universities” where night classes did not exist would have included McGill.

In order to find sites in which to conduct the experiments, I scouted the vicinity around Concordia during my daily student life, canvassing each street and alleyway with my attention alert while I walked through the various campus buildings: to, from, and between seminars, meetings, lunches, rests, and visits to the library.

The process of selecting the interstitial sites for the experiments was practical and sensed. First, the sites needed to be within close walking distance to the studio where each session would begin.<sup>5</sup> After guiding the participants through a warm-up, I wanted to be able to keep their embodied attention keen and open. A commute of more than a few minutes would risk diffusing what we had built up. This criterion contained the experiments within the perimeter of the downtown campus.

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<sup>5</sup> The training studios of Concordia University’s Departments of Contemporary Dance and Theatre are located on the seventh floor of the John Molson School of Business, one block to the West of the Hall building.

The second practical criterion was whether we would have permission to conduct experiments. I was determined to do so guerilla-style if necessary but aimed for a minimum of interruption from security guards and law enforcement. This meant that while I was scouting, I considered whether I might be able to gain permission to use the spaces. In case it was not granted, I looked for sites that seemed to be outside of or between the surveillance of cameras and security personnel stationed throughout the campus buildings. While the movements generated in the experiments are innocuous, they tend to confuse enforcers which in turn causes them to bring the activity to a stop. Indeed, regardless of my attempts to sidestep this issue, the presence of security guards is a motif that threaded through the experiments.

The sites emerged for me, one at a time, as they were needed. If I had not been searching for the sites, it is unlikely I would have noticed them with much interest but while engaged in the project of being open to affect, their pull was strong. In fact, all three sites demanded my attention in moments when I was not actively scouting, stopping me in my tracks and drawing me in. Each of the sites had a distinct atmosphere that set it apart from the area that surrounded it. Unlike the polished glass lobbies of the newer university buildings or the freshly renovated library, the sites of the experiments were coated in dust and textured with signs of decay. The sites had an oddness that appealed to me, in their material aspects and a disjunction of atmospheres, between the dominant campus moods of busy-ness, concentrated study, and boisterous youth and the sites' more mysterious, dangerous, and playful affects.

The kind of sites that presented themselves to me were interstitial spaces. From an architectural perspective, they were between buildings or the primary parts of buildings. From a social and philosophical perspective, the sites were between caretaking. This was evidenced in signs of neglect: they were dirty and unkempt. The lack of care indicated that whoever might remunerate or supervise the caretakers was not paying attention to the sites. This lack of attention contributes to the site's interstitial nature: it reveals an opening into which unsanctioned or non-normative activities can take place. In this way, they become sites of opportunity. As posited by sociologist Pascal Nicolas-Le Strat, interstices "embody... what is still 'available' in the city. Their provisional and uncertain status allows for a hint, a glimpse of other ways of creating a city that are open and collaborative, responsive and cooperative" (115).

The sites I selected were the following: (1) an abandoned lot tucked between a three-story Victorian Greystone and a parking lot, with a church behind it and, facing it across the street, a university-owned glass high-rise built in 2005. Until 2015, the lot had also been occupied by another Victorian Greystone, a twin to the one left standing, but that building had been left derelict for several years and was then torn down (*Quatre immeubles*, Champagne). (2) The Faubourg St. Catherine. This is a storied building, constructed by an ambitious developer on a site left derelict. It was envisioned as a high-end indoor market and constructed between 1986 and 1989 (*Urban Marketplace*, Wallace). We worked in an underground corridor that was part of the building formerly occupied by a cineplex. It is now leased to the university as classrooms. For the most part, the decor has not changed in 30 years. (3) A stairwell in the Hall Building. The stairwell is nondescript in form, its concrete and cinderblock construction unadorned other than with beige paint and the occasional exit sign. It is plainly lit with fluorescent tubes. In affect however, the space is eerie, mysterious, and a disconcerting contrast to the bustling classroom and lobby spaces that bookend it.

The interstitial spaces selected for this study came to exist due to intersecting, overlapping, and diverse concerns that include those of students, citizens, municipal governance, and capital; questions of economic scale, with the contested designations of local and global; the materiality of the built environment, humans, plants, and things, and so on. For this reason, I find the word “entanglement” to be a fitting descriptor. Indeed, it has taken prominence in recent literature to describe the indissoluble meeting of these and other various subjects, things, and forces. For instance, Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw cite Engels to provide an opening metaphor for their discussion of the complexities of urban political ecology. Engels states that “when we consider and reflect upon nature at large...at first we see a picture of an endless entanglement of relations and reactions, permutations and combinations, in which nothing remains what, where, and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being, and passes away” (45, cited in Heynen et al. 7). This view emphasizes the dynamic nature of the entanglement, which is not only complex, but always changing.

To tease apart and consider the spatial entanglements in this study, I have found it useful to begin with the concept of (social) space formulated by sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. In this monograph, Lefebvre confronts what he considers to be a lacuna in the work of Karl Marx: space is not

definitively addressed. Grappling with this problem, Lefebvre conceives of (social) space as being constituted by three interlocking categories of space, so that it could be understood not as an air-like absence, but as something that is *produced*. The three categories are: spatial practice, which is lived, and manifest in the social and biological, as well as in everyday acts such as shopping and trading, travelling, and labouring and can be observed in everyday space, for instance schools; representations of space, for instance maps and plans, which are conceptualized by those with the power to do so, and organize the relations of production; and representational spaces, which express complex symbolisms, and “which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (Lefebvre 39). In his example of a medieval village, Lefebvre lists as representational spaces “the village church, graveyard, hall and fields, or the square and the belfry” (45).

Through his triad, Lefebvre provides a framework for considering the political and economic aspects of the production of space. He also addresses the role we play in producing space in everyday life, at a street-level human scale. Put simply: he argues that we produce (social) space through our very existence, which in turn is a form of engagement with the political economy. In Chapter 3, I will argue for the importance of recognizing the political economy’s influence on material forms and artifacts, for instance the architectural structure, routes of circulation, and decor encountered on a daily basis. These materials contribute substantially to the affects of space.

I borrow the Lefebvrian frame of spatial practice in order to consider the experiments I undertook in the context of everyday life and to identify them, as Lefebvre identifies the spatial practices of commuting, shopping, et cetera, as producing space. This framing may seem at odds with the notion of conversing with the space as an interlocutor. However, I see Lefebvre’s formulation of “producing” more as an active, embodied engagement with the forces of social life and the economy rather than as the subject of the mover creating the object of the space. Additionally, I recognize that the practices of the experiments are not repeated in the same way as Lefebvre’s spatial practices, and that they are (mostly) untethered from this kind of activity. I also acknowledge that there is a substantial difference between the routine, quotidian embodiment in Lefebvre’s spatial practices, and the extra-daily embodiments in the experiments. However, the experiments, through embodied performance methods, both contribute to and disrupt the everyday life of the space, unquestionably producing (social) space. For instance, the Faubourg and Hall Building sites were both transitional

spaces which connected the street level entrances of the respective buildings to the rooms where the designated activities of teaching and learning took place. The experiments created diversions from the transitional routine, and variously caused passersby to pause, to detour, and to spectate. These were subtle, momentary transformations, but transformations nonetheless.

The transformative potential of the spatial practice of the experiments speaks to my interest in how architectural historian and cultural critic Jane Rendell builds on Lefebvre and forges links to the Frankfurt School's critical theory. She argues that spatial practice is not representational, but processual and moreover "messy" (*Site-writing* lecture). She also cites philosopher Michel De Certeau's assertion that spatial practice can also be "tactical" in that it may contest the site's dominant meanings. In light of these points Rendell introduces the term *critical spatial practice* which, she states,

allows us to describe work that transgresses the limits of art and architecture and engages with both the social and aesthetic, the public and the private. This term draws attention to not only the importance of the critical, but also the spatial, indicating the interest in exploring the specifically spatial practices that operate between art and architecture (20).

Rendell approaches spatial practice from an architecture and design perspective, but what interests me here is her argument that "art, as a form of critical spatial practice, holds a special potential for transforming places into spaces of critique" (13). To be clear: I do not consider the experiments to be artworks. As well, they do not themselves critique the (social) space. However, I will argue that they do have the potential to generate spaces of critique. In this way, I see them as laying foundations that could be built upon in order to create artworks that are also critical spatial practices.

### 2.3 Methodology

This research operates from a practice-first perspective: the practice of the experiments is the locus for my investigation. For my approach, I have drawn on Nelson's *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* which



clearly articulates how practice-researchers “not merely ‘think’ their way through a problem, but rather they ‘practice’ to a resolution” (10).

PaR is a relatively recent methodology, which emerged during the 1980s and 1990s, and has become more formalized during the last twenty years. Nelson traces the possible origins of PaR to Finland and observes this phenomenon from his position as a scholar in the U.K. (25). He partly attributes the development of PaR to an increased presence of artist-researchers entering into graduate studies, mobilizing their creative practices as methods. However, PaR has precursors that pre-date this late-20<sup>th</sup> century trend. Indeed, the many researchers mentioned in the previous section on embodied knowing conducted their investigations through practice beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those artist-researchers studied empirically in studio laboratories. Their objectives were practical, in service of performance capacities (Decroux, Grotowski), or therapeutic aims (Bainbridge Cohen), rather than academic study towards a finite “knowledge”. During the 1980s, in the field of education, Elliot Eisner “encouraged social scientists to accept artistic ways of knowing” (Finley 73). In the 1990s, in the field of anthropology, Thomas Csordas argued for the “body to be understood as the existential ground for culture” (135). Together, these approaches mark the continued development of and arguments for alternatives and complements to positivistic science. Importantly for this study, they value knowing as a dynamic, lived proposition.

PaR represents one of several possible art-as-research approaches. Others include “art-based research”, which builds on applications of artistic expression for qualitative study and has been advanced by, among others, arts therapy scholar Shaun McNiff. Another is “performative inquiry”. I researched this category in a directed study with scholar and applied theatre practitioner Warren Linds, who describes it thusly: “performance is the method, content and representation of inquiry and works between complexity, interpretive play, pedagogy, and performance” (*Performative Inquiry* 1).

My focus in this study is on the data generated through the practice. The art origins of the practice are important for how they facilitate affective attunement, but their artfulness is of secondary interest to me. While the methods I use are gathered from the field of performance, for the time-being I wish to shelve the myriad concerns – for instance of self, of identity, of gender – that performance raises. For these reasons, I have chosen Nelson’s practice as research approach.

Nelson's model emphasizes "the dialogical relation between elements yielding resonances by way of affirmation" (7). I understand this approach to be a form of triangulation, wherein the notions and propositions that arise through practice are brought into conversation in order to challenge, and potentially confirm, one another. The key elements in this study are the participants' bodies, the interstitial sites, and the affective meeting between these two in conversation. Following dancer, choreographer, and scholar Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, I consider the moving body as a mode and site for engaging with and understanding our environment. In *The Primacy of Movement*, Sheets-Johnstone posits the notion of "corporeal consciousness" (48) that engages the body's perceptive capacities kinetically – that is, through movement – and imaginatively. I see this engagement as a method for revealing aspects of the site that may not be readily sensed. It is also reciprocal: for it to happen, the participants must be attuned to the site, effectively opening their perception to it, bringing it into themselves. In turn, through their movement, they contribute to the transformation of the space.

At the beginning of this study, I did not yet consider the site as subject. It was over the course of the experiments that the sites asserted themselves. For this reason, as stated above, I take Lefebvre's notion of the production of space as my starting point. This situates the sites within social and economic contexts, and as entities that are not fixed, but constantly being produced. Through my analysis of the experiments, my understanding of the sites shifts. The material aspects of the space have important impacts on the participants, and the sites gain agency. This theme is a rising current in my thinking and over the course of this study, the results move me increasingly towards political theorist Jane Bennett's approach to thing theory in *Vibrant Matter*. Bennett differentiates between objects and things, describing the latter as "nonhuman materials" (2). She draws on Spinoza to explain that things exist with humans, not as objects to human subjectivity, but as part of a shared world. In her writing, Bennett highlights "a positive, productive power" of things (2). It is a power that asserts itself in several instances over the course of the experiments. In this way, I see the experiments contributing to a Lefebvrian production of space and further posit that what emerges is a co-production with the nonhuman materials of the site.

In this study, I have emphasized the heuristic aspects of PaR. As explained by psychologist, researcher, and originator of the heuristic approach, Clark Moustakas this "refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and

meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis" (9). This principle fits well with the experiments and how I have approached their analysis. I started with this broad research proposition in order to till the ground for more specific lines of inquiry: the body, engaged with space through performance practices, can reveal important aspects about city spaces. Then, I used the experiments to further define what I was looking at and how: the bodies with whom I worked were the participants, and the spaces I selected were the interstitial sites around campus. The practices were enactive methods for co-constituting the site. Working iteratively, through the research process I sketched out provisional definitions and frameworks while I dwelled in the unknowns of the practice, allowing the resonances between fields to emerge through the doing. In this way, I followed strategies utilized by cultural anthropologist and ethnographer Kathleen Stewart. In her study *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart points out that positivist approaches to knowing may "obscure the ways in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities" (4). Stewart explains that she does not try to "know" but rather to "inhabit and animate" her subjects in order to allow them to communicate their own locations, associations, and meanings. She states that her aim is to "slow the quick jump to representational thinking" (Stewart 4). I see value in this slowing, as it creates analytical space wherein the minutia of the interstitial sites' materiality and the participant's somatic engagements can coalesce. In this writing, I retrospectively contemplated what happened through the spatial practice of the experiments, what I sensed, and how it might (or might not) all fit together. What has arisen here is an ethnography, wherein I describe, explain, and unpack my process, and then conduct a scholarly analysis of some of its key themes.

The practice at the heart of this study consisted of a series of experimental workshops that I devised and facilitated between October 1 and December 4, 2017. These were designed to generate experiential data and in so doing, facilitate my "reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life" (Van Manen 32). I have found Csordas' broad take on the collection of data encouraging. He states that, "there is no special kind of data or special kind of method for eliciting such data, but a methodological attitude that demands attention to bodiliness..." (*Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology* 148). My attention to "bodiliness" in the experiments has been

through the preparatory exercises which awaken somatic responsiveness; through the participants' descriptions of their embodied experiences; through my observations and sensings of the affects expressed through their movements; and through my own somatic experience of the sites.

Participants were self-selected volunteers, responding to callouts shared through my own and the university's networks.<sup>6</sup> In all, there were 16 participants: 8 with theatre training, 3 with dance training, and 5 laypeople. They attended as drop-ins with no obligation to complete a session to its conclusion, nor to attend more than one.

The workshops consisted of two parts per session. The first part of each session was intended to prepare the participants for the experiments and lasted approximately one hour. We worked in the studio, where I guided participants through a progression of exercises drawn primarily from my own experience as a student. While the original exercises were not designed to approach the space as a subject, most proved to be highly adaptable to that purpose. (I will discuss the preparatory exercises and my facilitation of them in more detail in Chapter 2.) Through these I aimed to bring the participants' attention to their somatic responses to the studio space, and then to generate movement improvisations from these somatic responses. In this way, I saw somatic responses as a driver for impulses. The improvisations ranged from three to ten minutes in duration.<sup>7</sup> In the second hour, we relocated to one of the three sites which I had scouted in advance. At the site, the participants did two longer improvisations of approximately 15 minutes each.

My analyses of the case studies track three perspectives. First, is my own, as an involved researcher. Second is the participants', who experienced the site and reported on those experiences in the first person. The third perspective is that of the site itself. I have not gone so far as to anthropomorphize the space, or to give it a first-person perspective, though that was a tempting exercise in order to imagine it as a co-conspirator. However, I have endeavoured to account for the sites used in the experiments with a depth and curiosity equal to that of my own and the participants. In

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<sup>6</sup> For a chart itemizing the times, dates, locations, and the number of participants at each session, see Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> I determined the duration of the sessions, the exercises, and the improvisations based on my experience as a student, a facilitator, and a director. There were two considerations: first, to allot enough time for the participants to have an embodied acquaintance with each exercise and second, to ensure the time commitment required did not discourage participation.

this way, I demonstrate a balance between the three perspectives, moving away from privileging one over another.

Working with a heuristic approach, I am a subjective researcher: I am co-implicated in this entire process. Through my subjectivity, I am able to bring my own experience and living engagement to bear on the finely nuanced situations that emerge from practice (Eisner 10, 11). During the experimental process, I moved back and forth between two roles. I was an artist-facilitator: I fostered the participants' acquaintance with the exercises. As I did this, I observed what happened, and I too was embodied, my experience oscillating between the brain leading and the body leading the experiments. I was also a researcher, observing, documenting, and considering what arose. I was, as stated by Linds "co-implicated". In this position, he stresses the need to be able to "shift back and forth – facilitator as participant, participant as facilitator. The work is shaped by me and I am shaped by it in a circular process" (12).

The participants were the engines of this inquiry. It was through their embodied perceptions of the space, their movement, and their writing about the experience that the questions, observations, and quandaries of this study arose. When seeking participants, my priority was to find people with an enhanced capacity for somatic engagement, ideally through prior training. Therefore, I sought people who had some theatre training as, based on my own experiences in training and practice, those were the corporeal and imaginative methods with which I was working. I was also interested in having dancers in the studio, because this research operates through movement. I also surmised that dancers' relationship to embodied knowledge would be parallel to the actors', yet distinct. Finally, I was interested in participants who were laypeople with little or no training in embodied performance techniques. This way, there would be a range of skill, and I would be able to compare the various responses with an eye towards whether a response was necessarily due to training on one hand or on the other hand, whether it might be more about the space. Additionally, I see working with laypeople as an important reminder that we all encounter and produce space, regardless of our perceptive skills.

Participants were invited using social networks online, and the university's email lists, through callouts where I offered the sessions as research workshops. I was unable to find funding to pay participants, and so they were volunteers, who self-selected based on their interest in the practices, the research, or both. I did not exclude anyone

from participating. In the end, the participants were predominantly actors, either still in training or recent graduates from the Concordia University acting program. There were two dancers who participated, as well as several laypeople, i.e. those who did not self-identify as performers of any kind. Sixteen participants took part over the course of the three case studies. Eight of them attended one session only, seven participants attended between two or four sessions. Finally, I was extremely fortunate to have had the dedicated presence of one participant, Nic Turcotte, who attended all the sessions in the project, 13 in total.

