

260826 MA Dissertation

Autoethnographic Reflections on Dance-Based Contemporary Art Practice-as-Research

Keywords: dance, movement, embodiment, tango, autoethnography

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MA Contemporary Art Practice: Public Sphere 2021-23

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A handwritten signature or scribble, possibly the initials 'EM', located in the center of the page.

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ABSTRACT

This is an autoethnographic reflection on eight years of dance-based practice-as-research within contemporary art. This practice has centred around the question: *how is it possible to communicate the inner experience of dancing through art?*

However, this dissertation is not focusing on answering this question, which is what my practice-as-research works towards. Instead, this is a reflection upon that process of inquiry, where I will examine both process and results of this journey, to develop dance-based methods and modes of artistic engagement with society that create a deep sense of connection with diverse international audiences.

GLOSSARY

Autoethnography: A research methodology of analysis and description (graphy) of personal experiences (auto) to better understand culture (ethno). Challenges established research methods through political, socially conscious acts. Uses ethnography and autobiography as both process and product.¹

Embodiment: 1. the act of embodying; 2. the state or fact of being embodied; 3. a person, being, or thing embodying a spirit, principle, abstraction, etc; incarnation; 4. something embodied.²

Practice-as-Research: Research methodology suited to art practices in academic contexts, leading to artistic output, projects, methods, and/or interdisciplinary practice as a valid research process. Provides innovative perspectives, extends existing knowledge and catalyses new knowledge practices.³

¹ Ellis, Adams, and Bochner. "Autoethnography: An Overview".

² "Embodiment Definition and Meaning." Collins English Dictionary.

³ Johannes Sjoberg. "Practice as Research - Methods@manchester.". The University of Manchester.

Public Sphere: A term coined by Jurgen Habermas, defined as "society engaged in critical public debate".⁴ Founded of participatory, inclusive approaches to democracy, where citizens meet, exchange opinions on social matters and form public opinion.

Situation: A convergence of theories on site, non-site, place, non-place, locality, public space, context and time, and as a means of rethinking the ways in which contemporary artists respond to, produce and destabilize place and locality.⁵

⁴ Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

⁵ Claire Doherty. *Situation*.

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Throughout eight years of dance-based contemporary art practice-as-research, I have held the question: *how is it possible to convey the inner experience of dancing through art?* In this dissertation, I am not trying to answer that question, because my artistic practice is where I approach this 'mirage' - continually disappearing before me, just out of reach, yet compelling me towards it. Instead, this is a space to reflect upon this practice-as-research, using an autoethnographic, personal perspective to understand the potential for how this body of practice-as-research could progress in the future.

To achieve this, I will move chronologically through Art Practice-as-Research, looking at selected pieces and processes from this body of dance-based practice-as-research, dating between 2014 to 2022, to achieve a logical, accumulative understanding of this process of inquiry. This includes images, videos, artworks, photos of sketchbooks, cahiers, paper and pen journals, screenshots of digital journals, and at times, illegible Notes to Self. The next section, Dance Practice-as-Research, will move thematically through the internal, personal, lived experience of dancing, examining how this inspires, informs and supports my current and future practice, before concluding this dissertation.

This autoethnographic, personal, introspective approach can make a meaningful contribution to the study of public sphere because this methodology is founded on the principle that personal experiences help understand society, with the aim of creating positive social impact. Society is made up of individuals: unique personal histories, stories, experiences, collective consciousness, and inner journeys. This process of self-reflexive inquiry enables me to generate informed insights into creative practice; into what I believe it means to be human; and into intimacy between complete strangers. By better understanding how dance can elicit

connection to the Self, to others, and to society, this will enable my work to move towards dissolving the barriers we surround ourselves with, through affective dance-based contemporary art in the public sphere.

A key motivation to explore dance, social dance and public sphere is that in this paradoxically [dis]connected, fragmented world, our minds and bodies are rarely in sync. Our body is in one space / time - but our mind is in another.⁶ We can connect to anyone in the world in a fraction of a second but find it increasingly difficult to connect to ourselves and to the moment, and even to others around us. This issue has only increased post-lockdown,⁷ but it has been a growing symptom of the contemporary world we live in, even since before we had to lock ourselves away from each other. We are bombarded by millions of messages from innumerable media sources,⁸ often telling us we are not enough, that we need something external to ourselves, or that the world is coming crashing down around us. This often happens while our bodies are in stasis in our increasingly sedentary lifestyles: at our

⁶ Ann Cooper Albright interview: "Finding Ground in an Unstable World".

⁷ "Before Covid-19, 1 in 5 people reported being often or always lonely. Now, 41 per cent of UK adults report feeling lonelier since lockdown. 31% of UK adults often feel alone, as though they have no one to turn to. 1/3 UK adults haven't had a meaningful conversation in the last week. A lack of meaningful contact ... exacerbated loneliness during the crisis."

British Red Cross. "Life after Lockdown Tackling Loneliness".

⁸ "People living in Western culture are blasted with advertisements and slogans constantly. We hear commercials on radio and television at regular intervals. Ads stare back at us from billboards, buses, taxis, cars, flyers, posters, benches and even hang from the stall doors of public restrooms. Commercials encircle nearly every page on the internet. Logos reflect off of people's outfits throughout the day."

Rick Carp. "Ads Are Polluting Our World".

desks, while travelling, at home, staring at luminous flat screens. We look ahead to futures that we may never know, chasing ideals that may not fit us, dreams that may not even be our own. We are more depressed and anxious than ever; and as is so often the case, disconnected to what may be just below the surface of ourselves.⁹ Amid this disconnection and dislocation,¹⁰ dance brings the body/mind into unison, into synchronicity with itself, into synchronicity with others, and with global communities and cultures. Dance transcends societal boundaries and social norms. It enables connection between people from all walks of life, even if they are strangers.

This body of practice-as-research first examines the process of creating dance-based contemporary art, and later considers how social dance reconnects a disconnected world through personal and collective art experiences. This study will focus on the lessons and realisations along the way, and how these support, inform and underpin current and future work.

⁹ “If modernization correlates with an increased risk of depression, then what are the specific components of modern, western culture contributing to this phenomenon? A decline in physical well-being ... Disease-promoting changes in modern daily living include growing waistlines ... poor diet and physical inactivity ... inadequate sunlight exposure and sleep. A toxic social environment ... increasing competition, inequality, and social isolation ... Each of these aspects of the contemporary environment is associated with diseases of modernity”.

Brandon H Hidaka, “Depression as a Disease of Modernity.”

¹⁰ Miwon Kwon. *One Place After Another*.

ART PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH

2014-15: ((e))MOTION PROJECT

((e))Motion is the first project where my work evolved into becoming a dance-based practice, exploring effects and affects of motion on emotion. I researched the work of various artists, dancers, architects and writers in order to find potential points of departure for a range of dance-based experimentation. This process allowed me to 'stand on the shoulders of giants' by understanding how artists before me have used dance, body-oriented and movement-based practices within their work. I began experimenting with their techniques and approaches to create work of my own, which includes a body of dance-based practice-as-research working with large-scale gestural drawing, video, kineographs, installation, ambisonic sound, painting, sculpture, performance, photography and 3D printing. This will be the focus of the following sections, where I intend to move succinctly through each of these lessons, towards a closer reflection on more recent practice-as-research, which will follow this *((e))Motion* project.

BILL WADMAN

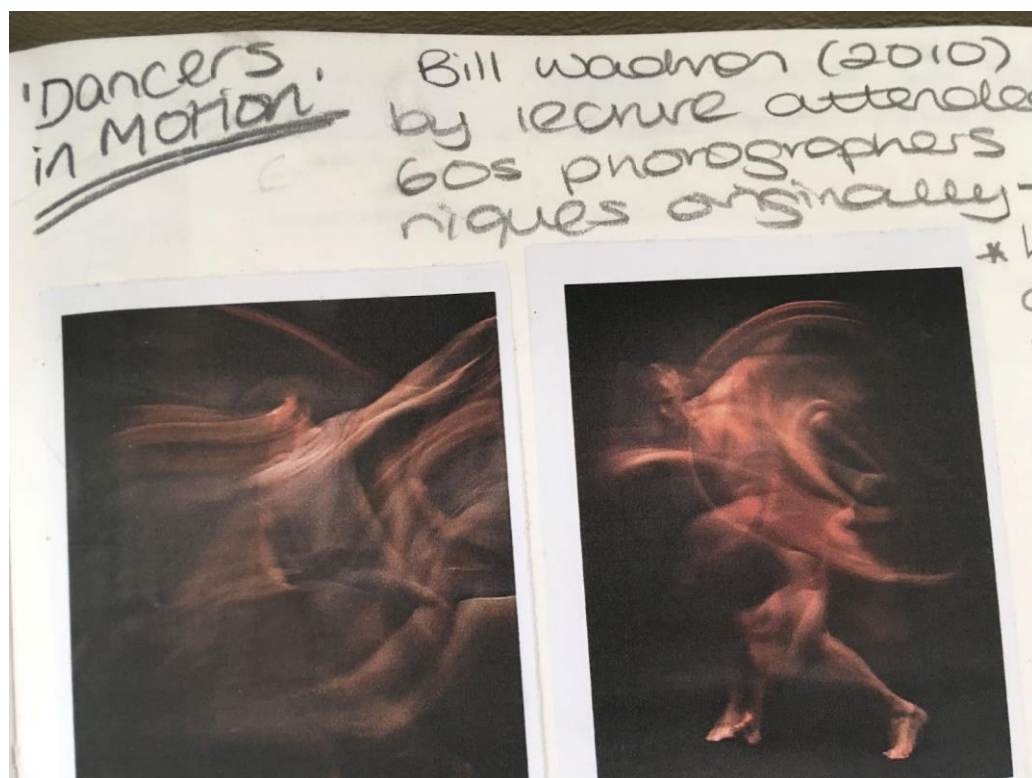


Fig. 1: Bill Wadman research. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

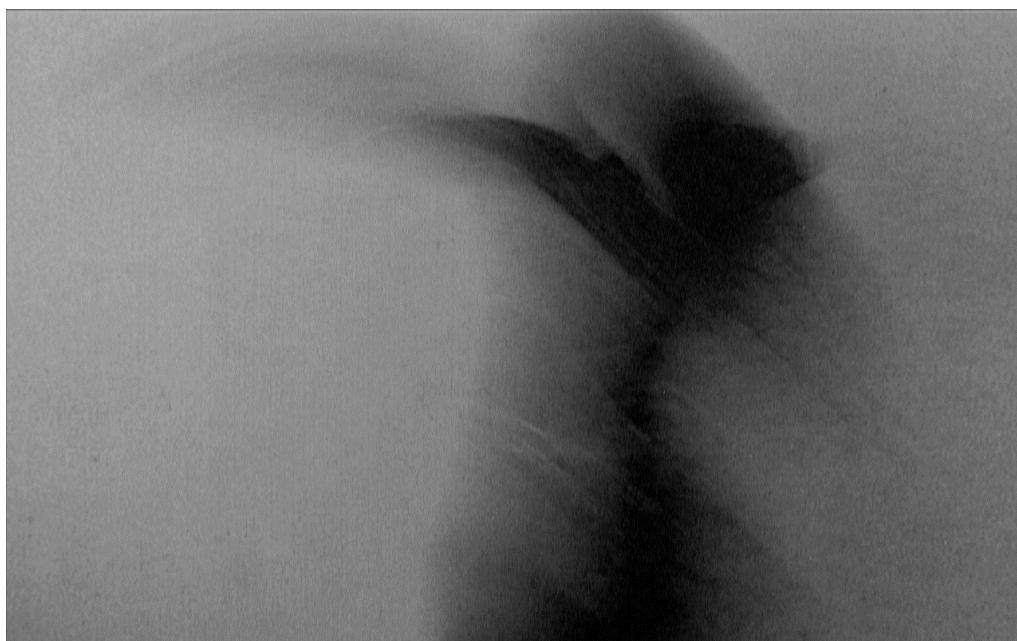


Fig. 2: Motion blur. Emma Boutet.