The data that I collected came from several sources and was gathered through various different media. I chose this approach to ensure that I had ample material on which to draw and moreover, to report on the embodied, affective, experiential, and spatial aspects of the study, in order to bring these multiple perspectives into conversation. The data collected were: my writing about each of the spaces as I encountered them; video of the participants' movement improvisations that I recorded with my mobile phone; audio of discussions with the participants; free-writing by the participants; and archival research into the sites. The free-writing and verbal responses of participants proved to be the critical, central data to this study. These reported directly on their experiences, translating and communicating their affective journeys in discursive form. The participants' observations conveyed much that I did not see nor sense as an observer. Their writings bridged a divide between what the movements enacted for them, what the movements expressed to me, and how they related with the site.

Due to the vast number of variables and the uniqueness of each experience, I sought emblematic moments that demonstrated a meeting of the participant's embodied responses with the space's affect. While this research is not designed to create artworks, it is rooted in art practices. I found that aesthetic forms and relations helped to identify what might constitute an emblematic moment of entanglement. Knowles and Cole explain that aesthetic principles help to define how arts research "should look based on aesthetic principles and conventions of the genre" (63). As a theatre artist facilitating participants' embodied engagement with space, there were two important guidelines for me. The first was the participants' depth of connection with their embodied exploration. I recognize this as full-body movement, wherein no parts are left out. In my experience, this fullness speaks to a more profound internal experience of the

participants. Secondly was composition. For me, this term describes the participants' embodied relation to and with the space in configurations that "read", both visually and affectively. As shown in the figures that illustrate the text, composition is expressed through proximity, contrasts, frames, and groupings. I analyzed the video documentation watching for moments that affected me partly due to their composition, and from there I looked more closely.

To interrogate the provisional findings as they arose, I adapted a method of thematic inquiry to which I was introduced by education scholar Lynn Butler-Kisber. This involved filtering through the documentation, then seeking responses that were common across the experiments and in more than one performer. (I also noted some moments that were anomalous.) From this set of findings, I grouped the responses into clusters of themes; I was curious to see if there were thematic threads that wove through the experiments. Once I had these groupings, I described them in writing, which helped to refine my understanding of their relationship to the various aspects of the study. Working with themes and recurring experiences as described by the participants made it possible for me to gather observations that resonated through the various aspects of the research question.

The experiments engage the non-discursive means of embodied performance practices to get closer to slippery, ephemeral occurrences of spatial affect. To me, this makes the act of writing an important aspect of the research, as it "constitutes in language" (Pippen 75) the impressions of the living phenomena of the experiments. For these reasons, I have sometimes employed informal approaches to the writing of this text, specifically in the sections that describe my own discovery of each site.

To account for the spatial side of the conversation, descriptions of the participants' movements and citations from their first-person descriptions are placed alongside writing about the historical and architectural context of the sites. I intend for this juxtaposition to illuminate threads of the social, political, and economic complexities that intermingle and bring me to label these spatial moments as entanglements. By placing these two perspectives alongside one another in the writing – the experiential and the contextual – I also aim to demonstrate their inter-relation and co-constitution. In this way, I am practicing a form termed by Rendell as site-writing. This approach performs some of the aspects of the space through the composition of the

text, how it is organized, and how I guide the reader through its narrative (*Site-writing* lecture).

## 2.4 Conclusion

What follows is an inquiry of three case studies and the data they generate through experimental movement processes. In these, I am working from the starting point that perception is embodied and that participants improvising in this embodied *enactive* mode enter into conversations with spaces. Considering this data, I analyze the resonances and meanings of the experiments and spatial affects of the three sites.

I will report on the three case studies in turn, each taking place in a different site. I have termed these cases “entanglements”, a representation of their complex nature and a reminder that there are always more threads in the knot than can be tugged upon. The entanglements are addressed in chronological order, and my grappling with their meanings in this sequence follows the trajectory of how my understanding of the work developed. By focusing on one site per chapter, I provide a point from which to continue to develop the trajectory. From the perspective of that focused development, from time to time I refer to instances from the experiments in the other two sites that provide worthwhile explanation or comparison.

*Entanglement I* is where the experiments begin, in the participants’ embodied practice, moving in response to and with the site. Here, I will argue for the value of using embodied performance practices as methods of investigation. In order to do this, I elaborate a progression of exercises actually used in one of the warm-ups to develop the participants’ practice of perception. This will show how their complex engagement with the space occurs through the nurturing of their somatic attention, which sparks impulses, is expressed through movement, and enacts the space. This enhanced capacity will then be turned towards the site where the first set of experiments took place, the abandoned lot at 1421 Mackay. Through the experiments, we learn that we are not alone in using the interstitial space, and that others who exist there as humans and things occupy it for similar reasons: tacitly or explicitly forbidden from engaging with our activities elsewhere, this trash-littered, weedy, dangerous site provides a temporary hangout.

In *Entanglement II*, I switch perspectives, from foregrounding the practice to looking primarily at the interstitial space where the second set of the experiments took



place, a subterranean corridor in the former shopping mall, Faubourg St. Catherine. By addressing my material experience of the site and then briefly analyzing the space's meaning in terms of its social aspects and relationship to the wider political economy, I will demonstrate how the space's material aspects are indicators of what I call the *attention of capital*. Just as the performers train their embodied attention through the movement improvisations, capital will at times focus its attention on particular sites. At other times, capital will turn its attention elsewhere, leaving sites unattended. For now, I will call that inattention neglect, and the state the spaces are left in, fallow. I acknowledge that these are two substantially different terms. However, both will be useful until I have developed a clearer understanding of the site's affect and its origins.

*Entanglement III* takes place in a stairwell in the Hall Building, the founding structure of Concordia University's downtown campus. With my analysis of the last set of experiments, I aim to bring the entanglements of the participants' embodied engagement and the affects of the interstitial site into more fluid conversation, moving between them in equal measure and imagining them as a co-constituting whole. The structural constriction and oppressive affect of this site raises new questions. Through the experiments at the first two sites, there is an emergent understanding of how the practices awaken a sense of embodied agency in the participants, especially in their relationships to spaces and spatial affects. However, the Hall site confronts them, immovable and impervious to their conversational gestures. From the third entanglement, a dilemma emerges as to how the participants can manage their nascent agency in the face of this particularly intractable interlocutor.

### 3 Entanglement I: Embodied Practices in Enaction, 1421 Mackay

#### 3.1 October 8, 2017: Preparation

There were two participants present, both alumni of the university, Nic Turcotte, who graduated from the acting program, and Mathilde Loslier-Pellerin who graduated from contemporary dance. We met in a dance studio on the seventh floor of the John Molson School of Business building, a 15-storey glass clad tower. The Departments of Theatre and Contemporary Dance have been housed there since it opened in 2009. Their location there is an open secret: no signage at street level indicates their existence.

The studio space was familiar to all three of us. Following brief introductions and a description of the session's plan, we got to work. We began with the first part of the workshop session: preparation for the experiments. I allotted one hour for each preparatory warm-up, half the total time of each session, with a second hour spent in the experimental process on site. There are six steps to the warm-up process, each taking approximately ten minutes. These will be described later in this chapter.

The expansion of perceptual capacity is one of the aims of performance training, and I consider this expandability to be important to the experiments. If performance practices expand the participant's capacity for perception, it follows that she will perceive – if not simply more – then more deeply, with more detail, or in a way that is extra-daily. It is this view of performance training as a practice of perception, as enactive, that provides a foundation for the affective engagement in the experiments.

Theatre artist and theorist Philip Zarrilli draws on the pioneering work of Francisco Varela, Eleanor Rosch, and Evan Thompson who made important strides in the reframing of cognitive science. They departed from the metaphor of the mind as computer which was prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s – with the brain receiving sensory data, processing it, and commanding the body to act in response – to a phenomenological paradigm wherein perception is viewed as an experience and action that occurs through the body, in concert with the mind and environment. They term this approach “enaction”:

We propose the term enactive to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is

rather an enactment of a world and mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs (9).

Importantly for Zarrilli, performance training can be a holistic, synthesizing practice that simultaneously enacts – creating and performing perception as it happens – and expresses the performer’s experience of perception. He builds on anthropologist Tim Ingold’s finding that “...perceptual skills are the capability of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment” (5). In so doing, Zarrilli lays the foundation for several performance training techniques to be understood as practices of perception. He goes on to cite Alva Noë’s assertion that perception is not only a skill, but as such, one that may be developed. Noë observes that “...we gain perceptual content by active inquiry and exploration” (1).

This chapter focuses on the practice of perception, or *enaction*, in the experiments. In order to do this, I describe and elaborate on a single research session, beginning with the warm-up that prepares participants. Through this exploration, I aim to demonstrate how the practices used in the experiments activate and engage the enactive practice of perception. Then, I will move to the second half of the session and analyse several entangled moments in the space.

To begin, I invited the participants to lay on the floor with their eyes closed, a position that allowed them to release tension and relax. In performance practices, it is a truism that relaxation creates a state of openness that is an important starting point, as it offers greater possibility for range, expression of movement and flow of impulses. Conversely, holding tension in the body can block the flow of impulses, inhibit focus, and restrict the participant to habitual, patterned movement. Laying down on the mat is a transitional moment: participants come from the world outside of the studio, with its demands and stimuli, arriving to engage with these practices in which their availability and responsiveness to sensation is essential.

Their eyes still closed, I guided the participants through a brief meditation, drawing their attention to their breath, gently deepening each inhale and exhale, and releasing their weight into the floor. After a few minutes they appeared to have finally arrived in the space in earnest. It was an observable moment that in studio vernacular is described as “dropping in” to the body. I observed this phenomenon as a subtle shift in

the tonicity of the participants' bodies: they appeared to release tension, and their breath moved their whole bodies, not just the lungs. Their faces had a placid expression.

The participants' attention had already shifted significantly towards their somatic<sup>8</sup> experience. With their eyes closed, the ocular was displaced from being the primary mode of sensing. By attending to the breath and releasing tension, the participants began to follow the body's subtle movement and signals. The meditation also asked them to listen for sound, and to attend to their sense of touch, which was felt through air currents and temperature, as well as the feeling of clothing on skin. Each of these prompts increased participants' awareness of the palette of their sensual experience. Together, the prompts laid a trail of breadcrumbs that the participants could later follow should they get lost in the experiments: always return to the breath and sensation.

Attention is the first key element in this practice. Anthropologist Thomas Csordas describes Alfred Schutz as "the premier methodologist of phenomenological social science" (138). In the glossary for *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, Schutz defines attention as "the full alertness and the sharpness of apperception connected with *consciously turning toward* an object, combined with further considerations and anticipations of its characteristics and uses" (316, italics mine). Of particular note here is that this consciousness is active and involved.<sup>9</sup> For me, this definition of attention is helpful for understanding the body's perceptive potential: attention is an active, involved, conscious action that can be, and often was in the experiments, turned towards the body itself. To build on this notion, I would like to point out an observation by Varela, et al. who share Merleau-Ponty's insistence that "we see our bodies as both physical structures and as lived, experiential structures" which are not opposed, but continuously circulated between. They continue:

Merleau-Ponty recognized that we cannot understand this circulation without a detailed investigation of its fundamental axis, namely, the embodiment of knowledge, cognition, and experience... embodiment has this double sense: it encompasses both the body as lived, experiential structure and the body as context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms (xvi).

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<sup>8</sup> As stated in the introduction, somatic is defined as being of and through the body.

<sup>9</sup> This is a point to which I will return in *Entanglement III*: it is possible for the subject to focus their attention, constituting a step towards agency.

In the experiments, I suggest that the participants are engaging with their embodiment in this “double-sense”. They pay attention to the “lived, experiential structure”, and then, through movement, they reintegrate what they actively perceive into the body’s “context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms.”

Once the participants appeared to be relaxed and present in the studio space and had experienced this warm-up awakening their somatic attention<sup>10</sup>, the progression of exercises begins. I guided them through the following steps:

- (1) Cultivating somatic attention in familiar, “everyday” exercises;
- (2) Cultivating somatic attention in simple movements;
- (3) Bringing somatic attention to unseen-yet-sensed bodily processes and initiating the body’s movement from those processes;
- (4) Moving following the body’s impulses in response to the space;
- (5) Observing the change in their perception of the space, and in the change in the space itself created by their movement and experience thereof; and finally,
- (6) Engaging with the dynamic of the changing space, to be changed by the space.

For steps (1) and (2), I was interested in easing the participants into the experience of somatic attention. After the meditation, I invited them to stand, and guided them through relatively familiar movements that also served to warm up the body and prepare them to encounter the studio space. For instance, I instructed them to do a light jog in the space, which gets the blood flowing through the whole body while also acquainting the participants with the studio’s full length and breadth and their ever-changing positions within it. This was followed by inviting them to stretch their arms above their heads, which opens and relaxes tight muscles as well as brings the participants towards an embodied understanding of their vertical presence in the space, calling to their attention the floor and ceiling – the earth and the sky – between which, and in conversation with which the participant exists. Rotating each set of joints in turn – ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, wrists – served to “lubricate” them by encouraging the

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<sup>10</sup> This statement assumes that the performers arrive at the studio with somatic attention that is dormant. This is not necessarily true, over the course of the experiments some performers were already warmed up when they walked through the door. They had a bright and relaxed countenance and dove quickly into the work. However, it is the case for the majority of participants.

production of synovial fluid (*Exercise: An effective prescription*). This exercise also tests the participants' balance and works on their proprioceptors, the body's system of sensing itself in space. As facilitator, I did not explain the purpose of every exercise. Rather, I guided the participants through them leaving the connections to be made experientially. For instance, joint rotations may improve proprioception and the participant may feel more comfortable in their embodied relationship to the space as they move. In this way, I gave credence to the body's sensory capacities and self-organization, its inherent intelligence.

In step (3), the progression continued: to bring, as I have stated, "somatic attention to unseen-yet-sensed bodily processes and moving the body from those processes." I aimed to recreate two exercises borrowed from somatics classes with dancer, choreographer, scholar and pedagogue Angélique Willkie, whose practice is inspired by a lifetime in dance, as well as influences from her studies with Bainbridge Cohen. In the first exercise, we began by moving from what are imagined to be internal spaces in the body, between the bones. While those "spaces" are in fact occupied by fluid, cartilage, organs, and other parts and systems, imagining them as cavities creates a sense of openness and lightness in the movement. I asked the participants to explore moving from these spaces in a curious way. The exploration started with a request for them to move their hands from the spaces between those bones and to observe themselves doing so. As their curiosity increased, I asked them to play with moving from different spaces in their bodies, according to their own desires and to follow what piqued their curiosity. They deftly moved, and I observed them exploring. It was as if a wind whistled between their tibiae and fibulae, fanned out between their ribs, or eddied around their scapulae. Their facial expressions were bright, open, and slightly incredulous. I remembered the feeling when I first tried the same exercise: it was a kind of movement I had never done before, it was simply generated, and it felt amazing. I felt free.

Sensation and imagination work together to form the second key element of the experiments. Three of the five so-called primary senses were evoked in steps (1) and (2) of the session: participants were asked to open their peripheral vision to the space, to listen for sounds, and to become aware of their sense of touch not only through their hands, but also their skin as it contacted their clothing and the air. In those parts of the exercise, the senses were attuned to the world "outside" of the body.

Somatic attention attunes to internal processes of the body. To return to the process of breathing as an example, the breath moves the body and this can be observed visually: the breath causes the lungs to expand and contract. The expansion and contraction of the chest cavity is also felt. However, it likely requires closer attention to sense the movement of the diaphragm in response to the breath, or the circulation of oxygen through the cardiovascular system. Indeed, for some, such sensing will be only be possible through dedicated practice. As an entry point into detailed internal sensing, somatic and other movement practices often employ visualization. Through this technique, the participant brings her attention to what she imagines to be their sensation of a specific anatomical process. With some basic knowledge of what the process is and how it operates, she can imagine what is happening, visualize it, and in doing so, their attention appears to tap into it, generating a sensation specific to the process.

In her classes, Willkie referenced different aspects of the somatic imagery Bainbridge Cohen employs, which have been arrived at through decades of empirical, practical inquiry. As I interpret these exercises, I do not consider the visualizations to necessarily be a form of observation of the actual anatomical systems. For instance, if I understand the biological fact that my craniosacral fluid circulates through my body four times per day, if I imagine its flow and sense its slow, persistent pulse, it may or may not really be my craniosacral fluid that I feel. However, the attempt of imagining brings me closer to that possibility and redirects my attention *away from* other foci. Moreover, imagination is, as stated by Sheets-Johnstone, a “form of sense-making” (*Primacy of Movement* 429). It is a mode through which the participants in the experiments can sense, attend to, and play with that which they cannot see.

Attending to the imagined internal biological existence of the body also has the side effect of contributing to another move away from the ocular paradigm of sensation. The practices develop the participant’s alertness to and sensitivity of perception as a holistic experience. In this way, the relationship between modes of perception – including perception through the senses, proprioception (the body’s sense of itself in space), and interoception (the body’s internal sense of its own processes) – can reach a

more “horizontal”<sup>11</sup> relationship, versus a hierarchical one wherein the sense of sight sits at the top of the pyramid.

In step (4), after the participants had begun moving from their internal spaces, I invited them to move imagining those cavities opening through the porosity of the skin and entering into dialogue with the external space. This image changed the quality of their movement from a primarily self-focused exploration – these are my internal spaces, they are affected by the studio space – to one that was more situated in and involved with the space: my body is in and with the space, and the space is invited to permeate my body and move me. Suddenly, the participants were moving in response to the structure of the room, its physical and metaphorical borders, its volume, its meaning; they danced with its air currents and temperature, its sensual qualities and other aspects of which their bodies took notice. The imagined conversation moved them and, through movement, an actual conversation between internal and external space emerged.

In a discussion after one of the experiments, participant Eddy Jackson confirmed that doing the preparatory exercises stoked a “curiosity”, describing their embodied perception as being “activated”, making it easier to “go with what I felt like doing” (November 27, 2017). In retrospect, this report is unsurprising. Performance and cognition scholar Gabriele Sofia explains that perceiving in action implies an activation of all the individual’s abilities, both the imaginative and associative, as well as motor (174). It is as if their perception through movement is lighting up an array of embodied circuits.

Up until this point in the session, the participants were improvising movement based on their somatic perceptions and guided imagery drawn primarily from their anatomy. They followed their own curiosities and sensations from one movement to another, and so they were already working from impulse. However, it was only after a gradual embodied introduction of the concepts that I made the invitation to work from impulse explicit. I asked them to improvise movement with the body leading.

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<sup>11</sup> This arrangement echoes Mary Overlie’s use of the term horizontal to describe her system of practice, *the Viewpoints*, in which she takes a phenomenological approach to the following elements of performance: space, shape, time, emotion, movement, and story. Overlie posits that these elements are ever-present, yet in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western theatre story and emotion tended to dominate. Her practice aims to put all the elements on equal footing.



I consider impulse to be an important source of improvisation. As I understand it, impulse operates before, beneath, or outside of conscious and discursive thought.<sup>12</sup> By introducing this layer of awareness to the participants – bringing their attention not only to the body itself, but also to a meta-recognition that they had not been consciously directing their own movements – I asked them to open their attention so that they may go from curious observer of their movements to coaxing and fueling those movements through the noticing and nurturing of their sources. I instructed the participants to ask themselves, “What does your body’s shape, tempo, expression, and so on want to be?” I invited them to cultivate a sense of appetite, play, and pleasure in the work, which was intended to help them navigate its complexity.

Through working with impulses, not only does the participant become conscious of them, but they may unearth unconscious material or bring specific aspects of the participant’s consciousness into play. In this way, I see the actions and gestures that emerge through improvised movement as corollary to Merleau-Ponty’s description of thought emerging through speech: “There is a “*linguagely*” [*langagière*] meaning of language which effects the mediation between my as yet unspeaking intention and words in such a way that my spoken words surprise myself and teach me my thought” (*Signs* 88).

Impulse work can have powerful effects on the participants’ movement and thus, their embodied perception. Due to its repetitive, mainly unconscious nature, everyday movement takes specific forms in the body. What we do with our bodies shapes them, and this in turn impacts our perception. In contrast to everyday movement, moving the body freely from impulse often leads to the participant exploring unconventional ways of moving, and they may experience unconventional perceptions.

On one hand, impulse work can be startlingly practical. The participant observes what feels like it needs to move and how, and then may conduct her own experiments as she follows one impulse to another, playing with their variables and boundaries, or with how parts of the body move on their own and in relation to one another.

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Nigel Thrift cites studies by Wilhelm Wundt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, proven in the laboratory by scientist Benjamin Libet in the 1960s and theorized by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio in 1999, which show that action precedes decision. Thrift explains that Libet “was able to show decisively that action is set in motion before we decide to perform it” sometimes with a lapse of a second or more. (67)

On the other hand, impulse work can be mysterious and ineffable. This may be partly due to the myriad unconscious sensings, images, memories, and meanings embedded in and expressed through the moving body, as well as the body's fundamental importance in our very being with our environments.

One example of this is explored in *Body-Mind Centering*, Bainbridge Cohen's study of what she terms experiential anatomy. In this method of understanding and treating the body, she has compiled an index of patterns of movement through which the body is formed, beginning in the womb. Categories of movement that she has researched include: "spinal (head to tail movement) ...and homologous movement (symmetrical movement of two upper and / or two lower limbs simultaneously)" among several others (5). By analyzing these types of movement from a developmental perspective, Bainbridge Cohen posits that they generate the embodied forms through which humans exist. Moreover, she argues that aligning "within the developmental process can facilitate the evolution of our consciousness" (5).

Parallel to this model is the work of scholar Mark Johnson, who shows how our understanding of the world emerges through embodied metaphors that conceptually frame our experience. He explains that "sensorimotor experience is schematized," providing examples of what he terms as "image schema... containers, paths, contact, balance, centrality..." (85). Together, these two paradigms help to explain why somatic responses could be revelatory in spatial engagements. For Bainbridge Cohen, the moving body is the seat of what is existentially possible, extending into our environment. For Johnson, much of the body and self are understood via their relationship to space, and attendant conceptualizations. Of interest vis à vis working with impulses, Sofia explains that image schema "function below the threshold of awareness," with "no conscious access" (175). I suggest that nurturing and following impulses can lead the performer to play with image schema which, when described discursively, sound a lot like existential metaphors. To give a few examples drawn from participants' descriptions, Turcotte and Loslier-Pellerin described "marking territory," "becoming architecture," and "ricocheting energies transiting through my Self" (October 8, 2017). These instances illustrate how playing with image schema tap deeply into the participants' perceptions of the space.

In the experiments, I acknowledge that the movements generated by the participants do not necessarily arise solely from the embodied engagement with their

impulses. In my observation, their movements most often toggle between various sources, for instance: impulse, the conscious decision to experiment, and with actors especially, imagined characters and narratives. While these are not strictly somatic, I consider them as sources for movement that may still be considered “in conversation” with the space. In one instance from the experiments, the detritus littering the Mackay site provoked Turcotte to imagine the life stories attached to each piece of garbage (October 8, 2017). The narratives arose during the somatic exploration, leading to a more cerebral, and therefore less embodied approach. In the video, he stands, his eyes are focused on the ground. He barely moved, except to step from object to object. It is possible that narrative responses pulled his attention away from his somatic responses. Being experienced in impulse work, Turcotte recognized this and tugged his attention away from the stories, transforming them into “abstracted explorations of the energies of those lives” (October 8, 2017). This led to a transition back towards being affected by the site. Considering this response, I suggest that there is a continuum of the depth of embodiment, with the most extreme body-driven impulses on one side and those that are mind-driven on the other.

Returning to the warm-up in the studio, I guided the participants through a second exercise, which involved imagining the skeleton as the body’s architecture and exploring the relation between the body’s and the building’s architectures. The movement generated was more linear and appeared in a sequence of parallel and perpendicular relationships to the walls, ceiling, and floor, the imagined structure of the entire building and the cityscape beyond. The participants moved in angular ways, walking in straight lines, bending their limbs sharply, orienting themselves in the space at regular intervals. There was a contrast between the first exercise and the second: in the first, the movement generated was fluid light, and curvilinear, with the space of the body mingling with the space of the studio. In the second, the movement was more rigid, sometimes machine-like, and played with physical structures nested together and in interplay. Together the two exercises created a heightened awareness of possible modes of embodied conversing with the space.

As participants had become acquainted with moving from impulse and they had some tools for approaching the improvisations, the last two steps happened in quick succession. In step (5), I invited the participants to observe the perceived changes in the space created by their movements and to continue attending to and moving from their

impulses. This dovetailed into step (6), wherein I instructed them to allow themselves to be changed by the space. I did not have specific exercises for these steps rather, I instructed the participants to improvise movement from their impulses with this spatial awareness as a layer of their conscious engagement. The first improvisation was short, only three minutes in duration. This was brief but was usually enough time for participants to have an embodied sense of the activity. After the first improvisation, we discussed their internal experiences, and I offered any feedback that I thought would be helpful. Often, this was through asking them about moments when to me they seemed particularly connected to their somatic responses. The discussion also gave them an opportunity to hear from one another, and to demystify the experience which, in the end, was unique for each participant. Equipped with their gleanings from the first experience and the discussion, I asked them to do another, longer improvisation of ten minutes in duration. This final activity of the warm-up was analogous to the improvisations they would do at the site.

During the warm-up, the performers worked through a progression, beginning with focused attention on their internal experience, then balancing attention between the internal and external in co-existence, and finally with the internal and external in inter-relation and co-constituting. They were attuned to the space and awake to their own “capacity to sense subtle differences.” (Ash and Gallagher 72)

We were ready to leave the studio and head down to the street.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.2 The Experiment and the Site: The Lot is Not Empty

I’d walked past the abandoned lot on Mackay street a thousand times, and I can say that easily, without exaggeration. The lot is located on the street that hems in the West side of the university library building, and across the same street from the EV<sup>14</sup> building. (Figure 2.1) To me, the lot had been invisible. However, on that bright day in late September, scouting with my senses open, I finally saw it.

And it was mysterious to me.

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<sup>13</sup> Departing from the studio space, there is a recurring question that tugs at the research: how do I address the (social) space produced in the studio, and the studio’s spatial agency? In brief, my interest is in the non-studio spaces and so that is where I focused my inquiry. Investigating and comparing the different spaces of practice is beyond the scope of this research but nonetheless raises many questions. There is analysis-worthy overlap between these two kinds of spaces, not to mention the spaces through which we would walk to get from the studio to arrive at the non-studio space.

<sup>14</sup> In this abbreviation, the E stands for Engineering and the V for Visual Arts, markers of the university’s aspiration to bridge these faculties by placing them in adjacent buildings.

Why? It was layered with material and affective details that communicated both recent moments and long past decades of its story. From the sidewalk, my eyes were drawn left, along the exterior of a two-storey brick wall. It was covered in what looked like a protective coating, a thick, rust-red paint. I remembered that there was recently a building that stood on that lot. I could not recall when it was torn down. This memory nagged at me as I treaded through the perimeter, a few haphazardly placed concrete blocks. What was there?

Later, back at home, I hunted for its story. The lot came to exist in its current form in October 2015, when the building that stood there – a Victorian Greystone – was demolished after several years of neglect. (Figure 2.2) Around the same time, the City of Montreal expropriated the land and designated the space for a park (*Quatre immeubles, Champagne*).

Entering the space, it felt like it increased in size, the footprint was larger than I first thought. There was a strange feeling there. Something substantial had been removed, a building excised, with only gravel and paint left in its place. It was divided in two by a line that cut across the ground and ran up the wall. The side closer to the street had gravel on the ground, the side further back had hard-packed soil and persistent weeds. Looking at the twin building that had been left standing, the line appeared to mark the dismantling of two eras of construction: the original brick structure and a cinderblock extension.

On the ground, in the void left by the building, there were objects strewn everywhere. They told stories about moments in time. There was a newspaper in Arabic script laying open to an article with a photo of Donald Trump. There was a fragment of a compact disc by Canadian 80s rocker Gino Vannelli. There were discarded coffee cups, crumpled legal papers, and a smashed empty bottle of Jack Daniels. There was a charred piece of lumber and a hand-written film script. There are also a few small birds chirping from a scrawny bush along the sidewalk, and weeds everywhere. The weeds look tough and resilient, but I also see them as growing things, with living tissue that can be crushed by careless feet.

In spite of its apparent abandonment, I found evidence that the site was in fact much used. Dog feces littered the area closest to the sidewalk indicating pets being walked, deeper into the lot there were remnants of drug paraphernalia, and more broken glass. The site was hazardous. To prepare for the workshop I spent several

hours trying to clear the terrain, but it proved to be impossible to remove the smallest fragments which were lodged in the soil. Danger was a material of the improvisation, provided by the site.

When I arrived at the site with Loslier-Pellerin and Turcotte, we found a concrete block on which to place our things. I explained that I had attempted to remove the dangerous material from the ground and was mostly but not completely successful. That meant that if they had an impulse to move on the ground that they would need to negotiate with the impulse and invite its expression in some other way. There are techniques for doing this. One is to play with impulses on a scale of one to ten. For instance, an impulse to drop suddenly to the ground might be a ten out of ten, but the participant can choose to embody it with a smaller expression. As a two out of ten, the impulse may be expressed more as a sensation of gravity, an internal weight and pulling downward without dropping the whole body. Another strategy is to migrate the impulse to another part or system of the body. Using the same example, the impulse to drop to the ground, the participant could drop imagining the rush of a full-body downward motion occurring through their blood and see where that leads. These suggestions were meant to support the participants in their explorations, so they would have tools for approaching what could be seen as barriers to the work. The danger was there and available to them as material while they remained safe.

I asked the two participants to find a spot to start, to open their senses toward the space, and attend to their somatic responses to it. I asked them to be curious about the following questions: what is your somatic response to this space? How does the body move according to that response? How does your body move *with* this space? How does the space move you? I told them they would have approximately 10 minutes to work, and then I would stop them. At that point, they would free write responses, we would have a brief discussion, and then they would improvise again.

They walked with quiet intention to their separate positions. Turcotte stood on the gravel side of the lot and faced the street. Loslier-Pellerin stood on the soil side, facing the back of the lot. Their backs were to one another. They dropped into their bodies and began. (Figure 2.3)

Loslier-Pellerin started moving first. She took two slow, liquid steps and then her body gently pivoted, her arms rising up, then her entire body curved sideways into a crescent. She twisted slightly, the curve turning her to face the inside of the lot, her back

to the wall. There were a couple of feet between her and the two-storey cinderblock structure. In that moment, her body's expression shifted. The curve evaporated, she became flat, upright, perpendicular to the building. It was as if the building had a magnetic pull, and it turned her again, to face it squarely. She spent the next two minutes there, moving in contact with the wall, touching it first with her hip, then her head.

Turcotte took a few more seconds for an impulse to build. Then his hands contacted his thighs and he swayed slightly until the momentum of his swaying provoked his legs into wide strides away from his starting point. Something stopped him suddenly, he placed his right hand above his heart and then brought in his left hand there as well, holding himself. He turned his body 180 degrees, as if away from something. He stepped back, again in a gesture of avoidance. His arms still wrapped around his chest, he slowly crouched to the ground.

I recorded video of their movements with my phone, trying to keep them both in the frame. There were two different angles that made this possible, one captured the width of the space, the other the length. I did not enter the space while the participants were improvising, instead hanging outside its perimeter. This was not a planned decision but dictated by the need to have a record of the participants' movements. In the role of documenter, I felt a significant degree of separation between their affect in the space and my own. I was not in tune with my own experience to the same degree as when I had visited by myself, without a camera. I sensed that I was a witness, outside of the participants' experience, permitted the privilege of watching their intimate explorations. Sometimes I was pulled in, though, when a participant seemed especially affected and an impulse worked its way through her growing in amplitude. In those moments, it appeared as if the space was indeed moving her, its force becoming visible through her engagement. I was stirred and experienced what scholar and curator Jill Bennett calls an "affective encounter" (10). It was not an emotional response, but it was nonetheless fully sensed. This response contributed to my sense that what we were doing was generative and revelatory, but it would not be until later when I reviewed the video and compared it to the participant's free-written response that I began to understand of what.

Turcotte had launched the series of experiments with me on October 1, 2017. The October 8 session with Loslier-Pellerin was his second in the space. Observing Turcotte

in that first video, there appeared to be a gradually deepening encounter with the space. He began by gingerly stepping into the lot, the gravel crunching beneath his feet. He was tentative at first, soaking up the material details of the detritus on the ground. Then there was a burst of motion, as he circled the lot as if to sense its various vantage points and find an orientation. He stopped at a ledge in the wall and perched. The next impulse began as contact with the material and the makeshift seat transformed him. To me, he didn't look like himself anymore. He looked like an old man, with this ledge as a regular spot for watching the world go by.

In his writing, Turcotte described a journey, a series of causes and effects, through which he engaged with the space:

It felt like a precarious place, full of business. I felt like I had to orient myself more deliberately. I had to recognize the things around me and react consciously, almost guardedly. But this guarding, this need to slow down and be deliberate did seem to bring me closer to what I was moving around. I internalized a great deal of the textures and almost felt like a piece of shapeshifting trash. (Turcotte, October 1, 2017)

Over the course of the experiments several participants described through imagination and movement effectively *becoming* the materials at each of the sites. This is a theme that runs through their writing. This is interesting to me, as it places the human participants on the same plane as the material.

On October 1, Turcotte's experience with the materials was not fixed. Rather, his imagination, impulse, and embodied experience of the material recognized its possible transformation. He wrote: "I felt like I whirred through an imagined history of the space, becoming an object tossed from some distant time to another." I see the detritus with which Turcotte communes as a version of political theorist Jane Bennett's "vibrant matter," wherein she attributes to things "active, earthy, not-quite-human capaciousness" (3). In the experiments, the human sometimes becomes the thing, and vice versa, operating in a shared world. This suggests to me that this kind of somatic engagement, through its attention to the body and horizontal approach to the senses wherein the ocular, haptic, and other senses have similar degrees of influence, contributes to a horizontal – or less anthropocentric – perception of our environments.



In her writing, dancer Loslier-Pellerin was not concerned with things nor objects. She considered her body as part of the space and vice versa. She was articulate in describing the experience, writing back and forth between the space and the body affording them equal attention. Reviewing the video, I notice her altering between conscious experiments and the flow of impulse taking hold. I understand the former to be detectible by the quality of her gaze. There is a middle-distance focus that appears to indicate a train of thought. For the latter, the impulse appears the strongest when the whole body moves with it. These are the moments when Loslier-Pellerin seems most engaged with the space and which are therefore of most interest to me.

To give one example, a sequence of movement appeared to begin as she abruptly stumbled backwards, her head down, her arms extended in front of her, as if to shield herself from an oncoming force. Her movement slowed, she came close to stillness and then pivoted lightly. Her arms dropped to her sides, heavy, slack, bent at the elbows. Then she shook her head, eyes down, her hands crisscrossing in front of her, flicking something away. The action played on her balance and pushed her backwards again until she turned to face a brick wall. Afterwards she wrote, "I felt the recklessness of the space affect my internal spaces, a sort of apathy connected to the movement" (October 8, 2017). I find her description of the space as reckless to be intriguing. It had no care or regard for its occupants, it jostled Loslier-Pellerin like a rag doll. There was a moment when she seemed to resist its force, backing away, raising her hands in front of her, but the resistance was half-hearted, as if she only partly meant it.

In our discussion afterward, Loslier-Pellerin explained that she had moved *with* the space's recklessness, and through that movement revealed it. I take this as an expression of the space's ambivalence towards its users. But we could all see that it was a gathering place, a kind of home base. To me, these two aspects were in tension: people were socializing, claiming this site as a hangout within that dangerous affect, rather than an unambivalent site with an affect of safety. The broken glass on the ground from shattered liquor bottles spoke to intoxication, which could also be construed as an ambivalent affect: intoxication is unbalanced and sloppy. As we spoke, it became obvious that the site was necessary to some people. At night, its far side is sheltered by darkness, which would provide a place to sit on the ground and have a few drinks, to share some conversation and camaraderie.