Fig. 3: Motion blur layers. Emma Boutet.

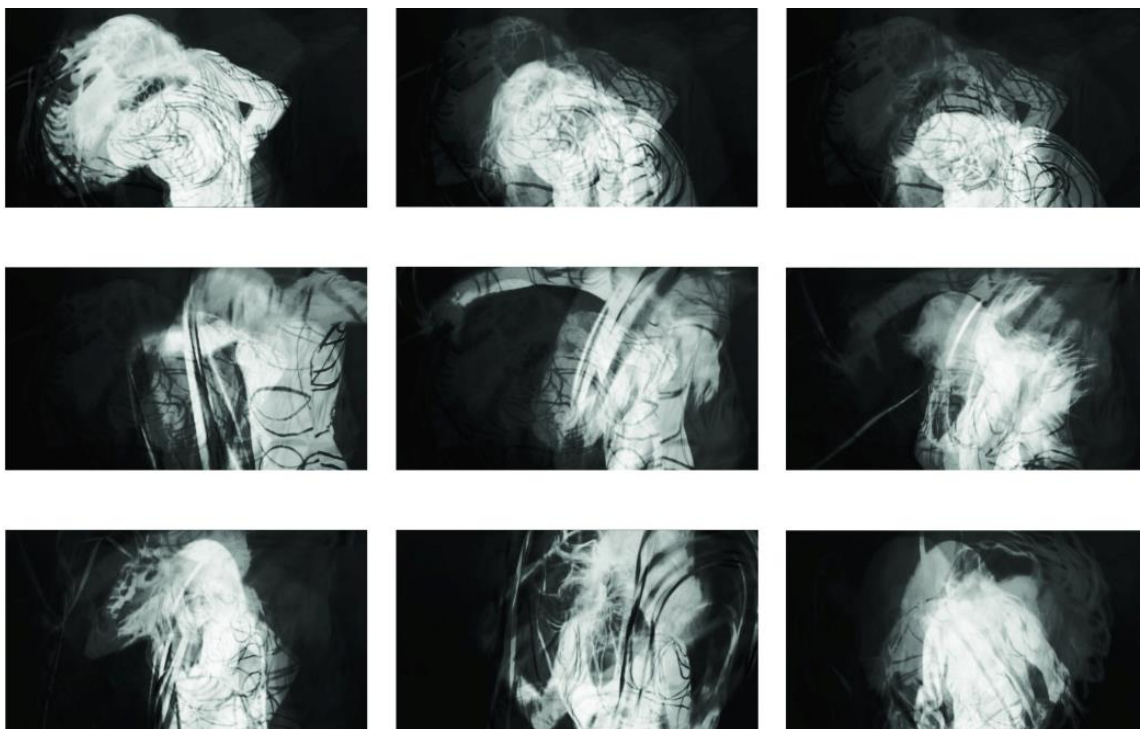


Fig. 4: Motion blur video stills. Emma Boutet.

This practice-as-research process started with Bill Wadman's slow-shutter, long-exposure photographs of dancers – a process which inverted the usual methods of photographing a dancer. The more energy used in performance; the less energy revealed in the photograph. The more they danced, the less they could be seen or captured - only a blur would remain where the dancer had moved, instead of the clarity of stillness. I chose to work with video for the first time, instead of static mediums and methods of representation, to capture dance in motion and express the intrinsic qualities of movement. Videos became a viable method of describing the visual attributes and qualities of dance, despite having limitations of how much they can describe the abstract, intangible, ephemeral quality of dance. This is something I keep coming back to again and again as something that I must wrestle with within my work, in a perpetual realisation of how impossible this task may be yet how impossible it is for me to let it go.

SUSAN FOSTER | RACHEL SWEENEY

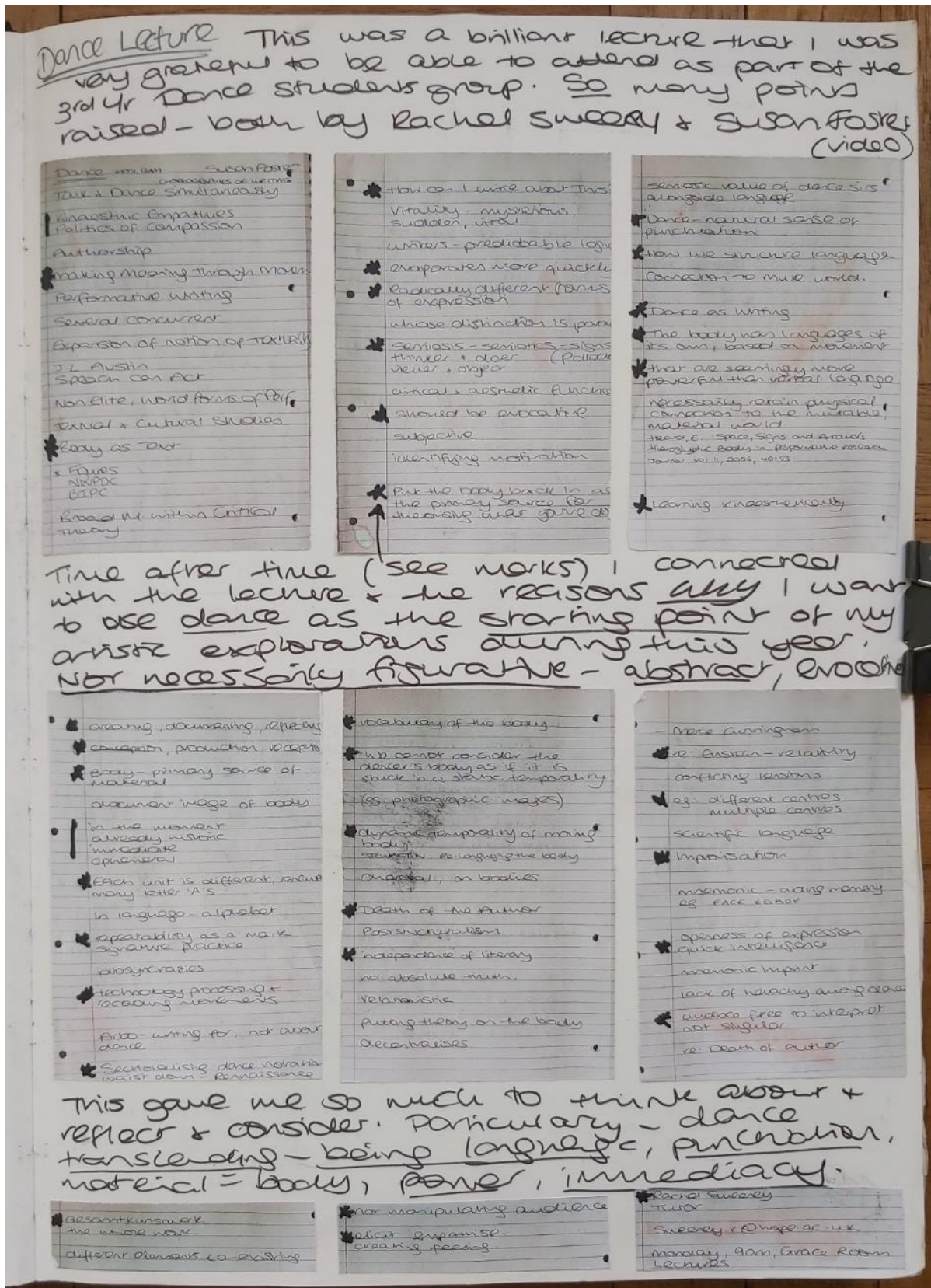


Fig. 5: Sweeney | Foster notes. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

I attended *Choreographies of Writing*, a lecture discussing choreographic and linguistic approaches from which to consider dance.¹¹ Key points included how, in dance, there are many letter 'A's in the vocabulary of the body; choreographies of writing; kinaesthetic empathies; making meaning through movement; body as text / dance as writing; body's languages of its own, based on movement; natural senses of punctuation in dancing; and how we are more powerful than verbal or written language. There was an emphasis on bringing the body back as a primary source of material for theorising practice; the importance of learning kinaesthetically; and how we cannot consider the dancer's body as though suspended in stasis, stuck in static temporality - as with dance photography, paintings, sculptures and 2D mark-making.

This lecture also brought up ideas surrounding quick intelligence; relational qualities of dance; eliciting empathy and creating feeling; and the freedom of the audience to interpret dance in their own way, not manipulating or prescribing interpretation. These ideas stay with me eight years later, have had a distinct impact in how I engage with my practice-as-research. This lecture is part of why I am writing my dissertation autoethnographically - where I can look within, to my own embodied experiences and kinaesthetic learning. While engaging with the work of artists, dancers, philosophers, writers and researchers, I am not obligated to these sources to provide me with information about my body or dancing that I can seek within.

¹¹ Dr Rachel Sweeney. "Choreographies of Writing".