This tension raises questions about the spatial politics of the Mackay site. As sociologist Fran Tonkiss points out, “the everyday spaces of the street... are sites for a micro-politics of urban life in which individuals exercise their spatial rights while negotiating the spatial claims of others. This is a politics of space as much lived in the body as it is written in law” (59). While the City of Montreal holds on to the site in which, they claim, they will someday locate a park, late night occupants lay claim to this interstitial space, perhaps because they have nowhere else to socialize. I suggest that they are pulled in by the same affects of neglect that attracted me, as signals of the site’s availability.

### 3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, my focus was on the participants’ embodied experience of the site. In the first section, I gave detailed descriptions of the steps of the preparatory process. I argued for the value of these exercises as a mode of engagement with space and unpacked theory around the practice and skill of perception, termed by Varela et al. as *enaction*. Through my description of the progression of exercises, I demonstrated how the embodied performance methods could bring the participants to *enact* with the site.

In the illustrations drawn from the experiments in situ, Turcotte and Loslier-Pellerin’s enaction took different routes. Turcotte played with objects, transforming them through his engagement, thus becoming a thing amongst things. Loslier-Pellerin described a oneness with the space as a force, endowing it with characteristics ungrounded in objects or narratives. She appeared closer to sensing the site’s subjectivity, visibly pushed around by it. For both of these participants, their writing on their embodied approaches to the site revealed it to be chaotic, dangerous, and disinterested in its occupants.

Based on the detritus at the site, one of the primary spatial practices there is intoxicated socializing. What kind of (social) space does this produce? There are many bars that surround the Concordia University downtown campus, profiting from the commodification of social gathering. By claiming this interstitial site, the nighthawk users are subverting that commodification. Even if it is out of necessity due to lack of funds, they are occupying the space for their own purposes. For me, this is an expression of their agency. In terms of the spatial politics of interstitial sites, I wonder about the relation between the users and the site’s affects. If the sites are being claimed

by users with nowhere else to go, does it matter to them that the affect is an ambivalent one? As I continue my investigation, I will keep these notions and this question in mind.

## 4 Entanglement II: Rent Theory and Materiality at the Faubourg St. Catherine

It's a chilly day in October, 2017 and I need something from the dollar store. Dodging and melding with the bustling foot traffic on St. Catherine street west, I join fellow pedestrians during a downtown lunch hour. We are students, instructors, and office workers spilling out of the university buildings that flank the street; business types from the offices interspersed between the classrooms; residents of the nearby apartments and condos; a panhandler and his dog leaning against a building, and just a block away is the intersection of Guy and de Maisonneuve, one of the busiest public transit stops in the city.<sup>15</sup>

After walking past a couple of coffee shop chains and restaurants, I almost miss the entrance. It is a nondescript door set in a wall that consists of glass panels supported by dark green frames. The building number is placed high above the door and is easy to miss from the sidewalk. The only signage for the entrance is a canvas banner for Dollarama, and the letters used by the university to identify the building: FG, standing for Faubourg. (Figure 3.1)

I enter the Faubourg and approach the narrow escalator – just one person wide – to head up to the second floor. But for a moment the ground floor captures my attention, stops me. There is an eerie stillness to the space. A fast food business that had been sitting there empty for months is gone. (I recall it being a cinnamon bun franchise.) In its place: only air and a freshly plastered wall. The space is now open, my eyes travel its depth to the far end, where light streams in. The open area funnels towards the window. A frame created by the building's structure looks like a proscenium. (Figure 3.2)

The high ceiling creates a volume that was not apparent when the fast food franchise was there. There is now space to breathe, and yet the plastering in progress has encased the whole area in a layer of dust. There appear to be spaces next to the window at the back. I am curious to know more, so go to investigate.

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<sup>15</sup> City-wide, the Guy-Concordia metro station ranks third busiest with 8,493,242 riders passing through the turnstiles in 2017. The Cote-des-Neiges bus that stops at that corner is the fifth busiest route, with 26,044 riders daily on average. *Rapport annuel 2017 STM (Société transport Montreal)*, pages 16 and 28. [https://www.stm.info/sites/default/files/affairespubliques/Communiqués/Rapport\\_annuel\\_2017/ap\\_rapport\\_annuel\\_2017\\_final.pdf](https://www.stm.info/sites/default/files/affairespubliques/Communiqués/Rapport_annuel_2017/ap_rapport_annuel_2017_final.pdf)

The nooks near the window seem to provide access for workers to get to other parts of the building. I pull on a door. It is locked. I try the door on the other side, it is locked too. This convinces me that the area might not be so interesting after all, at least not for the purposes of the experiments. When scouting locations, I am always thinking about permission to use the space, whether it will be granted, and whether we might get away with working in a space even if permission is denied. There needs to be an escape route, and here there are only dead ends.

I turn back, a bit disappointed, when my attention is pulled to stairs descending to a below-ground area. (Figure 3.3) Glimpsing it from this street-level vantage point shows it to be of a different composition than the main floor. There are teal green tiles cladding the wall to the left of the stairs, and a huge mirror covers the wall perpendicular to the tiled one. I descend the stairs and am immediately confronted by my own reflection. It is a strange moment. I am alone on the staircase and can either watch myself descend or avert my gaze. I wonder why the mirror is placed there.

I turn away from the mirror to see an expansive room with a low ceiling. The space is on one hand strangely humble: there is a dry fountain under the stairs and the ceiling is covered with bland white tiles. It is unfurnished, save for a garbage can against its far wall and a sunshine yellow plywood box blocking a non-functioning escalator. The box is painted with the words “hors service out of order”, the French phrase stacked on top of the English exhibiting its priority, as is the law here in Quebec. On the other hand, the space is dizzyingly rich with angles – gridlines traverse the floor and ceiling, the walls are cut through by the diagonals of the stairs – my eye cannot decide which lines to follow. This effect is heightened by several more mirrors, not only the large one facing the stairs, but others that wrap what looks like a load-bearing pillar. I watch someone walking through the space, and they are reflected on several surfaces at once. This creates a disorienting effect, as the mirrors generate doppelgangers of occupants, and from some points of view, the illusion of the space folding in on itself. (Figure 3.4)

The tiles on the walls and floors are a murky, dark blue-green reminiscent of an algae-encrusted pool. The colour and material of the tiles have a distinct period feel, in the moment when I first encounter them, I guess they are from the 1990s. They suggest an aspiration towards opulence that feels out of place in this basement passageway.

I continue deeper into the space and discover several more discrete rooms, each with a distinct mood. They appear suddenly around blind corners and this elicits a feeling of surprise, even delight. There is a wide corridor with three doors at one end, as if prepared for a French farce to unfold there. On the other side of the doors is another wide corridor, almost identical except that it leads to another set of stairs that descends again, deeper into the space. At this lower level is a room that could be a ballroom, and then deeper still are four lecture halls.

There is no evidence of the construction workers down here. There is no equipment left behind, the surfaces are not nearly as dusty as the street level floor. I look around for security cameras that would indicate someone somewhere is watching. There aren't any. I return to the first room with its angles and mirrors and linger there. Few other people pass through. There is not exactly an escape route, the exits at the farthest side of the space seem to be for emergencies only. But there are enough nooks and crevices into which we could disappear that I can imagine evading a security guard. The space is rich with provocative details for the participants to engage with. To me it feels odd, curious. I have been beguiled.

I think to myself, "this is where we will work next."

#### 4.1 Where does this space come from?

In this chapter, I foreground the spatial side of the conversation in the experiments. If the participants are turning their attention, perception, and somatic attunement towards the space, opening themselves to be affected, with what are they engaging? What is turning back to face and affect them? What is this space's affect, where does it come from? What does the experiment do to and with the space's affect?

In order to answer these questions, I analyze the set of experiments that I conducted following the Mackay site. These took place at the Faubourg St. Catherine, a former mall in downtown Montreal that opened to much fanfare<sup>16,17</sup> in the late 1980's before entering a period of decline. Much of the building was in a state of unfinished and ongoing renovations. However, the area in which we worked – an underground

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<sup>16</sup> There is ample newspaper coverage of the story of the site's development. A typical headline reads "Urban marketplace will revitalize entire block on Ste. Catherine St." and includes the subheadings "American Concept" and "Eyesore", the latter in reference to the building prior to the developer's intervention (Wallace, Bruce. *The Downtowner*. City of Montreal Archives, 48-4-4).

<sup>17</sup> Concordia University owns the fifth and sixth floors of the building and leases the underground corridor where the experiment took place.

corridor connected to a group of auditoria – appears to have been mostly unchanged since the building first opened almost 30 years ago.

I consider the material aspects of the space to be a major contributor to the space's affect. Moreover, I have observed that the participants' first encounters with this site were mainly through its materiality and its architectural structure as a transitional space<sup>18</sup>. I am also interested in understanding how the corridor came to be, as a material entity created by developers: a specific set of circumstances has brought together the strange amalgam of features that constitute the Faubourg's spatial affect. In this section, I argue that the affect of this site is in part the legacy of a series of landowners who represent the touching down of the international forces of capital. These transactions have led to much that defines the space now: its form, its décor, its state of (dis)repair; who occupies and uses the space, when, and what they do there. I am describing a causality here, with a political economy generating a set of forces and things – the material objects-turned-subjects that Bennett describes as “vital players in the world” (4) – that are important constituents shaping the corridor space and its affect. As the attention of capital turns away from these forces and things, the fallow interstitial space emerges.

With his theory of rent, geographer David Harvey seeks to fill gaps left by Marx in his analyses of land and rent. An in-depth review of Marxian approaches to the economy are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I find this is a worthwhile notion to introduce, as it helps to situate the intimate acts of spatial practice within the vast tapestry of the global economy. With his theory, Harvey asserts that “ground land value” can be productive beyond its obvious and direct material resources, for instance as a mine or a farm. Clearly, a material structure can be erected on the land, and that materially structured space has value and can be rented. Going further, Harvey observes the phenomenon of land speculation. Here, he separates landlords, who have a direct connection to the property, from capitalists, who are investing in a possible future value. In this move, the land is dislodged from its material existence and purpose, becoming abstracted and instrumentalized as a tool of investment. Harvey cites Marx's assertion that because space is “a required element of *all* production and

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<sup>18</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, in architectural terms a transitional space connects two or more other spaces of primary use. In this instance, the corridor is a transitional space that connects the street and auditoria inside the Faubourg.

human activity” and argues that, for this reason, “rent...provides a basis for social control over the spatial organization and development of capitalism” (337).

At each point in the Faubourg site’s chronology, it has been owned and occupied by iconic figures of the economy, of each respective era: the church, the automotive industry, and the film industry. The dereliction of the site at the end of each of those occupants’ heydays is symptomatic of the changing zeitgeist and transactional fashions in the Quebec and global economies.

The first separation of land from its “use value” was by the French settlers who colonized the site. They arrived after several exploratory trips during the sixteenth century, with the stated goal of the religious conversion of the Indigenous inhabitants (Viau 55). In 1641, the lot where the Faubourg now stands was occupied by the Sulpician order. Two hundred and twenty years later, the Grey Nuns took over the land and oversaw the building of the motherhouse residences and a chapel that remain on the bulk of the lot today. (*The Grey Nuns*; Figure 3.5) The church could be said to have been the landlord of the site, with a direct, material connection to its use for habitation and spiritual practice. In 1926, they nuns subdivided the lot, selling the St. Catherine street side to a car dealership. (Figure 3.6)

The economic influence of the church was subsumed by the advent of the car, and new landlords purchased the St. Catherine Street-facing lot where the Autorow building was constructed in 1926 and where it remained until the early 1980s. Following the narrative told by this site, the car dealership was unable to maintain the property: the automotive industry had passed its heyday. Economically, the film industry was on the rise, and a cineplex would soon act as the next tenant. Here the detachment of value from site escalates. Rent value was determined through the projection of films. Harvey’s landlord was gone, and his speculator-capitalist had arrived. However, at that point, the relations of production are still traceable through the object of the film spool. It is during the next transaction that the site, its land, and the material structure erected upon it become fully detached from their worth. The cineplex only occupied the site for a brief period of time before the developers were forced to sell the property, severing the link between its ownership and the material value of the site. The Faubourg St. Catherine is currently owned by a real estate holding firm (a prominent instrument of investment), and the area we explored is occupied by the university (twenty-first century reliable tenants).



Another important aspect of Harvey's rent theory is speculation, where the truism of "buy low and sell high" is king. This means it is advantageous to leave sites of "low" value to decrease to their minimum and to bottom out. At that point, an investor reaps the maximum profit. This phenomenon accounts for land left derelict, as investors await its bargain price. In 1983, the Autorow Building was acquired by developer Multidev Immobilia Inc. for \$5 million (Blouin, et al. 5), and the developer went about transforming the site. Newspaper reports at the time trumpeted how the "audacious" project would "clean up" the neighbourhood, after the building had been left abandoned and fire-damaged for seven years.<sup>19</sup> There is breathless coverage of the feat of engineering undertaken by Multidev to *raise* the building and carve out three stories of underground space beneath it (Désaulniers, City of Montreal Archives, 48-4-16).

The new development was inspired by the Boston Quincy market and others like it. Termed "festival market places", these projects built on a model of 19<sup>th</sup> century public markets, capitalizing on their nostalgic draw by adding other features, such as fast food and artisanal retailers. The goal of combining these features was to create a bustling atmosphere and render shopping a form of entertainment.

In his 1989 analysis of inter-urban competition, Harvey writes about festival market places as indicative of "an attempt to build a physical and social imagery of cities...suited for competitive purpose" (13, 14). Harvey observes that cities increasingly compete on a global scale for international investments, to lure head offices and their workers, as well as tourists. Harvey explains that this trend has led to a proliferation of homogenous attraction-type developments, like the festival market, one for each city. In 1986 Multidev opened the newly named Faubourg St. Catherine with 90 boutiques, and a four-screen cinema.

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<sup>19</sup> This information was pieced together between a microfilm spool housed at the City of Montreal archive and files of hard copy documents at the Concordia University archive. The details are predominantly from the City, where the collection of newspaper articles first celebrates the transformation of the Faubourg site, and then follows the organizational disarray of its developers and the consequent struggles faced by the lessors. Then the coverage drops off. It appears that once the site is acquired by Reemark Holdings in 1988 it ceases to be of archival interest or rather, the information is perhaps to be found in a different archive. I observe a similar trail in the Concordia University archives where there is an illusion of completeness: a file is kept for each university building. There is a file for the former Grey Nuns Motherhouse, and the six-story Faubourg tower that at the northeast corner of the block, which the university purchased in 2007 and 1997 respectively. There is no file for the building marked FG, in spite of the fact that the university has owned the fifth and sixth floors since 2012.

When the Faubourg was first being planned, the company occupying the cineplex was clearly intended as an anchor tenant. The anchor tenant plays a key role in a planned shopping centre, intended to attract other renters as well as customers. For the lessor, the anchor tenant also provides reliable income from the property while other smaller vendors are sought. This concept arose as an adjunct to the development of shopping malls in the 1950s (Mirel 28).

The four cinemas installed in 1986 are now auditoria used for classroom space, for the university as well as non-university renters. Reflecting on the image of the anchor tenant, and the anchor as object: an anchor is meant to secure a boat in place. It is heavy, a weight, a tool for mooring against the flows and currents. In this respect, the metaphor of anchor tenant is apt: their rent secures the whole building. But the metaphor does not tell the whole story. In the case of Cineplex Odeon in the Faubourg, the harbour was formed for the anchor, over and around it. Now that Cineplex Odeon is gone, the anchor has been pulled up or, more aptly, has evaporated into the ether while movies are consumed at home via streaming and internet. It left behind a concrete shell.

By 1988, Multidev and other investors had poured \$53 million into the development. The newspaper coverage of the decor and the developers' ambitions shifted to interviews with disgruntled tenants who were seeing building services cut. That year, Multidev sold to the Toronto-based Reemark development group for \$46 million and a 20% profit-share (Blouin et al. 95). After the Reemark purchase, the trail of transactions that I followed in this research ran cold. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to account for the transactions that occurred between 1988 and this writing. Rather, I am interested to know that, almost 30 years ago, the building transitioned from a material structure, tethered in the Montreal economy by its developers, to an investment holding. It appears to have remained in that state. When the experiments were conducted, and at the time of this writing, the Faubourg was included in the portfolio of Amcor Real Estate Holdings (*Properties, 1616 St. Catherine St. West*). Among other tenants, Concordia University uses the former cinemas as lecture halls.

When I discovered the space in the Fall of 2017, the everyday users of the Faubourg had been left with the spaces generated by the processes of capital transfer and speculation that I have just described. The value of the site has been utterly detached from its everyday use: it is absurd to imagine a multinational real estate

holdings firm calculating lease payments relative to the benefits of sitting in those lecture halls. Conversely, the students' spatial experience, and the spatial experience in the experiments, is shaped by the relics of a late-1980s mall conceived by "audacious" developers.

After discovering the site, I observed that the everyday spatial practice of this interstitial site left fallow to be predominantly walking through it, mostly by students on their way to and from classes. Occasionally there were people who paused there, sitting on the edge of the fountain using it as a bench. (At the Mackay site, the concrete blocks were often used as benches too.) I also noticed spatial practices that were not so everyday, and which aligned with the non-sanctioned practices I observed at the Mackay site. During one visit, there was a group of women who were using one of the mirrors to practice what appeared to be a traditional dance, or dance-like exercises. (Figure 3.7) On another occasion, there was a man who emerged from deeper in the space who showed signs of a life on the street. It is possible that he was using the washroom, or perhaps he was having some quiet time to himself in one of the hidden nooks tucked behind the auditoria.

#### 4.2 The Site and the Experiments: Three Stages of Engagement

In this section, I will consider the experiments that I conducted at the Faubourg and ask: how does this site left fallow work on the participants? Which aspects of the corridor and its adjoining spaces assert themselves the most and how do they manifest? How were these aspects received and responded to by the participants? What do these findings say about the relation between the site and its users? To investigate these questions, I have found that it is useful to focus on participant Nic Turcotte's improvisations. As the only participant to participate in every session of the study, he gained an extraordinary depth to his explorations. Through his writing and post-improvisation discussions, he communicated the complex experience of moving in embodied conversation with these interstitial spaces. As explained in Chapter 2, I see this embodied conversation as a form of enaction (Varela et al.; Pippen; Zarrilli), wherein the participant engages with the space through their skills of perception. By analyzing Turcotte's improvisations first, I establish a ground against which other improvisations can be set. Turcotte's descriptions for the Faubourg site chronicle a progression of three stages of discovery. I argue that each stage is informed by the

subjectivity of the corridor site as it influences and moves the participants. Additionally, Turcotte demonstrates a gradually deepening relation between the space as subject and the participant as subject.

#### 4.2.1 The site overwhelms, the participant contends

As previously detailed, when I discovered the underground area of the Faubourg, I was slightly dazzled by the space: its lines, its anachronistic mishmash of materials, and its mirrors. After his first improvisation, Turcotte describes a similar response: “This feels like a much more active space than the [Mackay] lot... it was slightly overwhelming and I found it a challenge to really focus” (October 29, 2017).

In several instances throughout the three case studies, participants reported a sense of being overwhelmed by spaces during their first explorations. I have also experienced this sensation. Everyday urban spaces are not usually occupied with conscious attunement, and so their multitudinous stimuli are not received as deeply, if at all. On one hand, in a typical day of moving around the city, my attention is habitually focused on my thoughts. On the other hand, after a class in somatic practices my attention shifts to my body and the sensory world becomes more prominent. I sense and feel more. This can be shocking, as the stimuli are many, often dissonant, seemingly random, some enveloping and others attacking.

Approaching a site with the specific intention of somatic engagement, which is supported through the opening up of perceptive capacities in the warm-ups, the stimuli may at first be felt as chaotic, intense. It’s a lot to take in, much more than usual, and I found that it took participants practice in order to parse and focus on specific impulses. Of course, a participant could also play with the impulses that arise from being overstimulated, but based on the experiments, they quickly sought out foci.

Turcotte’s contrasting of the Faubourg with the open-air Mackay lot stands out for me. 1421 Mackay is a slice of land exposed to the bustling city. It is frequently cut through by loud sounds, and the ground is covered in detritus. To suggest that the Faubourg is “more active” seems counter-intuitive to me, but looking closely at the sites, there are indicators as to why this is the case.

One possible explanation for the more “active” affect generated by the Faubourg is its architectural structure. The Faubourg contains and funnels its occupants, especially relative to the Mackay lot, which is open and porous. The active affect of the

Faubourg may also be due the spatial practices of its users. There are fewer people at the Faubourg, but they *passed through* our improvisations, while at the Mackay lot there are more people, but they *passed by*. For me, both of these possibilities are logical, but the most compelling reasons for the participants' sense of the Faubourg's activeness are the contradictory narratives told by the Faubourg's materials and structure. The material details were intended to affect in a certain way, speaking to an aspiration of being "high end". Thirty years later, with capital facing the other direction, they are not evidence of opulence or competitiveness, but rather signal a site awaiting conversion. Given the time and attention, the body picks up these signals. Several participants expressed a slipperiness to defining the space's affect. In their movement improvisation, Airin Finkelstein's<sup>20</sup> body appeared relaxed and curious, exploring much of the space's offerings that other participants had missed. Finkelstein loosely rubbed against walls, folded themselves into corners, flopped over ledges and stuck their tongue out far, as if to taste the air. Watching them, I don't sense a specific emotion, action, or affect. They would have seemed lackadaisical and apathetic if it were not for their gently inquisitive attitude. Afterwards, they wrote, "I feel like I am contending with an energy within and without me, can't place the vibe of the space" (Finkelstein, November 16, 2017). Participant Rachel Wallace characterized her response to the space as "energized" and explained that "Because of all the details of space, I felt frequently drawn to move my eyes and head rapidly" (November 12, 2017). It was as if by speeding up her movement she might be able to take it all in. Through her enaction, she dialogued with the space's tempo, absorbing it, expressing it, and revealing it in the process.

After Turcotte's first experience with the site, he described how he responded to its overwhelming affect: "I mostly ended up leaning on things... My body felt compelled to explore the edges and contours of things like the yellow block by the escalator and the handrail by the stairs" (October 29, 2017). This impulse to begin the exploration around the edge of the space was observed in other participants in the Faubourg sessions. There are several possible reasons for this. One is social: like wallflowers at a high school dance, the participants who hugged the perimeter of the space are less seen – and therefore less exposed – than others who take to the centre.

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<sup>20</sup> Two of the participants in this case study identified their gender as non-binary. This is reflected in the pronouns I used.

They are less visible, and so less likely to be objects of attention, and there is a sense of safety in that invisibility. Indeed, Turcotte surmises that staying around the edges was “a protective sort of effort, as well as a focusing one” (October 29, 2017).

Another reason for hugging the edges of the space can be perhaps found in the embodied impulse to lean. Leaning is an action of seeking support. By releasing the body’s weight into a wall, less energy is required. It is a kind of surrender to the force of gravity. I think of leaning as part of the family of image schema. As mentioned in the previous chapter, image schema is Johnson’s term for embodied spatial metaphors that occur unconsciously and yet shape our understanding of our place in the world. Leaning may be due to fatigue. It also recalls camaraderie, union, friendship, and togetherness. The sensation of an “other” offering support is akin to the sensation of not being alone. Leaning is an embodied expression, a moving towards physical and emotional support.

Participants at the Mackay site leaned against its single wall. In the Hall Building site that will be discussed in Chapter 4, the participants also leaned. However, in those instances, it did not appear to be a comforting gesture. At Mackay, Turcotte leaned his back in to the brick surface while perching on a makeshift ledge. From that position, he surveyed the site, watchful and alert. Loslier-Pellerin bent at her hips and leaned the top of her head into the same wall, a gesture with strange affect. It appeared first as if her head were magnetized, pulled towards the wall. Then she stayed there, connected to it. Her position suggested a bizarre form of communion with the structure, as if the wall were telling her something through this direct contact. In the Hall building, there was a great deal of leaning and rolling against the walls. As will be shown in the next chapter, the affect in those instances was predominantly uncomfortable. One of the key differences between the Faubourg and the other two sites is its relative cleanliness, and the smoothness of its surfaces, which allowed for all kinds of physical contact. This made full-body haptic explorations possible – perhaps even invited them – and so it was a safe, comforting form of leaning that happened in that environment. Mackay was dirty, and the ground riddled with dangerous material, limiting contact, and altering the palette of expression for participants. Likewise, the Hall Building stairwell had a filthy floor that discouraged contact, and the walls were cold and hard so even if the impulse to lean arose, the participant was not rewarded with positive affects.

Reviewing the video of Turcotte's exploration, I observed that he actually began in the centre of the small landing at the top of the stairs. (Figure 3.8) He aligned himself with the staircase and rocked lightly. From where we were working, we were in clear view of the one-person wide escalator that leads up to Dollarama. I saw two people ascend. As if displacing him with their distant gaze, Turcotte stepped out of the central spot, towards a niche with a railing, and found an edge upon which he sat. I was reminded of how during his first encounter with the Mackay site, he also found a perch. Again, this provided a vantage point, though this time it was to the underground area. As he leaned there, I became aware of how the railing delimited the underground space, forming a mezzanine. I imagined friends meeting here, watching for one another on their way into or leaving the cinemas.

Once he arrived at the space's edge, Turcotte's attention shifted. It became more tactile – his hands moving along the railing's curve – and he contended with balance. Because of the proportions of the improvised seat, he needed to support his weight with one leg and one arm, the other side leaning and exploring where he could gain purchase. His movement felt slightly playful, as if on a playground apparatus. At the end of this sequence, he disentangled himself from the spot and leapt lightly towards the railing on the far side of the staircase. Having found the support of the space through leaning into it, engaging in haptic exploration and playing with balance, he descended. In Turcotte's progression, meeting the edge of the space appeared to be a process of gathering bearings, stability, and the strength to move away from the walls and towards the space's other constituent aspects. The mirrored wall, the wide corridors, and the retro decor left behind by Multidev awaited him.

#### 4.2.2 The site fascinates, the participant senses and plays

On November 4, 2017, Turcotte reflected that, "With such a wide array of spaces to occupy and shapes to embody, I feel like I've only scratched the surface of the space." Having met the space the week before, during this session he still explored its perimeter, but no longer as a stabilizing impulse. Now, his movements were curious. I observed him working his way around the space, discovering its many distinct spots and playing with them. He spent time between the stairs and escalator, and then at the edge of the dry fountain, and in a small mirrored nook.

Turcotte commented that, due to the “wealth of potential” in the space he found it difficult to focus his attention on his embodied responses. The space’s details provoked thought, which he would “translate to physical expression” in order to return to the exercise of embodying impulses. “I guess I was really torn about where to go and what to do... this space inspires a lot of thinking about the nature of it. It’s fascinating” (November 4, 2017).

Several of the other participants also noted the material details of the space as an influence, but they found their way into embodied responses through different routes. Turcotte “translated” his fascination into corporeal expression. Others were provoked by the space to play, with the floor tiles being a particularly provocative feature.

There is an array of tiles in a palette of cream and teal. The first area of the floor at the bottom of the stairs is mostly covered with plain, cream-coloured tiles, with a border of sage green that ties in with the colour of the walls. Moving deeper into the space, there is another area where the border pattern is reversed: the main colour of the floor is dark algae green and the borders are cream-coloured. The placement of the tiles divides the volume of the space, creating distinct zones overlaid with grids. During the sessions, the participants spent time exploring one zone, and then their impulses took them travelling to another. They do not straddle the zones’ borders.<sup>21</sup>

The tiles also generated bursts of playfulness in the participants.<sup>22</sup> The lines of the tiles, along with their proportion and regularity appear suggestive of games. Maia Iotzova “followed those spaces and rhythmic patterns inventing different walking and jumping patterns based on the tiles” (November 16, 2017). Describing a section of her improvisation, Christine Bellerose wrote that she became “a piece of chess” and described how her game unfolded, first as she embodied all of the pieces, then the king, then the queen who won the game (November 11, 2017). By devising games and rules for engagement with the space, the participants enacted the critical power of play. As described by urban studies scholar Quentin Stevens, anthropologists and sociologists have observed play to be a method of social experimentation within rule-bound forms. Play creates opportunities to explore alternate modes of being, whether it is through the

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<sup>21</sup> Some participants do, however, peek around the corner created by a wall. From this vantage point, they are not crossing over into another zone, they are spies looking into it.

<sup>22</sup> This only happened at the Faubourg. Play was not a mode of engagement that occurred in the Mackay site nor the Hall building.



practice of skills, the reversal of power dynamics, or the release of control. In order to analyze how play can operate in city spaces, Stevens cites sociologist Roger Callois' typology of the different ways that "practices of play escape the behavioural restraints of work and social reproduction" (223). Callois' four categories are: competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo. The game invented by Iotzova involved the exploration of various walks and physicalities, and so appears to be one of simulation, which "involves pretending different characters and situations... and testing new identities, meanings, and realities" (224). Bellerose's play falls in the category of competitive games, which "enable personal control over the body and simulated meanings...and test and develop their knowledge and skills" (223). In both cases, the participants' playfulness disrupted the intended use and mood of the space, revealing the latent possibility of creative activities. In her free writing, Iotzova remarked that through playing this game, the space began to feel "less institutional" (November 16, 2017). Moreover, because these moments arose outside of any material exchange, they countered the original aims of Multidev's festival market place, which were to commodify amusement.

Through the process of playing her game, the rules of which provided "control" over her body, Bellerose arrived at a moment of abject release. After the experience that she described as her chess game, she paused and then suddenly collapsed to the floor in a heap. It looked as if she were ruined. This was near the end of the session, and after a long and busy weekend for Bellerose, as she was attending a conference on campus. It was as if, through her fatigue and nearing the end of the improvisation, she had also exhausted her habitual movements and some other mode of being took over. She may have dropped to the floor because she was tired, but what she described included other influences. Bellerose's free-written notes reported that she suddenly felt as if she were a homeless person. Following the enaction, she was struck by the clear probability that this site was a source of shelter, and the bathrooms tucked deep in the building could have provided a homeless person with a place to clean up. We processed her response in the discussion afterward, experiencing the space with this new understanding of it.

A row of poster cabinets proved to be another provocative material element in the space. There were four cabinets in all, two on the wall spanning the righthand side of the space, and two more that faced the occupant walking through. (Figure 3.9) They were clearly installed to showcase movie posters for the cineplex, and their design

blends into the aesthetic of the rest of the space. Their frames were gold-coloured. The main part of the cabinet where a poster would be placed had a teal-coloured border that matched the floor and wall tiles. There was decorative detail at the top of the cabinet that echoed the art deco references of the overall decor. The cabinets were designed to be lit up: the three without posters showcase exposed fluorescent light bulbs. The fourth cabinet had a poster installed, announcing the grand opening of an indoor “golf centre” called *Sharx* in November 2011. To the right of this cabinet was a locked door that lead into another space where the indoor golf space would have been. This was located at the opposite side of the building to the auditoria. Did *Sharx* ever offer indoor golf? It would seem that no, *Sharx* did not. An online search reveals that the space was originally constructed as a bowling alley, and it appears that it has remained in that form. As recently as 2016, a posting on the crowd-sourced review website *Yelp* mentions the lanes being in use. The user, identifying himself by the initials C.T.M., describes *Sharx* as being “a great place for an ironic date, after office drinks, or any other time you just wanna roll” (*Sharx Pool Bar*).

Several participants approached and explored the cabinets. In particular, during two separate sessions Eddy Jackson spent much of their time in that corner of the space. In the first session of the two, they worked on the floor, pushing into the corner where it meets the wall, looking up at the underside of the cabinets. They aligned with the cabinets, running their hands along the gold-coloured frame. There was an affectionate quality to the touch, it was gentle and caressing. The position of their body reminded me of a baby, reaching upward from a prone position towards dangling toys above a crib. After this movement sequence, Jackson departed to other parts of the space, and their movement qualities changed. They shuffled, wiggled, and hustled, the soft touch was gone.

In the next session, they were back at the corner with the cabinets. This time, they stayed vertical, and moved in a slow, shimmying dance. In that moment, it really did look like one of the cabinets was their partner, and that they were at a dance club. In an instance of sudden, spontaneous group gesture, two other participants joined Jackson. For a few seconds they danced together in this makeshift club and then they dispersed. (Figure 3.10)

The cabinets are perplexing to me. Their material form, their corner apart from the main flow of the space, the *Sharx* poster, together these things represent another

indicator of the site's fallow state. Their delicate gold shine is out of place in this underground corridor; they signal a nostalgia for glamour through art deco-esque design but house naked fluorescent light bulbs. They generate a complex, knotted affect for me: friendly but fading, ridiculous, and a bit pretty. This helps to explain Jackson's response which can be seen as a moment of tenderness towards these complicated things. In the discussion after the second session, Jackson states "I feel like I am interacting with things I felt before." They continued to explain that they had always sensed an affective agency from spaces, but dismissed it: "...now... I have been able to be in a space and... interact with [it] in the ways that I have imagined" (November 27, 2017).

#### 4.2.3 The site chases, the participant escapes

The presence of security guards was a recurring theme through the experiments, but it was most felt at the Faubourg. Their interruptions raised questions of what is permitted in the space, by whom, and by whose authority. They also enacted the attention of capital in human form.

In contrast to the Faubourg, the Mackay lot's protection is minimal, more of a discouragement, really: a few concrete blocks indicate the space's perimeter, suggest that the gravel on the other side of that boundary is off-limits, and prevent people from parking there. While we were working in the Mackay lot, the police drove by once, slowing down and scrutinizing our activity from the vehicle. Our odd movements did not cause them to stop, and they drove on.

Security guards stopped two experiments in a previous project<sup>23</sup>. In both cases, I told the guards that I was conducting research, that we would be done in ten minutes, and we were permitted to continue working. The first time we were stopped, I asked why, and the guard told me that they had a directive to intervene in response to any activity they surmised to be "out of the ordinary." In contrast, at the Faubourg on November 16, 2017, when the experiments were interrupted by a security guard, there was no negotiating. His directive was more pointed. This time, when I asked why we were being stopped, I was told that dancing was not permitted. When I explained that

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<sup>23</sup> From January to mid-April 2017, I led a group of students through a research-creation process as a part of the site-specific theatre piece *Dwellings*, directed by Ursula Neuerburg-Denzer. That project gave me the opportunity to begin testing my ideas about the potential of embodied performance practices. However, my explorations during the *Dwellings* sessions were excluded from this research due to their production-driven focus, as well as insufficient documentation.

we were not, in fact, dancing, that this was research and as a student I had a right to use the university space, the guard stood firm. We packed up our things and left, to return the next day at a different time. I did not ask the guard for whom he was working. However, I noticed his uniform bore a Commissionaire's badge, and they are employed by the university. They are a familiar, everyday sight. Concordia's downtown campus is comprised of several buildings that are easily accessed by the public, including those seeking shelter. I imagine that as much as securing the safety of students, faculty, and staff, managing the occupation of all these spaces is part of the job. I wonder if the guards have directives for who may use the washrooms, and who may nap on a chair.

I did ask the guard why dancing was not allowed. He pointed to a taped-up mirror and told me that it was broken by dancers, "That's why."

There was another occasion at the Faubourg when the work was stopped by a security guard. However, that session was not part of the experiment series, it was a demonstration for two visiting scholars organized by one of my committee members, Shauna Janssen. Because I was not collecting data, I did not document the session. Exceptionally, I also asked the participants to be prepared for a possible intervention by a guard. If this were to happen, I asked that they flee deeper into the space. I would distract the guard and offer to stop working, and then we would catch up and find them. When a guard did in fact show up, she asked us to stop working. I engaged her in conversation, explaining that what we were doing was research. The guard told me that dancing was not allowed, and I deceptively agreed to stop the improvisation. The guard seemed satisfied with this and left the area. Then, there was a flush of momentum, first of participants leaving the space, then of the guard reappearing and continuing – not after them, but on her daily route – and then myself, Janssen, and the two scholars in pursuit. We all met up again deep in the bowels of the building, and the participants worked for a couple minutes more when suddenly the doors of the lecture halls flew open and students began streaming out of their classes. Responding to the guard in this way added a layer of urgency (get away!) and momentum (follow!) and drew attention to the various other traffic patterns in the space: ours, the guard's, and students coming out of classes. By engaging with the guard, we engaged with another aspect of the space, that of the spatial practice of surveillance. This is an embodied force with a profound influence on the affect of the space, maintaining normativity by preventing any activity deemed "out of the ordinary".