DAVID GERE | ANN COOPER-ALBRIGHT

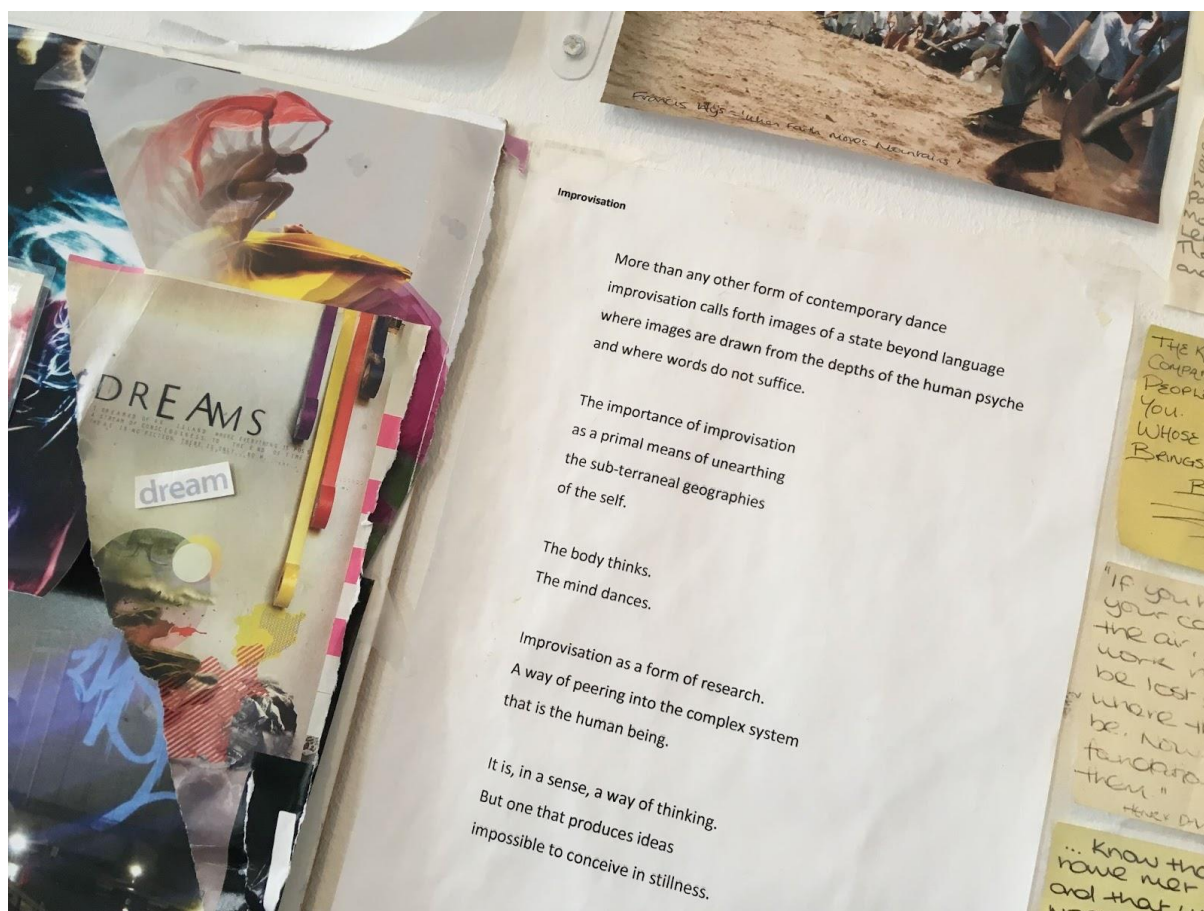


Fig. 6: Notes on Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader.¹²

*¹² “More than any other form of contemporary dance,
improvisation calls forth images of a state beyond language,
where images are drawn from the depths of the human psyche,
and where words do not suffice.*

*The importance of improvisation as a primal means
of unearthing the sub-terranean
geographies of the Self.*

*The body thinks,
the mind dances.*

*Improvisation as a form of research.
A way of peering into the complex system
that is the human being.*

*It is, in a sense, a way of “thinking”,
but one that produces ideas
impossible to conceive in stillness.” ¹²*

I began researching choreography vs improvisation in more depth, giving me greater clarity that my practice is rooted in the improvisational; in dancing with the unknown, where music and the moment come together to inform each movement, in each second. It became apparent to me that I am not interested in dance from a preconceived, planned or mechanical perspective of dance choreography. One of the key dance scholars I came across in this research stage was Ann Cooper-Albright, who included an essay by David Gere in her book *Taken by Surprise*.¹³ From the moment I read it, every line of this excerpt has had its own distinct significance and relevance to my work, and I have carried these words within me ever since: in my mind, on the walls of my house and my studio, in conversations, notes, messages, Zoom sessions and meetings. These concepts remain a core influence in my artistic practice and resonate with me now more than ever.

¹³ Ann Cooper-Albright (ed.), David Gere. *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*.

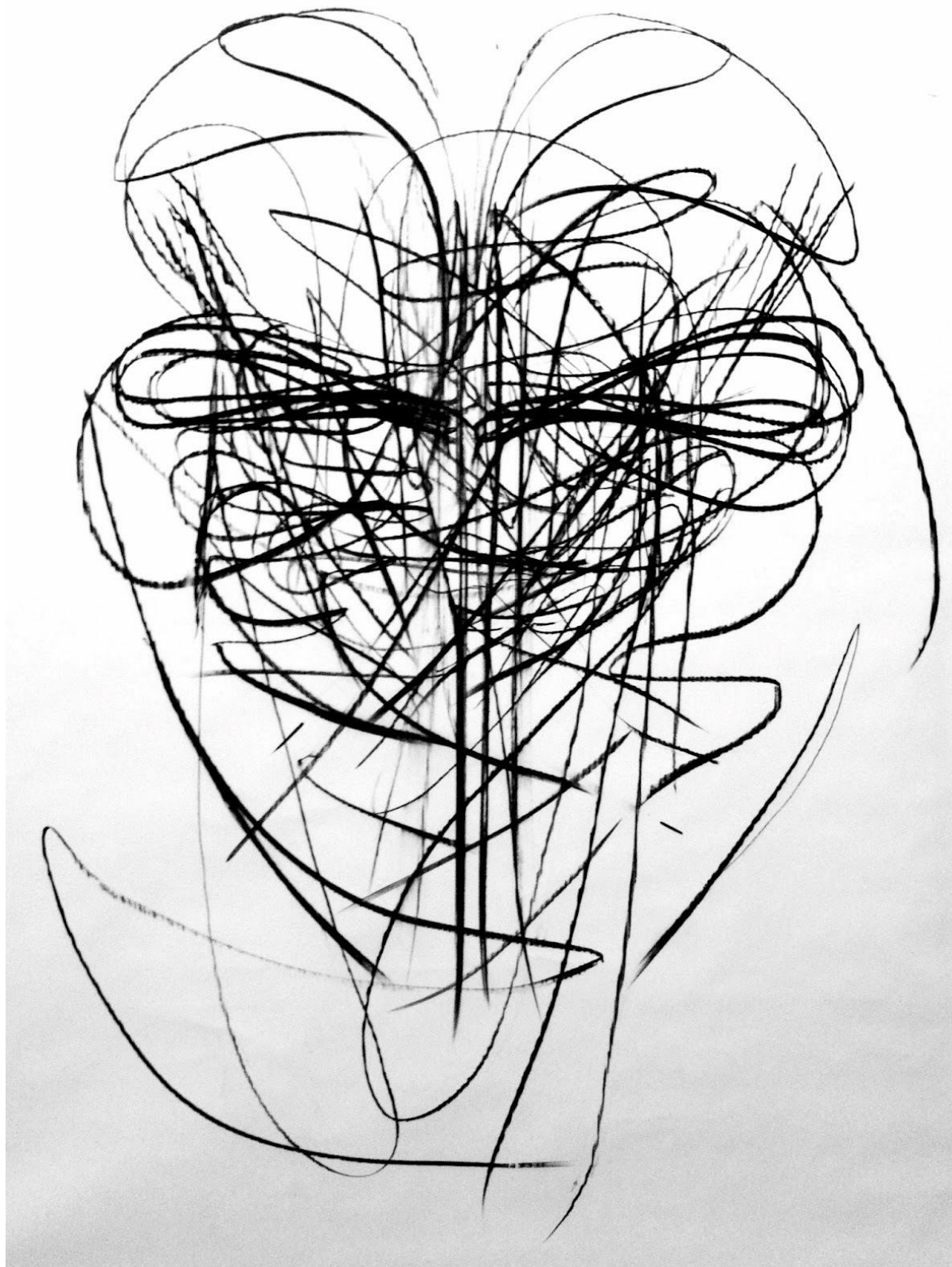


Fig. 9: *Face Your Self*. Emma Boutet.

Trisha Brown's postmodern choreographic practice informed elements of my practice-as-research through mark-making, paint, ink and charcoal. Creating *Face* while listening to a specific piece of music, each mark was made as a response to sound. On stepping away from the piece, I immediately saw a face looking back at me, which was the most memorable aspect of the process; where something arose within the work, with a life of its own, which I had no way of predicting or expecting, leading me to research phenomenology, authorship, and response.

Although these gestural drawings and paintings are dynamic in their marks, they mean nothing to me when compared with my lived experience of dancing. They represent mechanics of human movement, but they do not convey the soulful human experience in that moment, and do not reflect the true nature of what I am really exploring. Although I could produce many of these kinds of works every day, I feel it would completely miss the mark in terms of the deeper, embodied, inner, human qualities of dance that I am really concerned with.

I also noticed my inability to truly dance when creating these 2-dimensional works, because of the barrier of working on a hard, flat surface. Dance is 3-dimensional, not restrictive, unyielding, and unmoving; so, when an attempt is made to restrain it to this flattened mode of expression, I cannot fully engage with, or express, the act of dancing. I also felt an unwelcome, ego-based performative quality creeping in, leading to a feeling of unease, not intuition. From this point, I started to look at other mediums and dimensions that could be more fruitful to explore.

MATERIALS

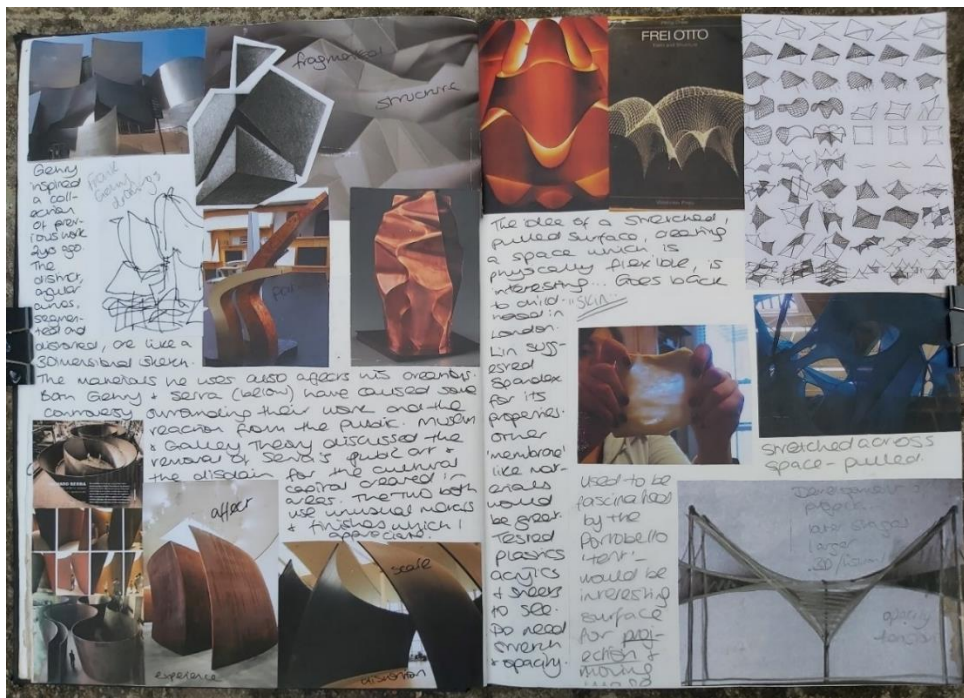


Fig. 10: Frank Gehry and Richard Serra research. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