### 4.3 Conclusion

Rather than an image of an efficient, unstoppable machine of the global economy, the Faubourg St. Catherine shows that the forces of capital can be haphazard, clumsy, and capricious. The Faubourg lot's history as property of the church, and then a car dealership spanned more than a century. However, more recent developments on that piece of land tell a less stable story. Multidev's development aspired to compete on a global stage, alongside other festival markets. The aspiration was unsuccessful, but its material traces remain today, affecting the everyday lives of the building's users. In this case study, the participants engaged with the capricious forces of capital, playing games and escaping its surveillance.

The lack of adaptation of this space to its tenants suggests that Amcor holdings is, following Harvey's rent theory, leaving the space fallow until the attention of capital returns to endow it with new value. But this is a different kind of fallow than the kind understood by farmers. That notion of fallowness originates in land stewardship, and the recognition that as crops remove nutrients from the land, inbetween time is required for its ecosystem to regenerate. When fallowness occurs in real estate, the "nutrients" of the land are not regenerated through an ecosystem, but rather, encouraged to reach their maximum depletion. Only then will maximum profit be achieved.

In terms of their material aspects, the affects with which the experiment engaged were the accidental by-products of the speculative process. Participants were first overwhelmed, then fascinated, then chased: as unsanctioned occupants, we had rich, if brief, encounters. While the site shows signs of neglect, the things that Multidev left behind evoked play and communion. As with the Mackay site, these evocations reveal the potential to transform the site, albeit briefly, through spatial practice. In play, the participants generate actions that test new ways of being – a different walk, a frolicsome jump – and overlay new rules of engagement. This finding marks a step further in the meeting of the participants' and the site's agency. At Mackay, their somatic responses opened conversations with the site, in the Faubourg, they are more consciously shaping them.

## 5 Entanglement III: Discomfort and Agency, Hall Building Stairwell

It is early November 2017. I am leaving a seminar on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of the Hall building, a “utilitarian, cube-shaped, 1960s-style high-rise.” (*Henry F. Hall Building*; Figure 4.1) The semester is grinding on, taking its toll; I am at once tired and rushed, needing rest and refusing it. This is the accepted state of students and faculty around campus at this time of year: the days are getting shorter and the final projects coming due. It seems the only way to get through all the work is to plod and push. Time will pass, there will be a holiday break, keep going until then. Chin up.

The hallway is packed shoulder to shoulder, there is a huge line-up for the elevator, which is already notoriously slow. Instead of waiting – waiting in this state feels awful – I look for the stairs. I am just going down anyway, why not let gravity do its work.

As soon as I open the door and step into the stairwell, the space asserts itself. It is dim, slightly lit by sporadically placed fluorescent lights, and punctuated by exit signs. The cream-coloured cinderblock walls and dark beige concrete floor are caked with a thin layer of grime. Scratches of graffiti confront me with grotesque images, entice me with cryptic musings, accuse and threaten. One states grimly: “dead men don’t rape.” Most affecting to me is the sound, which reverberates through the concrete and cinderblock construction. The building hums and groans, its many systems heaving, grinding, and pulsing at different rhythms. As I descend, I am enveloped by it. It’s like being inside filthy concrete organs. It feels like the building, put here by human labour, is also alive. I can be easily digested, as is the design. Or I can stay a while.

The sound is disturbing.

It feels like a dungeon.

It feels like a place where bad things happen.

I walk down the stairs in this building-organ world, pausing at spots to sense the air, the smell, the temperature. The walls are cool. The air barely moves. I do not hear another soul. I reach the bottom of the stairs and walk out the main exit door, and I am released into a boisterous, bright, well-attended area. The main mezzanine of the building is a lounge, and on this afternoon, it is buzzing. The contrast between worlds is

astonishing. I am overcome by the pull of this vibrant, well-kept space and continue out to the street and on with my day.

Between 1964 and 1966, the city block-wide twelve-storey Hall Building structure was constructed to be an alternative space of post-secondary learning, welcoming Montreal's downtown workers to night classes. But back in the stairwell, it's difficult to imagine how this space came to be. The solidity of its narrow cinderblock halls makes them feel as if they have always been here. There is an aspect of its affective quality that concurs with this impression of permanence, or at least of temporal suspension. It is like a prison cell in its utilitarian sparseness and constriction. It is only when I consider the material – when did these blocks come into use? – that it is clear that it is relatively recent, of my parents' generation.

I wonder if it's fair to suggest that this space is a synecdoche for the entire building, the history of the site, and the affects they generate. In its current state the Hall Building is a layered patchwork. Some floors and areas have been renovated with a lean contemporary style. Others remain in their original 1960s forms and decor, marked by the patina of use. Thus, the stairwell stands in for the parts of the building which have not yet been attended to, constituting a representative part of the zones of neglect.

With *Entanglement I*, I described a sample experiment in order to demonstrate my use of embodied performance methods to prepare the participants for their engagement with the site. The somatic preparation of the warm-up heightened the participants' sensitivity, and they engaged with the affects of the site. These were found to be ambivalent: dangerous and, for some, welcoming. In *Entanglement II*, I argued that the material aspects of the Faubourg site are the legacies of the political and cultural economy of the city. There, participants engaged with the site's artifacts, revealing capital's capricious attention. In this chapter, I aim to bring the concerns of embodied enaction and the site's affects into more fluid conversation. As with the previous two chapters, what follows is my analysis of key moments of the improvisations. These were selected for their particular *entangledness*, as junctures created through practice, of the participants' embodied responses and the interstitial site.

## 5.1 The Performers Meet the Space: Uncomfortable Affects

The first set of experiments in the Hall stairwell took place on November 25, 2017. In attendance were Nic Turcotte, an alumnus of the theatre program, as well as Greg James and Scarlet Fountain, who were theatre students at the time. During the first half of the session, I guided them through a warm-up in the studio. We then walked to the Hall Building via an underground tunnel that connects several campus sites.

Upon arriving in the Hall building, I led the participants up to the fourth floor using the escalators at the centre of the building. We turned down a hallway to find the door to the stairwell and entered. Above that floor, the structure of the stairwell is uniform, with sets of concrete steps interrupted at steady intervals by small landings. However, entering the stairwell at the fourth floor reveals a variation to this structure. Descending from this point, the user is met by a small landing that leads to a long, narrow corridor. At the end of the corridor is another, wider, landing that switches back into stairs. This part of the structure opens up into a vestibule-like space. The colours, textures, and layer of grime are consistent throughout the stairwell from street level to the top of the building. But this section of it has the largest number of graffiti markings and stickers on the walls. I suggest that these traces are partly due to the area's proximity to the ground: it is more accessible and therefore more frequently occupied. It also appears that the combination of structural nooks and expanses invite interventions. They afford a canvas, visible from a distance, on which to leave these marks. There is also enough floor space for the gestures of writing and painting on the wall.

The participants took their opening positions in the space, standing in a triangle formation, equidistant from one another. James was closest to me, facing East. Fountain was diagonal from him to the left and facing West. Turcotte completed the shape, parallel to James, also facing East. Their stances were relaxed and grounded. At that moment, a single, heavy thumping sound reverberated through the stairwell. I acknowledged it, pointing out that the sounds made by the site are part of the material available to them. The air was still. There was a long moment before they began to move.

Fountain went first, walking simply away from her starting spot, past Turcotte and around a corner to arrive at a long corridor. (Figures 4.2 and 4.3) It was not possible



to keep all three performers in the frame of the video documentation, so she slipped out of my sight.

James was next. He looked up, his eyes trained on something a few feet away from him, where the wall and ceiling met. He seemed to be wary of it. His body briefly slackened beneath his steady gaze, like clothes on a hanger. Then his eyes tracked slowly to the right, head turning, following the line of wall-meeting-ceiling at the edge of the space. This movement brought his body to follow his head led by his gaze, to take one step, then another, turning him to face a cinderblock wall, an exit sign, and a blind corner around which lay the corridor. The building let out a metallic clunk. James' head continued to turn to the right as he surveyed this part of the space. The head-turn morphed into a momentary head-wobble. The weight of his head, which seemed to contain his curiosity, pulled him to step forward and around the corner. He leaned the right side of his body into the wall. He slapped his left palm against it. He slapped again and again, generating a sickly rhythmic sound of flesh against concrete. The energy moved up his arm into his trunk and he began to rub the side of his body against the wall. This escalated into a convulsive rolling thrash along the cinderblock surface. And then the impulse subsided, he straightened and continued down the corridor.

Turcotte began in a corner, confronting the same wall as James but rather than looking upward, his body faced it straight on. As James began turning his head, Turcotte stepped back. One inspects, the other recoils. Turcotte seemed discontent to leave this starting position, though. He stepped forward again, as if to reconcile himself with this spot. He then turned 90 degrees to the left, to face another wall running perpendicular to the first. He swayed and stepped sideways, aligned with this second wall. When he could not move further left, he shuffled on one spot, picking up speed in a crescendo. He slammed himself into the wall sideways and then stopped. He swayed once more, this time leaning lightly into the wall, making contact, and then the sequence was over. He slowly stepped away from the spot, head hanging down, into the corridor and onto his next exploration.

On our way to the site, I did not tell the participants about my first impressions of the space. I didn't want to influence them, and I was curious to see how the space would work on them, and what kind of partner it would be. As the experiment continued, it became clear that by choosing the Hall Building stairwell, I had taken

participants into affective territory that we had not encountered previously. The Mackay site sat unoccupied, an invisible open-air living room in plain sight. I had walked past countless times before it finally lured me in with its curious trail of detritus, each piece of trash a story, and it kept me there in the embrace of persistent weeds. Collectively, the objects spoke to intoxication (liquor bottles, drug paraphernalia) and nostalgic moments (a greatest hits CD, hand-written notes). The impression of a dumping ground gave off an affect that was sad, yet the indicators of intoxication suggested social gathering and perhaps even fun. The nostalgic items along with the plants evoked a certain tenderness for me. The Faubourg was baffling in its material mix and odd architectural structure. Its wide passageway and tiled floors invited us to play, to flow with its current or to obstruct it. The sporadic presence of security guards made us mischievous and brought into relief the rebellious nature of our explorations. In the Hall stairwell, however, I was preparing the participants to open their embodied perception to a space that I had sensed as uncomfortable and disturbing. As always, I facilitated with care and attention to the participants. We debriefed after each improvisation, and that provided an opportunity to ensure everyone was working safely and taking care of themselves. At this site, it seemed especially important. Fountain and James grappled with the space each in their own way. But, perhaps due to a deeper somatic sensitivity cultivated over the course of the workshops, Turcotte was jostled by it.

Turcotte's first encounter with the space did not sound any alarms in me, but it hinted at what was to come. He opened his free-writing stating that "This space is terribly claustrophobic" (November 25, 2017). The sentence announced malaise that could be distress. But in his writing, Turcotte described consciously moving away from this sensation. He transformed what he called a "fear of becoming a barnacle" – which in my understanding would leave him fixed in this place – into an opportunity to embody the creature's capacity to gather nourishment:

seeing the graffiti and the stickers made me think of what collects in space where all sorts of stuff runs through. Something's always left behind. And so my body felt that: an initial rush that leaves remnants that harden or wrap around the edges... I did end up exploring being a barnacle, which left me open

to receiving the brief missives on all the surfaces... (Turcotte, November 25, 2017)

Turcotte did not plan this image, nor to take this form, it arose from a sequence of embodied responses evoked by the space. The space invited him to press his body into a wall, perhaps at first for safety as with previous explorations, but evolved into an impulse to “receive”, briefly becoming a non-human organism feeding on the microscopic residue flushing through and accumulating in the space. This was different from the experience of obstructing flow that arose in the Faubourg. The narrowness, darkness, and filthiness of the stairwell did not seem to leave room for that.

Analyzing the third and final set of experiments in the series, it becomes apparent that it is the simplest in two important respects. First, the architectural structure of the space is specific in purpose and that purpose is clearly defined: it is a stairwell. It is designed for people to move from one floor to another. As such, the stairwell is more contained than both the open-air Mackay lot and the Faubourg’s warren-like series of conjoined spaces. This site has the least varied stimuli, and it is the least interrupted by other people. (While there are swarms of students in other parts of the building, they appear to prefer using the escalators.) I argue that this relative simplicity coupled with the confined nature of the space make it confrontational: there are few material details for the participants to engage with and the ones that are present are cold, dirty, and hard. In terms of finding safety in the space, other than hiding around a corner, it is impossible to avoid being seen by someone who is passing through. The minimal amount of actual material with which to engage means the participants must work with what is there. There is no choice, no avoiding it. I suggest that, compared with the other sites, this causes them to work with deeper somatic engagement, as the materials that *are* available in the site command their focused attention, and the material of their own bodies is also brought into relief. Moreover, the nothingness of the space forces their somatic sensations and experiences to become foregrounded in the spatial engagement.

I say that this is deeper work because it appeared to be more somatically driven. At all three sites, participants responded variously to both material and immaterial stimuli. At the Mackay lot and the Faubourg corridor, it was the stories of materials and objects that most frequently provoked the participants’ impulses. In the Hall stairwell,

immaterial influences predominated. In my experience, a tendency towards narrative foregrounds less somatic sources. Stories tend to reside in the head, or at least begin there, sprouting from discursive seeds. The exercises did bring stories into the body, but they could still distract from or over-ride body-first responses. Rather than being provoked into narrative by objects, the light, shadows, sounds, and occasional passers-through became the material that seeped into the participants, who communed with the space through their body's own light, shadows, and sounds.

For instance, James writes about his multisensory experience, with sounds and sights melding together, generating synaesthesia through movement:

My exploration led me to imagine the substance of the space. For example: a speck of dust, light (and what part of the space is present or not present), sound (and how the reverberating began to empower movement) ... If I was the light I found myself transformed into shadows... (December 4, 2017)

Not knowing James' experience nor what he had written, in the discussion after the improvisation Turcotte described feeling James as a shadow bearing down the tunnel. He gestured to James and said he was "giving me less room to hide... a hunting feeling... you becoming one with the shadow." (Figure 4.4) While those who simply walk through the space are also constituent, James and Turcotte *coalesce* with the space's affect through their movements. That said, the shadows are a key part of the space's affect and a powerful metaphor for the "dark side" or "shadow self" in the human imagination. This causes me to wonder whether anyone who moves through the stairwell would sense the shadows' force and perhaps unwittingly embody them. I recall that during my first visit, I was struck by the dimness of the space. It does not require a great deal of extension to imagine playing with that perception.

These responses contrast with earlier sessions, where the participants more frequently wrote about embodying material contents of the space than immaterial ones. In the Hall stairwell, they became the air and sound (which are invisible), shadows (which are intangible), as well as other abstract images and sensations generated by their interactions with the site. Considering my aim to facilitate a practice that treats the senses horizontally, i.e. without deferring to the hierarchical dominance of the ocular, these responses point to an imaginative leap that is necessary in order for the

participants to include these immaterial materials as possible fuel for their movement. To put it more plainly: practice is required to move *with* the space as a subject meeting a subject, versus *inside of* it, as a subject contained by a thing and amongst other things. In the Hall building, it appears that, due to the hard, constrictive nature of the space, addressing it as a subject diminished the participants' experience of their own subjectivity. This was especially clear in Turcotte's writing.

In spite of his repeated efforts to make peace with the site, it persistently troubled Turcotte. In his second session in the space, he found it "suffocating" as if there were a "giant body of people streaming through" (November 26, 2017). The imagined phalanx caused him to feel tense, pushed him up against the walls and against himself. He characterizes the experience as "significantly stressful." On December 3, 2017, Turcotte attuned to the sounds of the space with a similarly unpleasant result, writing that "today the atmosphere felt especially oppressive."

In the discussions after our sessions, it was clear that Turcotte was finding the space upsetting. He was participating as a volunteer, and we had worked together many times before, so I trusted him to ensure that he wasn't harming himself through participation. Still, I felt badly. This situation brings the ethics of PaR into relief. In research involving human subjects, there is an imperative to minimize risk of their harm. Nelson does not offer ethical guidelines in his otherwise comprehensive text *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*. Nor does Paul Stapleton's survey of PaR make any mention of the ethical treatment of participants. I was confident that I was doing everything I could to support Turcotte and would have stopped his participation if I sensed that his discomfort exceeded what was stipulated by the Concordia University Office of Ethics, namely "risks greater than those to which participants would be exposed in their daily lives" (*Summary Protocol Form*). However, I will seek more detailed guidelines before conducting this kind of study again.

After the difficult feelings Turcotte experienced during the first two sessions, I suggested that he be prepared with strategies to play with the space in a way that would be less stressful, or at least more manageable, so that he could reclaim his own agency in the embodied conversation. He reported that he did indeed try "dancing and that felt more productive, though still ultimately had a tad futile feeling. It's hard to have a real voice in this space" (December 3, 2017).

Turcotte's discomfort emerged partially due to his heightened somatic responses expressed through movement and were partially about what the space asserted. With regards to the former, Turcotte's difficult feelings may have been exacerbated by one of the methods used in the improvisations. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in anticipation of possibly extreme responses to the sites, I gave participants approaches for working safely, for instance "turning down" the impulse's amplitude or transforming it. While the experiments yielded a vast array of expressions, their movements never appeared overly emotionally charged. For instance, whenever despair arose in the improvisations, it seemed to be expressed as the body folding in on itself or silent screams. These muted responses were already the norm when more volatile propositions started to emerge in the experiments, both offered by the space and sensed by the participants. In retrospect, I wonder if, by manipulating more intense impulses into less visible ones, Turcotte had been frustrating them. It is possible that an appropriate embodied response to the Hall Building site was a full-throated howl, but we had, through the practice, tacitly removed that as an option.

With regards to the spatial side of the conversation, Turcotte's experiences reveal the stairwell's oppressive power. James also evidenced difficulty grappling with the site. While he did not report the same degree of discomfort as Turcotte did, neither verbally nor in his writing, reviewing video of his improvisations shows a performer being pushed down upon, tossed about, and at times contorted through his relation with the space. (Figure 4.5) It was clear that Turcotte and James struggled to assert their agency as subjects through these embodied conversations.

Shabaaz asserts that "...spatiality is a central fundament of subject formation... Who we are as subjects is informed by our relationship to space"<sup>24</sup> (277). Through the snapshot of the experiments, what kind of subjects were James and Turcotte? And how did that impact their relationship to the space? As subjects, they were daunted. The experiment presented them with the objective to converse with the site, to which they committed. This resulted in a pattern of the space pushing them down, and them rising

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<sup>24</sup> Geographer and cultural researcher Rashad Shabaaz approaches the production of Black "carceral subjectivities" from a spatial perspective. He analyzes case studies of sites that "fix Blacks spatially", effectively "preparing them for prison" (276, 277). I don't mean to equate the experiments with the experience of the communities analyzed by Shabaaz, who he argues develop "prisonized subjectivities" due the "prisonized spaces" where they live. I do, however, find his assertion regarding the impact of space on subjectivity relevant to this analysis.

up again to continue. Through that process, many of their movements seemed to express failed negotiations. In one instance, Turcotte was seated on the floor after suddenly sinking down. He took a moment to gather himself then reached out to caress the wall, making peace. It was not long before he was thrown down again.

As they confronted the oppressive affects of the site, I wondered if there might be some agency to be found in the activities of the experiments themselves. These contradicted the structural purpose of the space, which could be construed as an action of defiance. The stairwell is intended to facilitate people's movement from one floor to another and the atmosphere of the space is so bleak, it encourages people to pass through it quickly. However, we lingered in the site and dared to move with it. By lingering in the space, James and Turcotte joined the category of users who were resisting its dominant spatial practices.

There was material evidence of those resistant users. Left behind on the side of a dusty vent was a sticker from the 2012 student strike, still rallying to the cause of affordable tuition from the side of a dusty vent. There were also various patches of graffiti in the stairwell. Some appeared to be tags, the stylized signatures of their creators who mark territory, announcing their occupation to anyone who can read their code. Interdisciplinary scholar Carrie Noland sees graffiti writing as an embodied practice. She observes that kinesthetic actions are functional – they are able to leave marks on a surface – but this gesturing, as she calls it, "...affords an opportunity for *interoceptive* or kinesthetic awareness, the intensity of which may cause subjects to alter the very ways they move" (2, italics the author's). In this way, the marks that are left behind are both a signature, a delicate human trace on the surface of the monolithic building and of the power structures that built it and tend – or neglect to attend – to it, and a record of embodied possibility in action. These material traces of possibility encouraged me while I worked with Turcotte and James, as they suggested that the two men might reclaim their agency, even in this harsh atmosphere. Through attending four sessions, James was able to adjust his approach to the improvisations. An actor still in training, he began treating them in a more detached way, consciously experimenting with his various responses. This appeared to ease the hold the site had on him, while enabling the conversation to continue. Turcotte's experience never improved. After being deeply affected on the first visit, his responses in the sessions that followed were variations on the theme of discomfort.

## 5.2 Embodied Consciousness of Hostile Sites

Speaking from the field of urban design, Crippen observes that our movement through city space is often unconscious, and that pre-reflective responses shape experience (125). Applying this to the Hall Building stairwell, I suggest that its powerful affect is sensed and impacts even those simply passing through. Those who mark the walls with graffiti sense it too. I see these sensings of affect to be akin to pre-reflective responses, and I posit that the experience of the site becomes layered into the subject's experience.

The experiments bring embodied conversation with the site into consciousness. This is not an everyday experience of the site. It is alert, heightened, and sensual. It productively attends to the affects that arise due to relations with the site. This can lead to a sense of awareness and empowerment, as the participant is increasingly aware of their own volition, capacity for choice, and therefore agency. This is a different kind of layering into experience than the one presented by Crippen.

Citing Ingold, social scientist and geographer Doreen Massey argues that "the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the currents of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings" (150). Even with James and Turcotte's uncomfortable experiences, I suggest that it is better to be conscious than unconscious of our relations, subjectivity, and what "forms we build". This includes imaginary forms. The experiments do not generate visual traces or material residue in the sites themselves. The movements that emerge from the practices are ephemeral, they exist in real time and then are gone, unrepeatable. However, they add new meanings to the site: for me, the participants, and all who come into contact with the experiments. These movements reside in and shape the body, preparing it for the expressions and relations that lay ahead. The activities of the experiments operate at a humble scale, while also enacting ways of being. By engaging with these neglected spaces, and moving with them, we discover what the site is really saying to us, even if what it "speaks" is not what we want to hear. Whatever the case, we may find that we have more at stake in the conversation than originally apprehended.



## 1.1 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered the experiments that took place in the third of the three sites: a stairwell in the Hall Building. The site is the founding structure for Concordia University in downtown Montreal and as such, figures prominently in the lore and imaginary of the area: it is the centre of this urban campus, a major figure in its origin story, and an anchor for the real estate development that followed its construction in the later 1960s.

As with the other two sites explored, the stairwell drew me in due to an affect generated by neglect. For me, it was the most intensely felt of the three spaces. Whereas the Mackay site intrigued and pulled me in through the imagined stories of its trail of detritus, and the Faubourg corridor perplexed through its odd mix of materials, with its monstrous echoing sounds, dim lighting, and cold, hard walls, the Hall Building stairwell incited fear in me. This site also had the most acute impacts on the participants. Their responses were in general more oriented towards metaphor rather than narrative, and this leads me to conclude that they were engaged in a less discursive, more somatic mode.

The participants were also disturbed by the site, which raised questions of how to work with it. As we aimed to converse with the space, we were confronted with the problem of an interlocutor that seemed to dominate and oppress us, with little room for negotiation. The domineering subjectivity of the site resulted in a conversation in which the participants' agency was diminished.

The difficult nature of the embodied conversations with the Hall site opened a line of inquiry into whether embodied agency might still be found in conversation with such a situation. After his first uncomfortable encounter, James took a more detached approach to his engagement. This enabled him to be more consciously involved with his somatic responses, and therefore to channel his exploration. Turcotte tried several strategies for contending with the site's oppressiveness, including dancing with it. However, the site seemed to consistently foil his agency. In the practice of the experiments, this was not the most satisfying conclusion; both Turcotte and I would have preferred to have discovered a way for him to contend with the site with his agency intact. However, considering James' responses, the experiments highlighted

how simply being conscious of this kind of banal everyday spatial oppression could be an important starting point to resisting the site.

## 6 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have illuminated three case studies that heuristically explored interstitial sites, laying the ground for future explorations. I see this research as an important conversation between fields, mobilizing the affective sensitivities of performance practices as embodied methods to explore social science theory on space and the city. This is an approach for which Thrift advocates. He describes the work between social sciences and the arts as a form of “engineering” in that the findings are “born out of concrete encounters which allow the world to speak back” (76).

### 6.1 Implications

Gregg and Seigworth assert that the “real powers of affect” are “affect as potential: a body’s *capacity* to affect and be affected” (italics the authors’, 3). I see the experiments as a series of awakenings to that capacity and therefore, that power or, to use another word, agency. The first was my own, as I canvassed the campus with my senses attuned to being affected and in so doing, discovered the abandoned lot at 1421 Mackay, the underground corridor at the Faubourg, and the Hall Building stairwell. The three interstitial spaces called out to me through their various affects of neglect, drawing me in with their textures and oddness, as well as moods that were distinct from their surroundings. The sites’ affects were in part exerted by forces and beings that were frequently non-human: the force of decay, constituents including birds and plants at the Mackay site, and the dust and sound at the Faubourg and Hall sites. These non-human constituents enhanced my understanding of the site as a subject, with its own agency.

The next awakenings belonged to the participants. The embodied performance methods prepared them to encounter the sites. The warm-ups facilitated the development of participants’ perceptive skills (Noë; Pippen; Zarrilli). This development was reported directly by the participants. It was evidenced in their free writing at the sites, which described aspects of their experience and of the environment with great nuance and sensitivity. It was also apparent from their movement, which was “full-body”, finely detailed, and highly responsive. Then, conversing with the site through movement, the availability generated by somatic preparation allowed for an experience of details that might otherwise have been missed: things, textures, aesthetic features, spatial nooks, sounds, indicators of history and what these provoked in embodied

responses. These came together through the participants' experiences, which were communicated in their free-writing and the post-improvisation discussions.

As participants experienced enhanced capacities of somatic attention, they noticed more and more deeply. In so doing, they recognized their positions as co-subjects with the site, and I assert that this recognition is part of what awakened their sense of agency. This was the case of the Faubourg especially, which was the safest and cleanest of the three sites. Unlike at the Mackay site, participants were able to contact the floors and walls without concern for becoming injured. Unlike the Hall Building stairwell, the space was warm and well lit. Participants dared to explore fully, and in so doing, transformed the site from an awkward corridor to a playground, a dance hall, and a site of experiment. With the other sites, which were respectively dangerous and hostile, the participants' agency was still there, but the palette of its expression was constrained. This contrast is intriguing, because the dangerous and hostile sites were the ones that appeared to be most available for occupation. As mentioned in my analysis of the 1421 Mackay, I sense a tension or a problem contained within that situation. I have not yet been able to fully parse what that problem means, and I am curious to explore it further.

In the experiments, agency also appeared to emerge through the participants' enhanced consciousness of their somatic responses as they recognized and engaged with what was *already there*. The framework of the experiments gave participants permission to play with impulse, to perceive *with* these spaces, and to experience the effects of that exercise – which were pleasurable, startling, challenging, disturbing – to experience, period. This is in contrast to everyday experience of the spaces, which was to move through (as was the case with the Faubourg and the Hall building stairwell) or past them (the MacKay lot). The experiments not only heightened perceptive attention, they asked participants to do, to engage. After improvisations, an exhilarated response was common. For instance, participant Airin Finkelstein wrote: "...extremely liberating! THRILLING... [I] felt empowered to do things I never would have dared" (November 1, 2017). The importance of this response should not be under-estimated. The methods, adapted as they were in the experiments, prepared the participants for action informed by an embodied experience of their capacity to perceive, sense, and impact on and with sites.

Though their somatic improvisations, the participants brought the affects of the sites into themselves. They invited the sites to move them and the sites agreed, sometimes aggressively as with Loslier-Pellerin's stumble backwards at 1421 Mackay, sometime tenderly, as with Jackson's delicate, infant-like touch of the gold poster cabinet at the Faubourg, and sometimes oppressively, as with Turcotte's experience in the Hall Building stairwell. Reciprocally, through the experiments the participants affected the sites for the duration of our visits. We transformed the mood of the sites, revealed, and disrupted their dominant spatial practices.

Through the experiments, I discovered that the affect of neglect is a signal of what I term the *inattention of capital*. This was acutely apparent in the Mackay site and at the Faubourg, which were both between speculative interests. In the Hall building stairwell, the link between its neglect and capital was less direct. What *was* clear, was that the caretakers of the building did not attend to that space to the same degree as others. Specifically, there was another stairwell on the opposite corner of the building that was freshly painted and well lit. The poor condition of the one in which we worked suggested to me that it was considered to be of less importance, and so less valued. These observations led me to conclude that, while the attention of capital is focused elsewhere, the affects generated by its neglect signal, both to me and to others, opportunities to engage with sites in non-sanctioned ways. While we conducted our own non-sanctioned use of the space, and at risk of being ejected, we encountered fellow occupants and their traces; we shared in the affects that affected them and embodied these through movement. Importantly, through that activity, through the embodied responses and the discussions they provoked, we engaged with the questions of spatial politics that arose: Who gains from the site? Who claims it? In this way, the experiments were a platform for an emergent criticality.

The experiments also brought me to a provisional understanding of the site's interstitial potential as locations where, for brief moments, we could operate outside of the commodification of everyday life. For Lefebvre, spatial practices are everyday embodied activities that contribute, through our existence, to the capitalist economic system. With my framing, I implicated myself and the participants as co-producers of space. This move endowed the participants with agency and responsibility. We were not engaged in the spatial practices of labouring or shopping, we were engaged with a spatial practice of site-responsive experimentation.

## 6.2 Future Research

Together, the threads of my conclusions and questions come together as a deeper curiosity for me. I am interested in exploring how the embodied performance methods and the understandings they engender might be mobilized to give, as described by Nicolas-Le Strat, a “glimpse of other ways of creating a city that are open and collaborative, responsive and cooperative” (115).

As a theatre artist, I am accustomed to working towards audience reception. Periods of experimentation are often cut short when it comes time to rehearse and solidify the performance score. These case studies existed solely as experiments, liberated from the considerations of performing for an audience. Away from the gaze of spectators, and the pressures of developing material for performance, these embodied performance methods were mobilized in a two-part methodology, first for their application to the perception of space, and second, for the analysis of the entanglements generated through that practice. I see this methodology as a key contribution of this study.

In future explorations, I am interested in building on the findings of this study in order to create artwork for an audience. The participants’ movements were affective and, for me, affecting. While watching both the live experiments and the videos, I often found myself feeling and sensing, as if with the participant and the site. This could be partly attributed to kinesthetic empathy (Foster; Reason; Reynolds). However, I assert that there was more at play. To witness or share the communion of the participants and the site is a moving experience. I felt that I was developing an embodied relation with the participants as well as a deepened comprehension of the sites. In turn, this understanding led me to recognize aspects of the site that warranted critique. This evolution of my relation to the sites, through the experiments, indicates to me that they can be extended to become critical spatial practices.

As formulated by Rendell, critical spatial practices build on Lefebvre’s spatial practices. She extends the notion into the fields of art and architecture, elucidating the intersections and relations between those practices and the space itself. Rendell asserts that “art, as a form of critical spatial practice, holds special potential for transforming places into social spaces of critique” (13). This leads to the question: what do the experiments critique? Through embodiment, the participants came to recognize how dis-embodied they usually were. From practice, I understand that the everyday

environment of the city is not suited to consistently deep somatic responsiveness. However, this study led me to the conclusion that there can and perhaps should be a greater degree of embodied attention to affect. Thrift argues that affects are important to understand, not least because “the manipulation of affect for political ends is becoming not just widespread but routine in cities...” (58). Describing various examples of this, Thrift includes the affective performance of credibility by politicians, and increased mediatization through screens which capture, display, and magnify affect. Walking the city in my daily life, I observe the affects generated through Lefebvre’s spatial practices of people shopping, labouring, and travelling. Our collective experience of these practices accumulates. It is worthy of attention if we are to have agency in our embodied production of city spaces.

In order to advance the discoveries in this study and in support of art creation, I am interested in testing more specific strategies. Because I began with a broad research question and was working heuristically, it took time to comprehend the specifics of what was at play in these experiments. My next steps would be to further develop and focus on what was turned up. I now understand the interstitial sites as being fallow. This suggests to me that there is potential to engage more fully with their forces and signs of life. I would begin that project through the focus of the participant’s somatic attention towards those living elements, and the development of specific imagery to fuel their exploration. This kind of strategy is used in Bainbridge Cohen’s approach to internal, biological imagery, and Overlie has used imagery to fuel the performer’s relation to sites. My interest is in the specific embodied conversations with the living details of interstitial sites.

Taking a more speculative approach, I suggest that material could be generated that would reveal the interstitial site’s nascent potential within the surrounding urban fabric. We could more directly explore the covert activities taking place in these sites. We could also play with more specific intentions in the improvisations. What might we find if the improvisations were to not only engage with and respond to site, but also to transform the site into what or how we wish it to be? A simple example of this approach drawn from the experiments would be to explore possible responses towards and transformations of the oppressiveness of the Hall building stairwell. This kind of strategy has been used by applied theatre practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal, who

with *Theatre of the Oppressed* devised improvisation techniques for participants to enact resistances, challenges, and improvements to their social and political situations.

There was a dilemma that arose during the experiments, one which I hope to avoid in the future. The majority of participants attended for one or two sessions only. With the exception of Nic Turcotte, the experience did not accumulate for the participants and was not as deeply synthesized as I had originally hoped. When any participant first encounters the exercises, they execute them from the basis of their previous experience. To do the embodied performance methods once is to make acquaintance with them. Repetition of the exercise forms the body with new experience which in turn becomes the departure point for what follows. Practice reiterates and reshapes, forging paths for new experiences. I see potential in continuing to develop the practice side of this methodology. If I were able to facilitate a group workshop that progressed over several sessions, I hypothesize that the findings would be more profound and nuanced, and therefore might open other lines of inquiry regarding the practice. I am interested in where more specific explorations might lead. For instance, what might be understood about the site through engagement with specific sensory elements such as sound, light, or texture?

Out of the 16 participants, four were laypeople with little or no experience with this type of performance exercise. I acknowledge that this is a tiny sample, but nonetheless note that all four of them engaged with the space in ways that they reported were transformative. I am interested in what could be learned by working with laypeople, in terms of how they understand and write about their experiences in interstitial sites, and in turn what that tells us about the site and our agency within it, especially in the context of the political economy and everyday life. Would working only with laypeople yield different results than working with participants trained in these embodied performance methods? If the interstice is a site of opportunity that may be pried open, what would laypeople report about that potential? Could this embodied methodology have broader applications, in terms of how we relate to these kinds of spaces, nested around the city, and how they might be critiqued and transformed?



## 7 Epilogue

Since conducting the experiments, I have periodically returned to this family of three interstitial sites nested in the institutional footprint of Concordia University. I do this to check in on them, which is itself a kind of spatial practice of revisiting, recollecting, and reacquaintance. These sites hold affective memories for me now. In my personal embodied history, they belong to a constellation of curiosities and experiences defined by associations and relations, sensations, feelings, and moods. Perhaps predictably, the Hall building stairwell remains in an almost identical state to the day I found it. The floor is still filthy, the student strike sticker still clings to a pipe overhead. The graffiti is painted over every few months to be quickly replaced by new markings. The disturbing sounds remain, as does the eerie mood. 1421 Mackay is also in a similar state as to when I found it. Trash tends to pile up there, and then it is removed. Graffiti is painted on the wall, and then it is painted over. The weeds grow to a foot high and then are cut down. Otherwise, the site is the same. The periodic painting over of graffiti and mowing of weeds represents the extent to which capital is trained on these sites. The caretakers do not, in fact, take care, but rather maintain the impression that the site is empty, without the messy interventions of life.