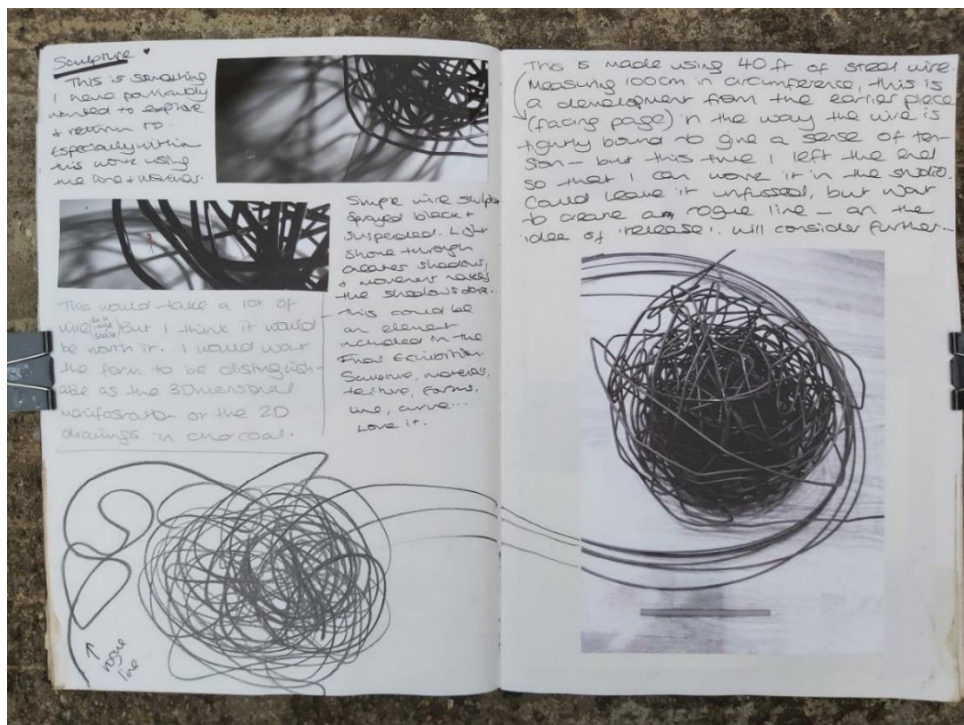


Fig. 11: Sculpture experiments. ((e))Motion sketchbook.



Fig. 12: *Tangled*. Emma Boutet.



Fig. 13: *Making Moves*. Emma Boutet.



Fig. 14: *Manifest*. Emma Boutet.

Moving from 2D to 3D, I began to explore possibilities of physical materials and sculpture articulating and manifesting dance-based artwork. I considered the body as an architectural form; observing buildings as lines dancing in space; noting similarities between drawings of dancing, and Frank Gehry's expressive, fragmented, deconstructivist architectural drawings. I researched resistant materials before creating sculptures that trace imaginary dance trajectories in space. In *Manifest* (Fig. 14), I created a hybrid work, where lines in a painting manifest as a 3D form, expressing my 2D to 3D explorations. These experiments came nowhere near solving my research question but did enable me to move a step closer to it. I began contemplating elasticity of time and space, while researching flexible materials that can be stretched across spaces for dancer interaction and/or as a projection surface. This research fuelled questions on sculpture's ability to communicate something as alive, vital and dynamic as dance, driving my work forward.

Another aspect of this research was examining controversy surrounding Richard Serra's monumental, architectural sculptures¹⁴ (lower left of Fig. 10), raising questions surrounding politics of public art and site-specificity; making me think more to about the places and people just outside the gallery, the studio, and the physical and metaphorical walls we surround ourselves and our work with.

¹⁴ Phillip Barcio. "Why Was Richard Serra's Tilted Arc So Controversial?"

NOBUHIRO NAKANISHI

Fig. 15: *Reticulated Time*. Nobuhiro Nakanishi.

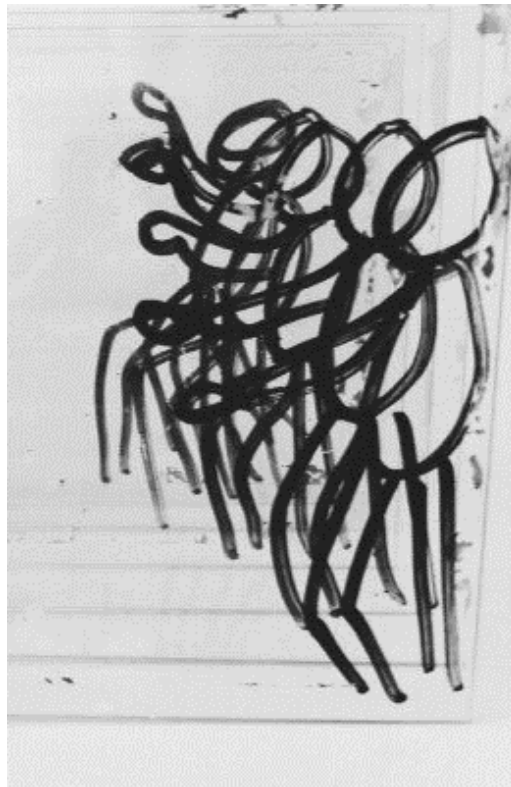


Fig. 16: *Motion Layers*. Emma Boutet.

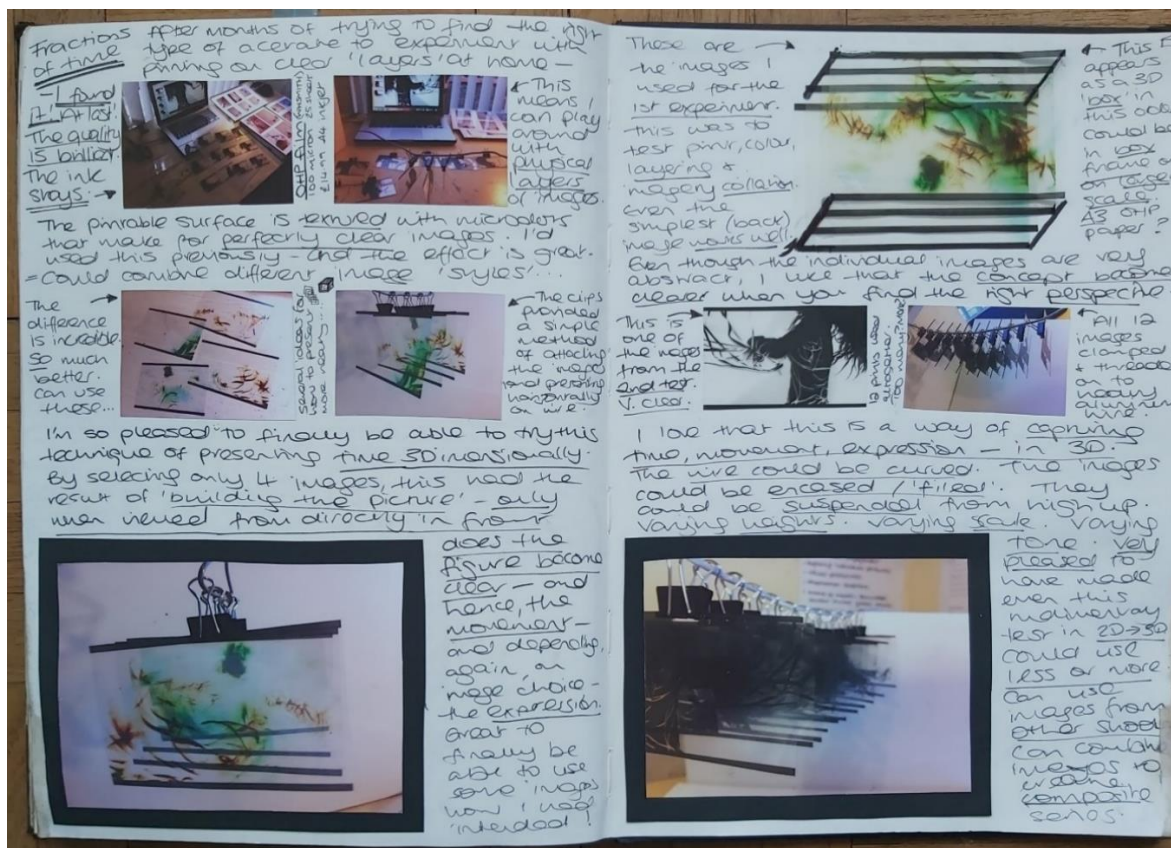


Fig. 17: Fractions of Time experiments. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

Nakanishi's work is concerned with sensorial observation and an internal understanding of objects / subjects.¹⁵ His work is closely connected to perceptual realms of objects, environments, space, time, and change. His sensitivity to sensory perception and transposition from the perspectives of both the artist and the viewer was something that caught my attention. Nakanishi creates a sense of movement between the viewer's experience of an artwork and the artwork itself by capturing the flow of time and spatial change. His ability to bring movement into the experience of viewing a work is something that relates to my attempts to capture and convey movement and considers some of the issues I have with creating 2D works that are only visible from one angle – which goes against the essential nature of dance. Nakanishi's focus on the viewer experience, their own movement, and their spatial interaction with a piece of work is an aspect that has stayed with me throughout the years since I discovered this artist.

¹⁵ "This is not about simply looking at something. It is about maximising the use of our nerves, memory, and sense of touch to their fullest, using our entire body as an organ to perceive."

--Nobuhiro Nakanishi

His layered, transparent photographs, taken over a gradual period of time, have also greatly influenced my practice, with the nature of opacity/transparency becoming a recurring theme in my work, particularly in video and image-based pieces. His visual fragmentation of time is represented 3-dimensionally using photographs on transparent acrylic panels in their temporal sequence, allowing slight variations in each frame. Nakanishi takes the alternative approach by creating motion by inviting the viewer to move around the work, and to feel the effects of their movement on their sensorial perception of the work. Although I admire these works, and intend to create more works using similar techniques, I find the subject matter, the stillness, the minimal aesthetic does not align with the nature of my practice-as-research.

ANTONY GORMLEY

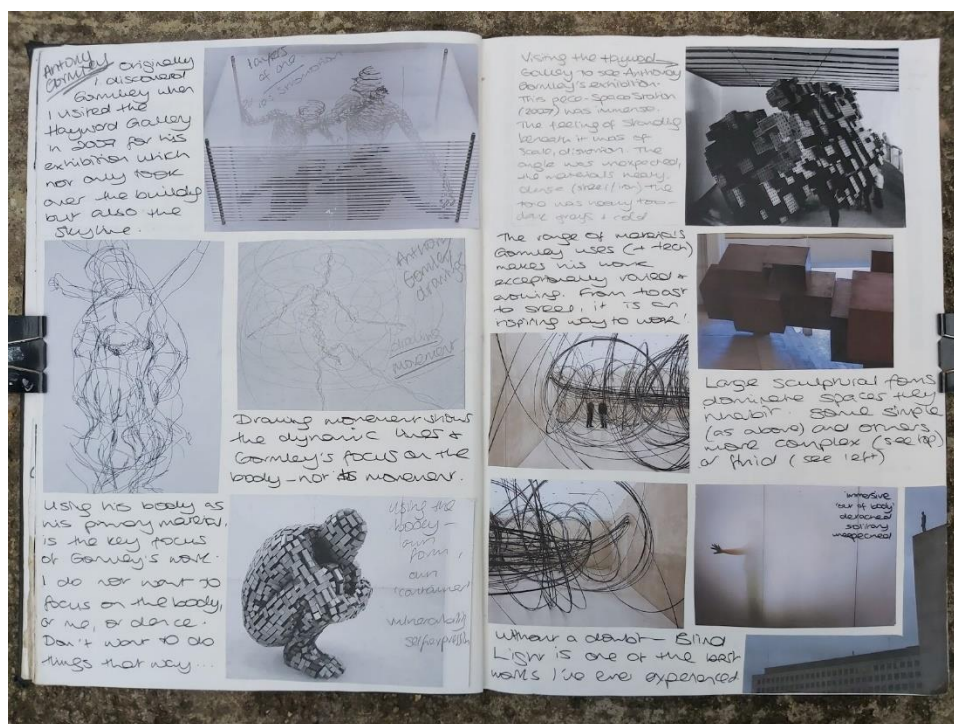
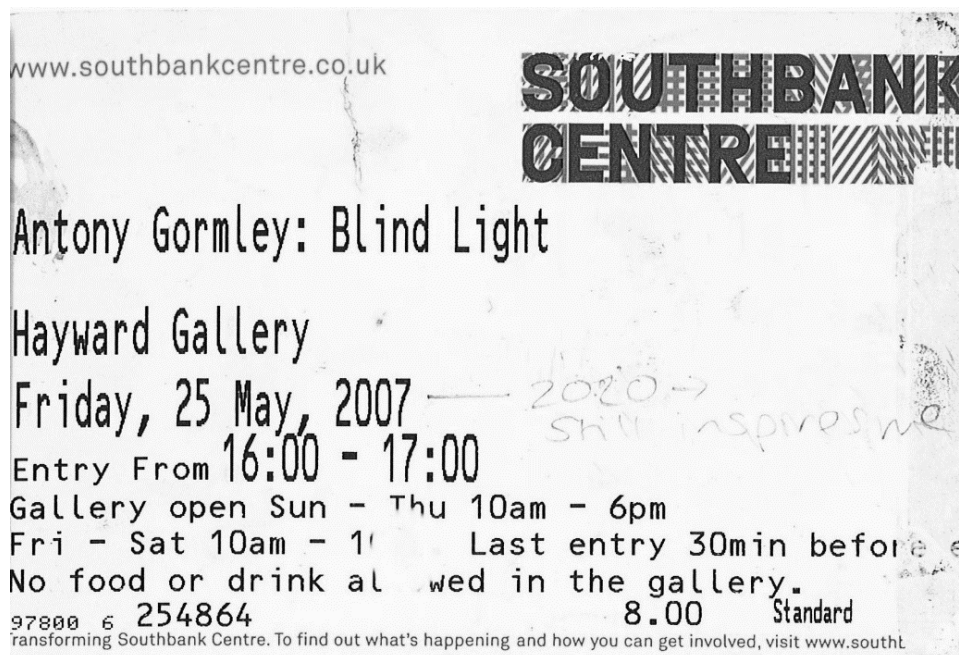


Fig. 18: Antony Gormley research. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

Fig. 19: My ticket for *Blind Light*.

By creating this exceptional
experience - Gormley created
 something memorable.
 This was an out of / full body
 experience that gave a lasting
memory. I have never + maybe
will never experience this again.
 That's something I love about
this kind of art. It is something
 you experience with all senses.
 It makes you feel something new,
something unforgettable. You don't
just look at it. You become
part of it. It transcends boundaries.
 It makes you both lose + find yourself.

Fig. 20: Personal reflection on visiting *Blind Light*.

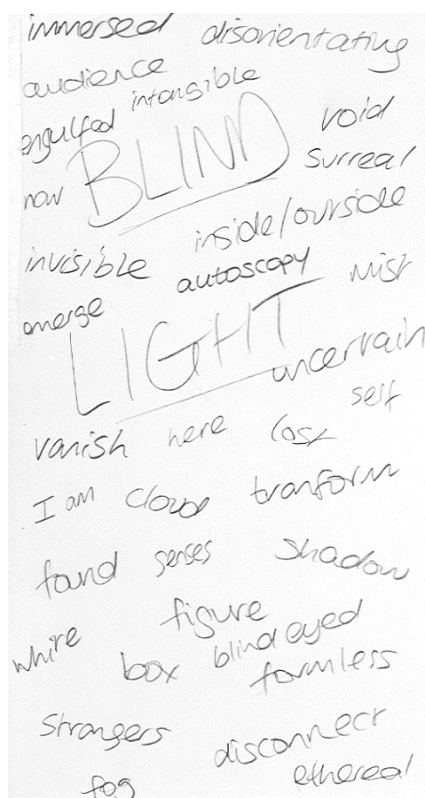


Fig. 21: Word cloud for *Blind Light*.

Antony Gormley's work explores embodiment and how we inhabit our bodies as sculptural, yet ephemeral spaces in both physical and abstract worlds. His concepts are informed by 'enforced sleep' as a child,¹⁶ making him feel that he was an entity trapped in the vessel we call a 'body'. The fact that feeling led to a lifelong body of work is part of my rationale for this autoethnographic approach in my writing and practice-as-research. Experiencing *Blind Light* in 2007 was unforgettable, and still influences my work today.¹⁷ Its sensorial, experiential immersion is directly aligned to my personal experience of dancing: being completely connected to my body; my mind focusing on immediate sensory inputs and responses; playing with the unknown; being able to lose myself - as when completely immersed in a state of flow - the room, the world and any worries in it melt away. This piece gave me the confidence to aspire to convey and evoke these feelings in viewers of my work.

With *Blind Light*, the embodied, out-of-body, thought provoking, sensory qualities of this work make it extremely memorable. I believe we remember what we feel with our full bodies, and I always find that when I have a full-body experience, the memory outlives the billions of visuals I am confronted with every day. Gormley has had great influence over my later explorations in experiential, participatory, immersive, affective, embodied practice-as-research, which I will discuss later.

¹⁶ The Art Story: Antony Gormley.

¹⁷ *Blind Light*, Southbank Centre. Hayward Gallery. London.

HEATHER HANSEN

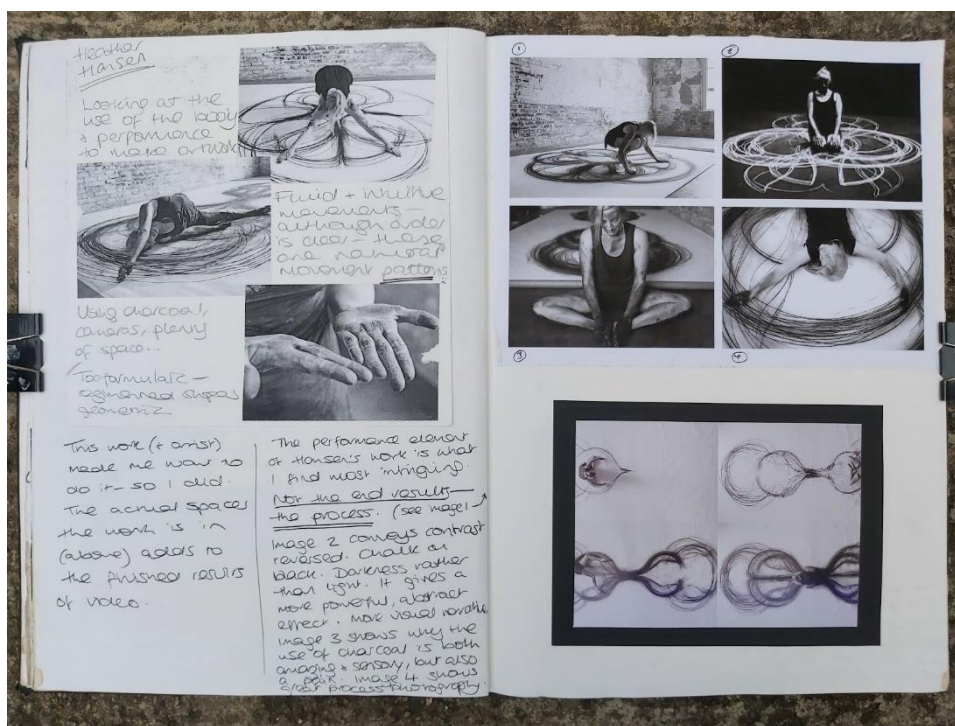


Fig. 22: Heather Hansen research. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

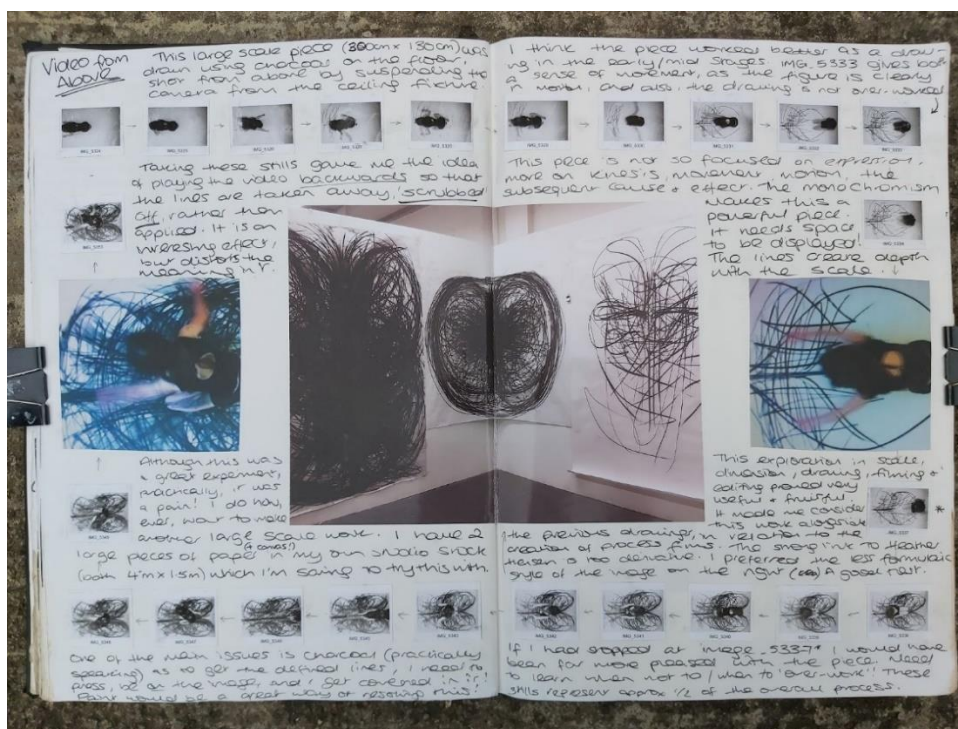


Fig. 23: Overhead video stills. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

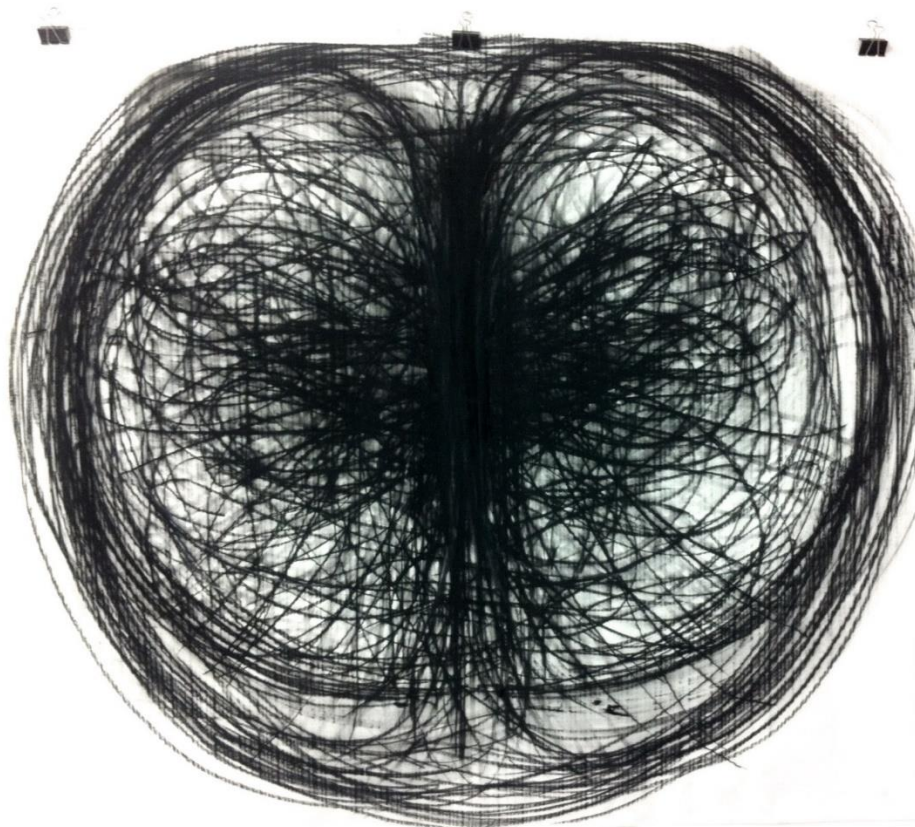


Fig. 24: *Neuromotion*. Emma Boutet.



Fig. 25: BA Final Exhibition. Emma Boutet.

Heather Hansen works with the body and performance to create large scale gestural drawings in charcoal. What I found most intriguing in Hansen's work was not the end results, but the transparency of the creative process, made visible through video and photographic documentation of the artist's own experience of making these works. I experimented with similar techniques to develop a series of pieces, using an overhead camera, drawing to music, and drawing with my eyes closed; enabling me to avoid visual interference, rationality, judgement, and evaluation in the process of creating; to make sensory space to allow myself to be led by intuition and auditory response, to interpret the music in the way I would when dancing.

The resulting pieces have a strong presence in an exhibition space, being of a large scale with heavy, dark charcoal lines, creating a sense of movement and energy. The use of charcoal as a material allowed physicality, by 'pushing' and 'pulling' the charcoal across the surface, and the immediate tactile quality of its darkness - which quickly became a nightmare to work with when I found myself covered in it. However, this experimentation highlighted the mechanical aspects to this process: using the body as an organic instrument, creating repeated patterns of movement (as with *Can't Help Myself* by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu, exploring how machines could replace the artist's hand), as opposed to the infinite possibilities of the true nature of dance. In my sketchbook, I describe these as being too rigid, contained, formulaic, regimented and too geometric for what it is I am looking to do within my practice. This emphasised that we are *not* just our body; a sum of biomechanics, movements, shapes and marks it makes. We are so much more.

This active process of practice-as-research heightened my desire to reveal the deeper human dimensions of dance: the soul, connection, inner experience, the places it takes us, the places we can take ourselves - within ourselves.

EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE

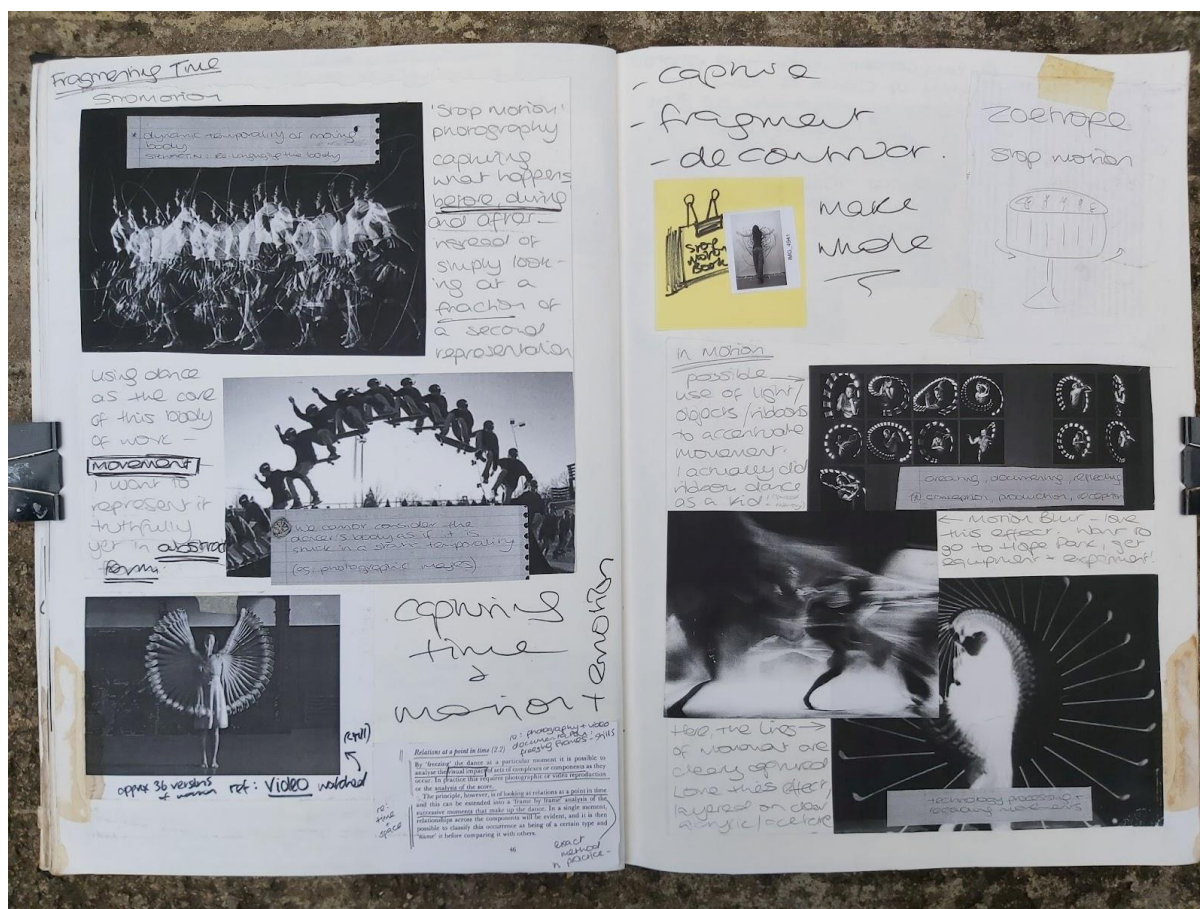


Fig. 26: Fragmenting Time research. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

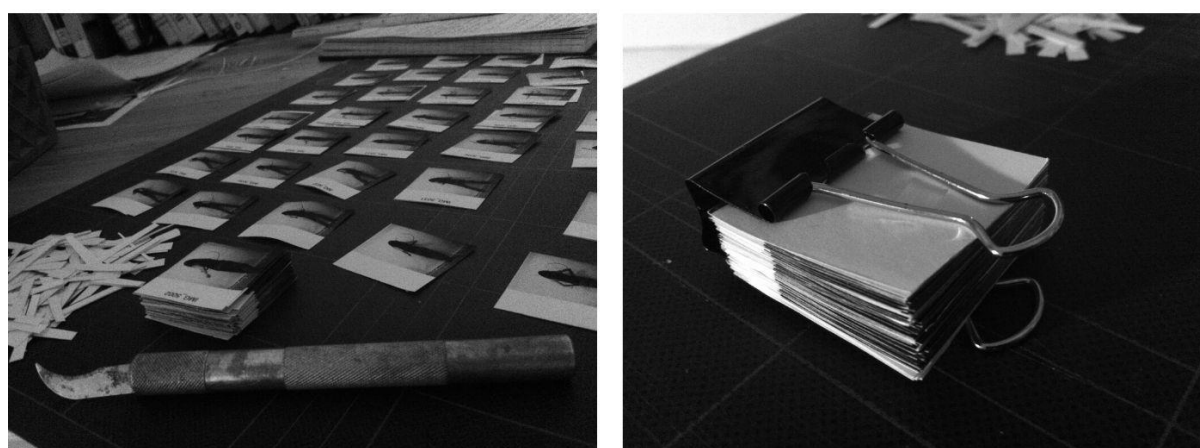


Fig. 27: Stop motion kinegraph. Emma Boutet.

Eadweard Muybridge's pioneering photography involves fragmented temporality of movement visually represented through stop motion and photographic techniques. These allow the viewer to witness relations in time, observing what happened before, during and after the shot that would normally be seen. This capturing of trajectories in time and movement have significantly influenced my process, including digital layering, motion traces and fragmentation techniques within visual works.

I experimented with using a series of video stills from other filmed experiments to create a miniature kineograph (stop-motion flick-book) to transform frozen images into perceived movement. This allowed even the still image to move beyond itself, trapping and visually communicating time and motion in a way that represents the subject of dance, the movement of time and the body, and spatial trajectories. However, this still does not speak to the experiential, felt qualities of dancing, and so, although it has since become a useful creative technique, the search goes on...

GINA CZARNECKI

Fig. 28: *Nascent*. Gina Czarnecki.

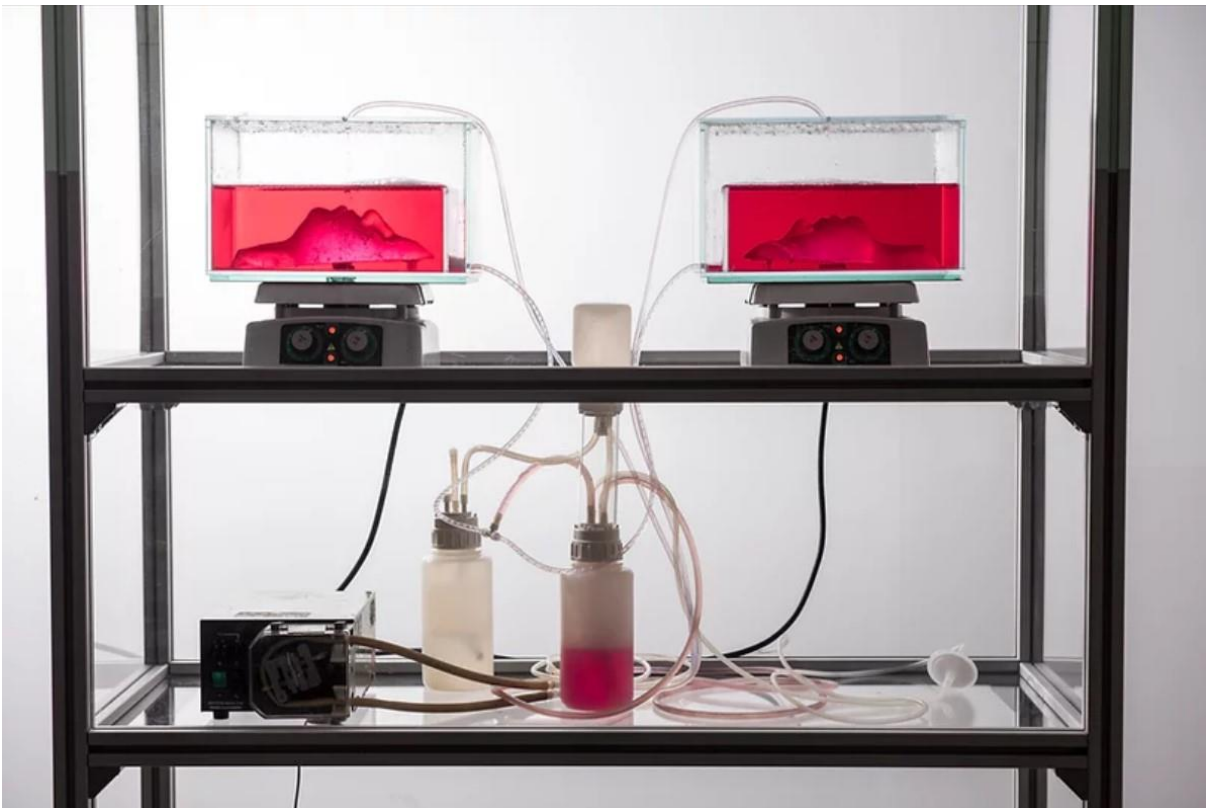


Fig. 29: *Heirloom* bioreactor studio setup. Gina Czarnecki.

My research has also been influenced by Gina Czarnecki, whose art-science projects involve movement traces, glitching, visual interventions, video, dance, and multidisciplinary collaboration.¹⁸ A core aspect of Czarnecki's process is that her field of artistic vision encompasses science, ethics, regional planning, care, medicine, dance, SFX, craft, forensics and technology. She gave me a series of sensor-based stethoscope recordings of a dancer, including their heartbeat, breath, internal sounds and footfalls. Although this brought an inner dimension to the body, and I now use body-based audio elements in my videos; this almost clinical, scientific quality is not the aspect of the inner experience I am seeking to convey. I want to maintain the soul of a human being dancing, because the most important things about being human are invisible.

Soon after completing my BA, I became Czarnecki's project manager and assistant, working on *Heirloom*,¹⁹ while managing 13 other projects. The international scope of her artwork meant we were working with people in Copenhagen, New York, Denmark, South Korea, Germany and Australia. This gave great insight into her collaborative methods of working, which includes socially engaged relational work

¹⁸ "The dancers' gestures and bodies, poised and isolated, gradually become intertwined, indistinguishable and frenetic - turbulent, mutated fragments that form and reform. A few frames of internal body image blast in as subliminal interventions or as momentary abstractions, leaving fleeting impressions of parallel structures - organisms, mutant animals, ghosts, mechanical insertions. The image processing creates new traces of movement that appear as blips in transmission or digital 'vibrations' where the body and its image tune-in, momentarily, then become 'unplugged' leaving behind traces of skin-print as after-images."

Gina Czarnecki. *Nascent*. Artist statement.

¹⁹ Gina Czarnecki. *Heirloom*. <https://www.ginaczarnecki.com/heirloom>

involving long term international co-creation with diverse individuals, experts, participants, and organisations as part of her contemporary art projects. This opened my eyes to possibilities of art project development, glocal collaboration and connection, regardless of location.²⁰

When Czarnecki became the lead artist for developing an Arts Council England Ambition Award for Liverpool, I supported this process from the inside; meeting with members of LARC (Liverpool Arts Regeneration Consortium), artists, creators, and ACE staff. This gave me in-depth understanding of the intricate networks of organisations, educational establishments, creatives, and change-makers in cities and across the globe; and the direct impact this can have on people living in and around the city. It highlighted the importance of art that connects to audiences, connects people to places, has social value, and that embodies true cultural democracy.²¹ This was invaluable knowledge of how to develop a viable artistic practice that encompasses ambitious, potentially national and international projects; involving and reaching diverse people, while managing a project's development and collaborating with others to achieve artistic and societal goals.

²⁰ Glocal: describing the seamless integration between the local and global; the comprehensive connectedness produced by travel, business, and communications; willingness and ability to think globally and act locally. 'The concept of glocalization captures the dynamic, contingent, and two-way dialectic between the global and the local'

Oxford Reference.

²¹ Francois Matarasso. *A Restless Art*.

VIDEO

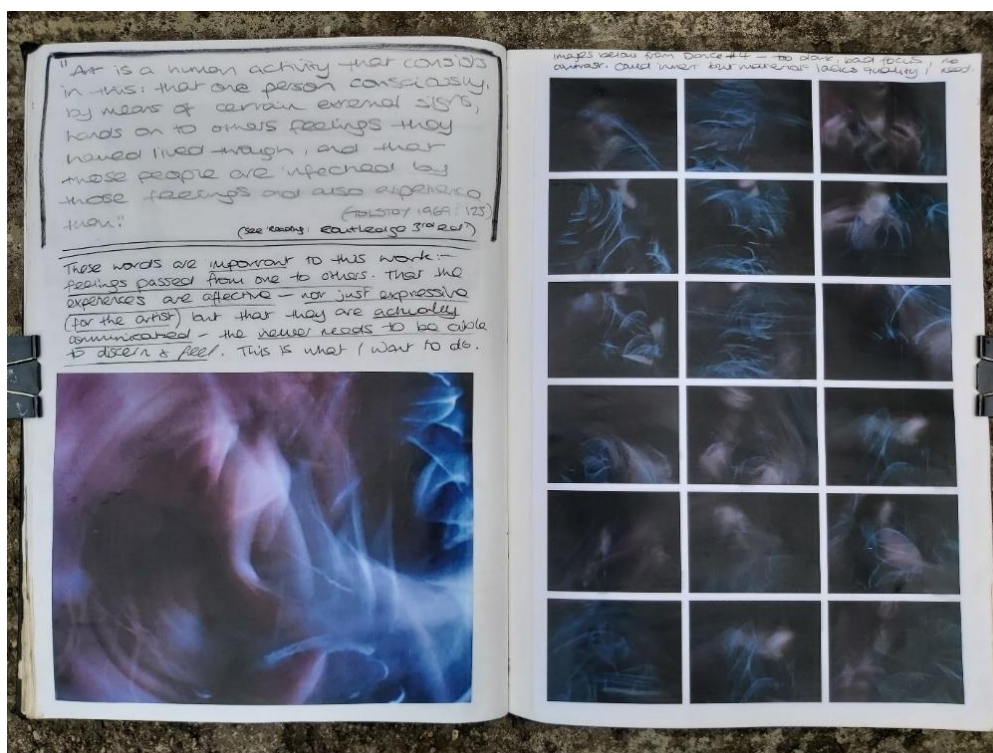


Fig. 30: Video motion stills. ((e))Motion sketchbook.

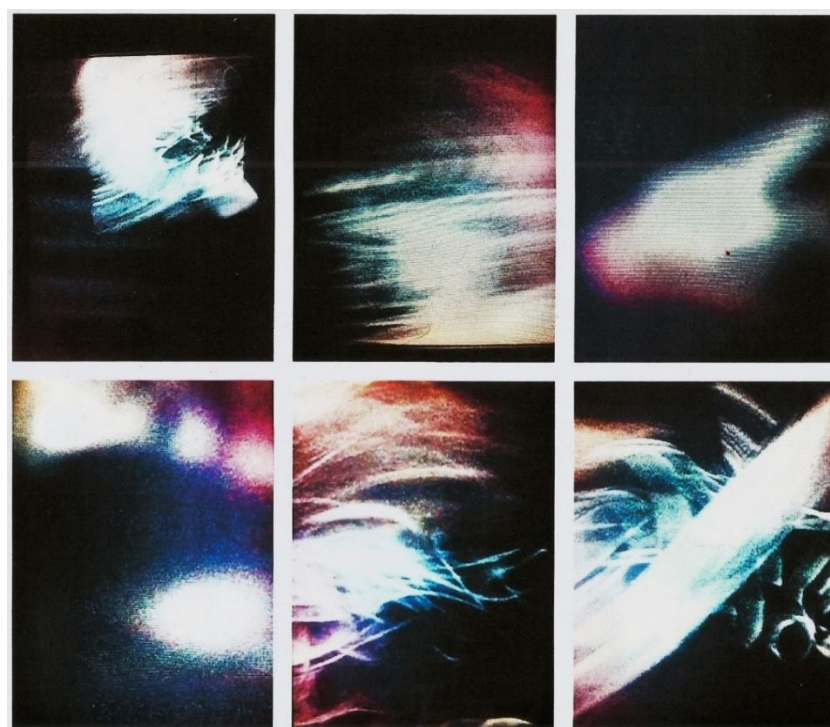


Fig. 31: *Video Stilled*. Emma Boutet.

Having experimented with various processes, I returned to video as a potential way of communicating dance. Holding the question of how to convey the feeling of dancing through art, I began to research methods of capturing dance through video - particularly challenging when working with improvisational dance, as opposed to choreographed movements. Along with practical elements, I learned about the viewer experience, and how film techniques facilitate active, instead of passive viewing; by only offering fragments of movements, allowing the viewer's mind to fill the space between²² - connecting to Nakanishi and Muybridge. I also learned how to express more about movement; that perception is affected depending on distance, framing and action focused details; and how the hybrid nature of filming dance presents challenges in its disciplinary crossover.

This research made me aware of the need to push myself, and the importance of working with others.²³ I asked someone to record me dancing to capture different types of shots and give a more dynamic result than DIY-ing it with tripods. However, I detested every minute - feeling awkward, in limbo, like I was flailing in space. In response to this experience, I abstracted the footage, blurring and dissolving the image into an anonymous, fleeting impression, instead of clear documentation of this gut-wrenching ordeal. Through this research and reflection, I

²² Katrina McPherson. *Making Video Dance*.

²³ "Don't resort to indistinct shots that capture everything because you aren't brave enough to make radical decisions or logistics are difficult." --Katrina McPherson. *Making Video Dance*.

now know that these negative feelings were not caused because somebody was filming me dancing - but I will discuss that later. Even just my awareness of my own performance avoidance tactics has helped me pinpoint the real cause, and how to move beyond this – not just by feeling comfortable in front of a camera, but at times, not even realising it is there.

((e))MOTION

Fig. 32: *((e))Motion*. Emma Boutet.

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/rcaartsandhumanities/e-motion>

This was the final piece at the end of this year-long project. It is an abstracted video of myself in motion, projected on a large gestural charcoal drawing on paper; using an ambisonic soundscape of movement, breath, and a heartbeat; presented in a darkened space. The video plays in reverse, and this subtle temporal intervention creates a visual sense of disconnect, undoing typical trajectories of motion, inviting the viewer to work out the sequence of frames. Costume and makeup helped the figure and their traces to merge into one, connecting the ethereal and the corporal, the dancer and their movements, and hopefully, the viewer and the work.

Although this piece had elements of affect and a strong sense of presence, it still did not achieve my intention of conveying the inner experience of dancing. It did not resonate how dancing does; and does not have that deeper sense of connection to the Self, which is at the root of being able to connect to others. The way I am moving does not represent the qualities of dance I want to express – the intensity, nuances, inner feelings, or being centred in one's own body.

2016: MOSENSCULPT

PROJECT: Motion - Sensor - Sculpture

KeyWords

dance	space	connection
movement	time	detail
expression	fragment	essence
motion	capture	data
sensor	frames	visualisation
biomechanics	zoetropes	society
2D / 3D / 4D	optical	personal
sculpture	eye tracking	context
translation	reaction / response	wellbeing
collaboration	kinetic	neural pathways
interdisciplinary	rhythm	organic
intersections	energy	kinaesthetic
hybrid	body-language	destination / process
cognitive psychology	linguistic	East / West
creativity	science	metaphor
problem-solving	art	stimulate v stagnate
thinking	technology	movement v inertia
learning	ideas as seeds	innovate v imitate
perception	extend	track / trace
body-mind	branches of thought	element

Notes: 21 January 2016
MEETING
Dr Emanuele Secco

- input → output
- input: PY cloud data print
- output: STL file to 3D print
- download Meshlab (free) to open PY
- visualising data
- cylinder - cylinder point
- easy to scale up in ratio eg: 1:10
- who would work on this? (MA students? Studio students?)
- needs somebody to process the data
- interest in wearable garments / sensors
- equipment is available
- re: breath & heart - phone app - measures acceleration, speed, angular speed (velocity?)
- Milent Lab = app, 1st device - Bluetooth sensor and analytics
- re: visualising data - Clara Curran, DataDoodle
- metawear
- send data to self, work on & translate data
- STL output is key for 3D CAD / print
- find program to print → process data
- David Reid
- research into upper limb movement
- trajectory of limbs
- philosophy
- plane of motion
- bell graph
- fluidity of movement
- robotics / rehabilitation
- further research around ideas
- academic publication

Notes: 21st January 2016
MEETING: Dr Greg Wood & Glinny Coyle

- Greg Wood's specialism: post-surgery sport rehabilitation, eye tracking, cognitive
- 'strategy to change a person'
- measurement / data analysis
- Glinny Coyle's specialism: biomechanics, 3D motion capture
- Vicon
- reflective points on body
- specific volume of space - 4m x 1.5m
- 3D marker points - raw coordinates of each → reconstruct
- to 3D print - what info is needed?
- produce using 3D print or CAD
- joint angle rotation calculated
- orientation of space
- eg: walking gait
- 1 or more readings simultaneously
- can analyse in isolation or relation
- will need Computer Science Department
- Computer Science create virtual people + animate
- can measure pulse / temperature / breath / muscle activity
- not in sync
- Nexaron / WhoMotion MyMotion
- In relation to other joints - not space
- magnets / direction
- centre to centre
- frame by frame
- capture stills / documentation
- camera shoots up to 400fps
- tour of facilities - 3rd Feb 16:2pm
- mechanical analysis

Email from Dr Emanuele Secco
28 Jan 2016

Good morning, Emma

Many thanks. Can we do Tuesday, Feb the 9th, at 9 am? Please confirm ✓

Just a couple of things and ideas:

- If you have time, please have a look at this [possible inspiration/connection for a grant] DANCE (IA, 2015-2017): investigating how affective and relational qualities of body movement can be expressed, represented, and analysed by the auditory channel. Web: <http://dance.dbrn.univr.it/>
- I met this lady some days ago, can I circulate an email to her and you to make some networking on that? Please let me know. Here is her profile: <http://www.dadafest.co.uk/about-us/dadaf/ruby-gould-biography/>. She works on art vs disability (which is a way to see what you want to do, i.e. providing for example a physical object to blind people which may 'feel' a dancing movement. Just a thought) but maybe she has ideas how to find money and/or something else, she was on the board when Liverpool became capital of culture

Many thanks

With kind regards,
Emanuele

Arts Council Application DRAFT

Describe the activity (500 characters):
This project will create a large scale public sculpture by capturing motion data from two contemporary dancers, translating data into a 3D printed CAD model, which will be scaled up to form a large copper data visualisation.
All stages of the project will generate documentation to accompany the project, which will be compiled into a Project Journal and published as a limited-edition run of 200.
This project would involve workshops, talks, performance, academic publications and will contribute to University scientific research. The final work will be exhibited in a public location in the area of Liverpool.

Amount requested:
£10,000

Looking into a dancer's brain - Pontio, Bangor University

Emily Cross of the School of Psychology and Internationally renowned dancer Riley Watts Dance and psychology come together at Bangor University this week (14 - 15 February 2012), in an exciting boundary crossing piece of research. Dr. Emily Cross, a psychologist at Bangor University, will be working with internationally renowned contemporary dancer Riley Watts to study **what happens in our brains when we watch complex movements**.

Cross and Watts are part of the Dance Engaging Science Interdisciplinary research project, which seeks to stimulate dialogue, collaboration, and new research ideas between dance professionals and researchers in the cognitive and brain sciences.

Cross's research focuses on how we learn new movement from physical practice compared to observation, and investigates such questions by observing people's behaviour and measuring their brain activity with functional MRI scans.

Through the Dance Engaging Science project, she has teamed up with Forsythe Company member Riley Watts, a talented young dancer with an interest in questions concerning how dancers learn to reproduce extremely unusual and complex movements. Watts will be joining Cross in her lab at Bangor University to help construct a new set of complex dance stimuli using the Vicon Motion Capture laboratory.

Says Cross, "It's phenomenal to have this opportunity to collaborate with one of the most talented and young dancers working today. The material Riley and I develop will lead to experiments that advance our understanding of how the human brain learns complex movement. In particular, we will be exploring aspects of observational learning, the results of which will inform how educators and therapists can best teach new motor skills to healthy people and those suffering from neurological or physical injury."

Says Watts, "I am incredibly honoured to be involved in this research with Dr. Emily Cross. I've been a dancer for seventeen years and I find it thrilling to now have the opportunity to begin understanding dance from the cognitive scientific angle. I look forward to playing my part in the discovery of the brain on dance, and to use this knowledge to help understand the bigger picture of what it means to be a cognitive human being."

Together, Cross and Watts hope this partnership will help illuminate how the brains of experienced and novice dancers, as well as non-dancers, are impacted when their bodies are challenged to move in ways they have never before experienced. Moreover, as their project only just beginning, both Cross and Watts are excited to find ways to bring their research findings to life for a larger public audience through collaboration with Pontio over the next several months.

ANNALS OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
Issue: The Neuroscience and Mind V

Dance experience sculpts aesthetic perception and related brain circuits

Louise P. Kirsch¹, Kelvin Dawson¹, and Emily S. Cross^{1,2}

¹Wales Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff, South Wales, United Kingdom; ²Department of Social and Cultural Psychology, Behavioural Science Institute, Cardiff School for Social, Cognitive, and Behavioural Research, Cardiff, South Wales, United Kingdom

Address for correspondence: Emily S. Cross, Ph.D., Wales Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience, School of Psychology, Bangor University, Aelwydd Iorwedd, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2AZ, Wales, United Kingdom. e.cross@bangor.ac.uk

Previous research on aesthetic preference demonstrates that people are most likely to judge a stimulus as pleasing if it is familiar. Although general familiarity and liking are related, it is less clear how motor familiarity, or embodiment, relates to a viewer's aesthetic appraisal. This study directly compared how learning to embody an action impacts the neural response when watching and aesthetically evaluating the same action. Twenty-two participants trained for 4 days on dance sequences. Each day they physically rehearsed one set of sequences, previously watched a second set, listened to the music of a third set, and a fourth set remained untrained. Functional MRI was obtained prior to and immediately following the training period to assess affective and physical ability ratings for each dance experience. This approach enabled precise comparison of self-report methods of embodiment with neuronal, empirical measures of action performance. Results suggest that after experience, participants most enjoy watching those dance experiences they danced or observed. Moreover, brain regions involved in mediating the aesthetic response shift from subcortical regions associated with dopaminergic reward processing to posterior temporal regions involved in processing multimodal integration, attention, and biological motion.

Keywords: higher perceptual affective judgments; operations; underlying neural bases

Introduction

When watching a live performance of Susei Lake, an observer might already be familiar with Fukuoka's intense wave, stretch & pivot performance of this ballet, or even performed some parts of the choreography during a childhood ballet class. Whether or how we have previously experienced an action has the potential to profoundly shape the brain's response during action observation. Action understanding is thought to be facilitated through the direct matching of observed actions onto one's own motor system via a mirror-activation mechanism.^{1,2} Several studies demonstrate increased brain activity in people watching familiar movements within sensorimotor brain regions collectively termed the action observation network (AON).³⁻⁷ Referring to the Susei Lake example, it is likely that an observer's aesthetic experience can also change depending on prior experience with the piece being observed. Investigation of aesthetic experience of brain and behavioral levels has given rise to the burgeoning field of neuroaesthetics, which seeks to quantify and characterize the relationship between neurobiology and aesthetic judgment. Niall et al. describe aesthetic judgment as a fully embodied and reactive process in which experiential plays an important role.⁸ Authors have distinct neural substrates that underlie positive aesthetic judgments, including sensorimotor cortical regions of the AON,^{9,10} subcortical reward circuitry,¹¹⁻¹⁴ and areas of prefrontal cortex involved in top-down processing and evaluative judgments.^{15,16} Although general familiarity and liking appear to be related,¹⁷⁻¹⁹ it is less clear how motor familiarity, or action embodiment, impacts aesthetic appraisal. Cross et al. began to address this question by investigating the relationship between self-report

Fig. 33: MoSenSculpt research & notes. Emma Boutet

Autoethnographic Reflections on Dance-Based Contemporary Art Practice-as-Research | Emma Boutet MA Contemporary Art Practice: Public Sphere RCA 2022



Fig. 34: *MoSenSculpt* test. Emma Boutet.

MoSenSculpt - was a project I developed that intended to create a large-scale dance-based sculpture in the public realm, by capturing motion data from improvisational dance, translating this into a 3D printed model, which would then be cast by a bronze foundry, and to later use creative technology to create an immersive experience. I consulted with experts in maths, technology, human movement studies, casting and sculpture, which resulted in the project being put forward to DaDaFest, and which in turn, led to writing an Arts Council application.

Fundamentally, I decided not to go through with this project, despite it addressing certain key intentions in my practice; for instance, collaboration with experts to create work that is greater than the sum of its parts. I felt that the project moved too far into the realms of art-science, technology and physiology, but did not adequately address my core question of how it may be possible to convey the humanness of the inner embodied experience of dancing that I seek to convey within my practice.

2017-2019: FLUID PAINTING

Fig. 35: *From Within*. Emma Boutet.