The most significant changes have been at the Faubourg, which has transformed. The foyer area that drew me into the space is now furnished with benches wrapped around tables and decorated with a ring of artificial plants. There are stylish new lighting fixtures. A mural adorns the main wall that marks the space's edge. The mural consists of a stylized tree in the centre of a dark royal blue circle; the circle is flanked by two birds, framed at the top with wispy clouds and at the bottom with star-shaped flowers. The word love is drawn across it, in pale blue cursive writing. These elements appear to be symbols, but in this context, it is difficult to ascertain of what. For me, the mural is innocuous and banal. (Figures 5.1, 5.2) A smoothie franchise has been installed on the opposite side of the space from where the cinnamon bun franchise once stood. The foyer area is no longer a transitional space, designed for passing through, it is a destination, a place to sit down, to study, and to socialize. The stairs descending into the building's underground corridor are less visible than before. Encountering the site as it is now, I would not have noticed them on the way to Dollarama. However, on this revisiting I knew the staircase was there. I descended and noticed that there was

painting and renovation underway. The art deco details of the ceiling had been removed. The gold frames for movie posters were gone, replaced by larger, plainer frames filled with advertisements for mobile phone plans. (Figure 5.3) The door to *Sharx* was covered with a construction notice, and the doors leading to the bathrooms and auditoria deeper in the building were locked. I was saddened by these changes. The attention of capital had finally returned to claim this space, to smooth over its expanse and erase the meanings left behind by Multidev. My sadness caused me to think again and more deeply about why the material details of the site were important. For me, the tale of Multidev, the developer's hubris, and the mildly ostentatious things left behind were cautionary. They warned of the foolishness of the developer over-extending, and the problem of a site that no longer suited its occupants. Without those things in the space – the gold frames, the art deco nods – the signals to its origin story had been removed. Moreover, there was little left that was odd or mysterious to draw someone in, to provoke curiosity to know more. As the site transforms into its next incarnation, its purpose is more direct, and the fissure of opportunity to lay claim and disrupt it is closing. Observing the site in this smoothed-over incarnation, I am instilled with a sense of urgency: the potential of interstitial sites is brief. If they are to be occupied, critiqued and transformed, it is important to act quickly, before they close up again and their potential is lost.

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### **Participant Responses**

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- Harrison, Pat. Free writing, audio and video documentation. November 11, 2017.
- Iotzova, Maia. Free writing, audio and video documentation. November 16, 2017.
- Jackson, Eddy. Free writing, audio and video documentation. November 16 and 17; December 3, 2017
- James, Greg. Free writing, audio and video documentation. December 4 and 7, 2017.

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Turcotte, Nic. Free writing, audio and video documentation. October 1, 8, 12, 13, and 29; November 4, 11, 12, 16, 17, 25, and 26; December 3, 4, and 7, 2017.

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# 9 Figures



Figure 1.1 Concordia University, Sir George Williams campus map, 2017-2018. Source: Concordia University Archives. The red dots were added by the author and indicate the location of (clockwise, starting with the upper-left): the training studio, the Hall Building stairwell, 1421 Mackay, and the Faubourg St. Catherine.



Figure 2.1 1421 Mackay street, prior to demolition. Image: photo taken by Hugo-Sébastien Aubert. Source: Sara Champagne, *La Presse*, February 3, 2015.



Figure 2.2 Video still, Turcotte and Loslier-Pellerin at 1421 Mackay, October 8, 2017. Videography by the author.



Figure 3.1 Faubourg St. Catherine, 2017. Image: photo taken by the author.

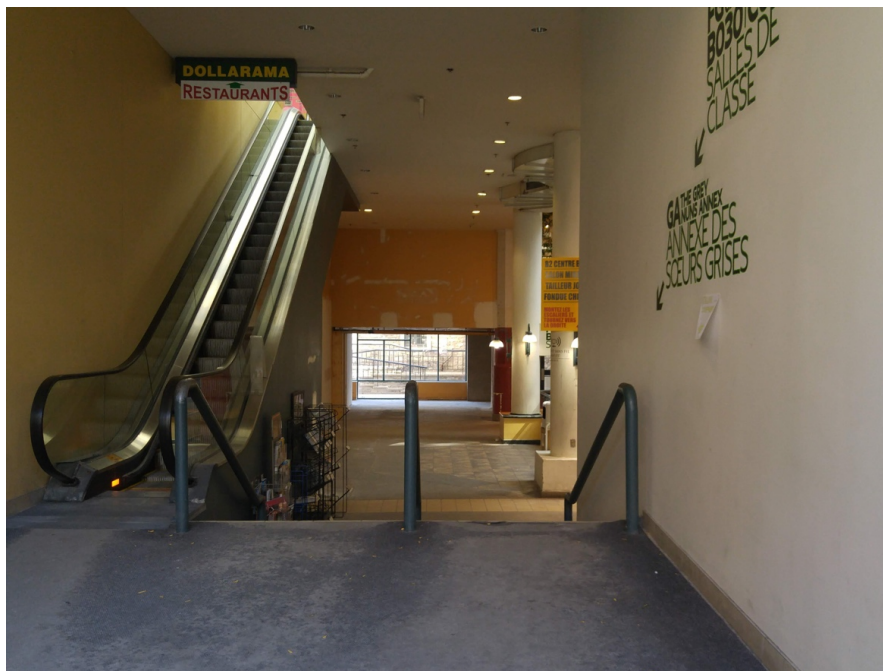


Figure 3.2 Faubourg St. Catherine entrance foyer, 2017. Image: photo taken by the author.



Figure 3.3 Faubourg St. Catherine, stairs to underground corridor, 2017. Image: photo taken by the author.



Figure 3.4 Video still, Wallace, Turcotte, and a doppelganger, November 12, 2017. Videography by the author.

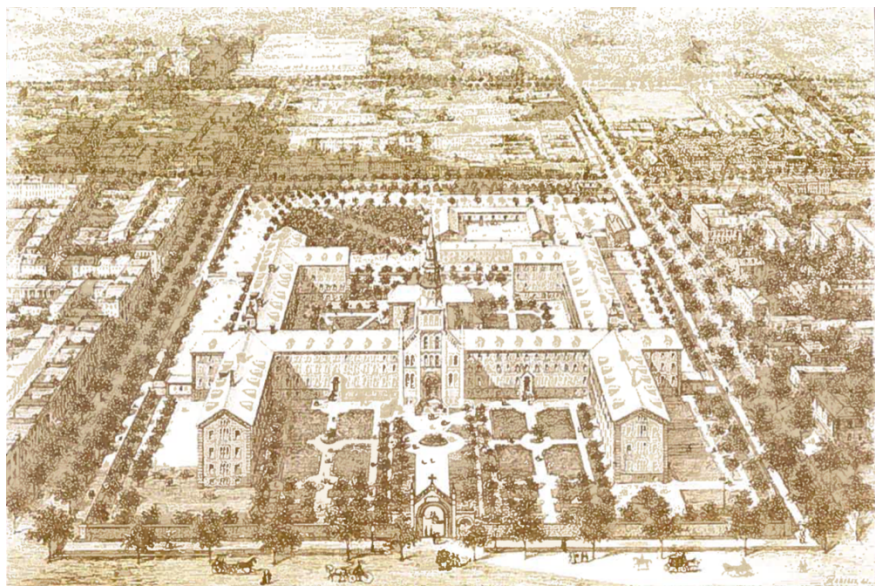


Figure 3.5 Aerial view of the Grey Nuns property, 1875. Source: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec BNQ\_2-96-a\_1975.jpg.

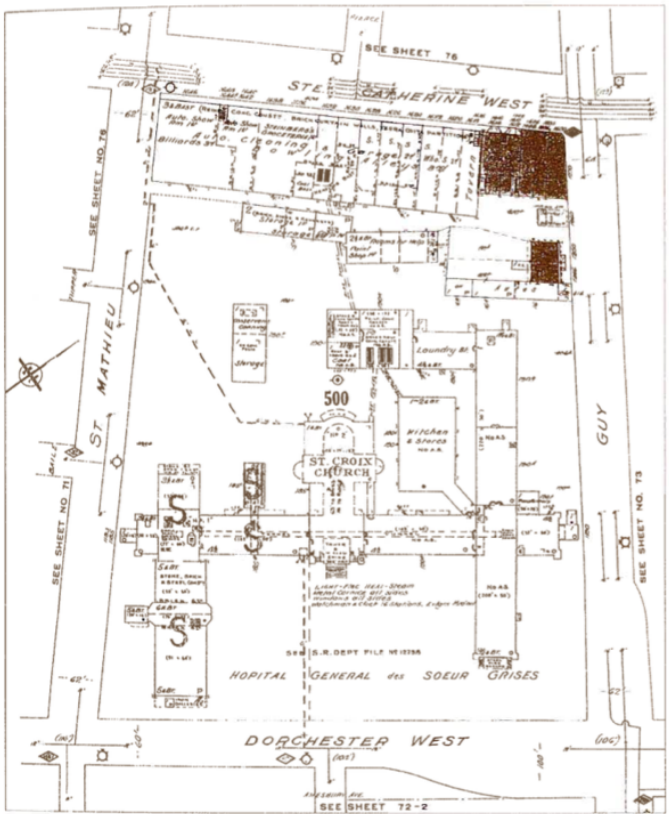


Figure 3.6 1957 detail of the Grey Nuns Motherhouse lot from the Underwriter's Survey Bureau. Source: Blouin et al., 2000.



Figure 3.7 Unauthorized dancers, November 11, 2017. Image: photo taken by the author.



Figure 3.8 Video still, Turcotte displaced by the gaze of two passersby ascending the escalator, October 27, 2017. Videography by the author.





Figure 3.9 Poster cabinets. Image: photo taken by the author.



Figure 3.10 Video still, Turcotte, Showers, and Jackson dance next to the poster cabinets, November 16, 2017. Videography by the author.



Figure 4.1 Hall Building seen from the Northwest, with Victorian Greystones, 2019. Image: photo taken by the author.



Figure 4.2 Video still, Fountain, Turcotte, and James at starting point for the improvisation, November 25, 2017. Videography by the author.



Figure 4.3 Video still, Fountain, Turcotte, and James, November 25, 2017. Videography by the author.

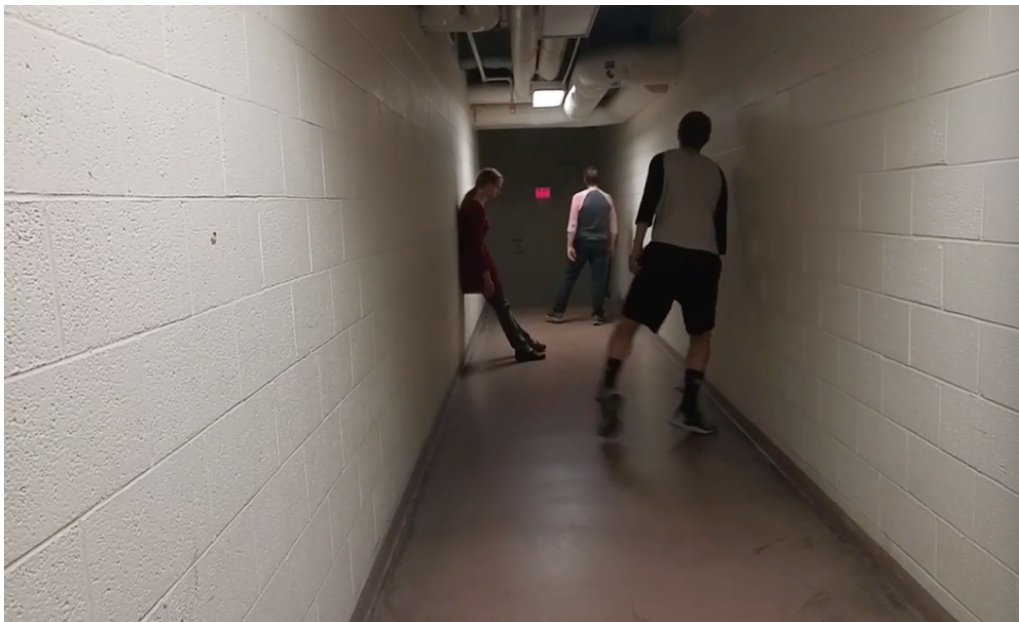


Figure 4.4 Video still, James “becoming shadow”, November 25, 2017. Videography by the author.



Figure 4.5 Video still, James contorted by the site, November 25, 2017. Videography by the author.

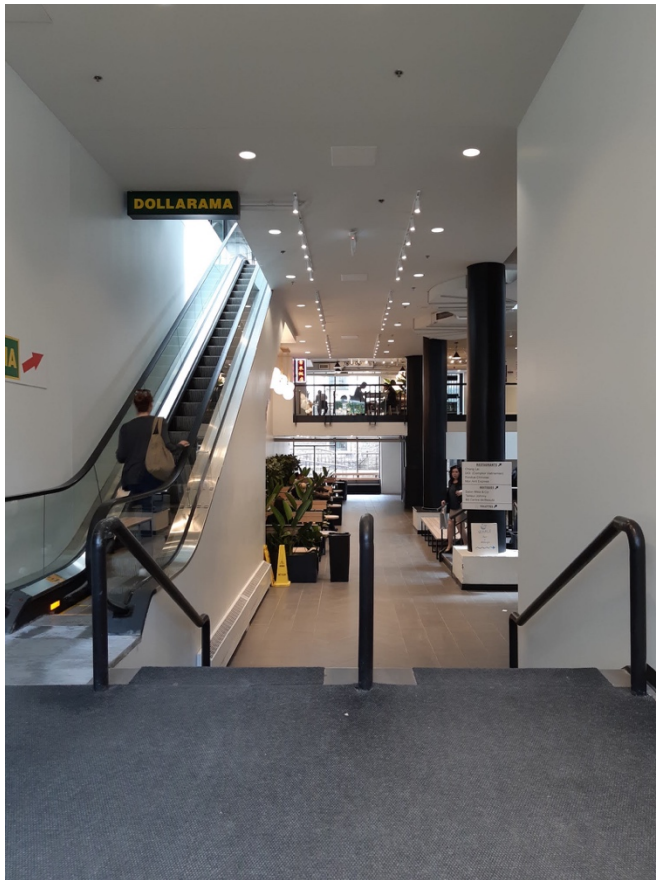


Figure 5.1 Faubourg St. Catherine entrance foyer, June 2019. Image: photo taken by the author.



Figure 5.2 Faubourg St. Catherine lounge and mural, June 2019. Image: photo taken by the author.



Figure 5.3 Faubourg St. Catherine underground corridor, June 2019. Image: photo taken by the author.

## 10 Appendix A: Table of Experiment Sites, Dates, and Participants

RESEARCH WORKSHOPS

SITE	DATE	TIME	PARTICIPANTS*	MODE
1421 Mackay	Sunday, October 1	1:00 to 2:30	Nic Turcotte	Research
1421 Mackay	Sunday, October 8	1:00 to 3:00	Nic Turcotte Matilde Loslier-Pellerin**	Research
1421 Mackay	Thursday, October 12	6:00 to 8:00	Nic Turcotte, LR	Research
1421 Mackay	Friday, October 13	5:00 to 7:00	Nic Turcotte, LR	Warm-up 5:00 to 5:45, showing
Faubourg	Sunday, October 29	1:00 to 3:00	Nic Turcotte, Guillaume Loslier-Pinard**, EB	Research
Faubourg	Saturday, November 4	3:00 to 5:00	Nic Turcotte	Research
Faubourg	Saturday, November 11	5:00 to 7:00	Nic Turcotte, Pat Harrison***, Christine Bellerose**	Research
Faubourg	Sunday, November 12	4:00 to 6:00	Nic Turcotte, Rachel Wallace***	Research
Faubourg	Thursday, November 16	6:00 to 8:00	Nic Turcotte, Rachel Wallace, Eddy Jackson***, Airin Finkelstein, Maia Iotzova***, Scarlet Fountain, SS, AM	Research
Faubourg	Friday, November 17	5:00 to 7:30	Nic Turcotte, Eddy Jackson, Airin Finkelstein, SS	Warm-up 5:00 to 6:15, showing
Hall stairwell	Saturday, November 25	5:00 to 7:00	Nic Turcotte, Greg James, Scarlet Fountain	Research
Hall stairwell	Sunday, November 26	3:00 to 5:00	Nic Turcotte, Greg James	Research
Hall stairwell	Sunday, December 3	3:00 to 5:00	Nic Turcotte, Eddy Jackson	Research
Hall stairwell	Monday, December 4	4:30 to 6:30	Nic Turcotte, Greg James	Research
Hall stairwell	Thursday, December 7	5:00 to 7:30	Nic Turcotte, Zeina Allouche***, Greg James	Warm-up 5:00 to 6:15, showing

*\*Inclusion of the participant's full name indicates that they signed an ethics form agreeing to be named in this study.*

8 actor  
 3 \*\* dancer  
 5 \*\*\* layperson  
 16 total

## 11 Appendix B: Ethics Certificates



### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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Name of Applicant: Jennifer Cressey  
Department: Faculty of Fine Arts\Theatre  
Agency: N/A  
Title of Project: Working Title: Somatic Dialogues with Inbetween  
(Social) Spaces: A Study in Embodied Performance as  
Spatial Practice  
Certification Number: 30009510  
Valid From: April 20, 2018 To: April 19, 2019

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Pfaus".

---

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY  
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

---

Name of Applicant: Jennifer Cressey

Department: Individualized program

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: Working Title: Somatic Dialogues with Inbetween  
(Social) Spaces: A Study in Embodied Performance as  
Spatial Practice

Certification Number: 30009510

Valid From: March 20, 2019 To: March 19, 2020

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

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Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee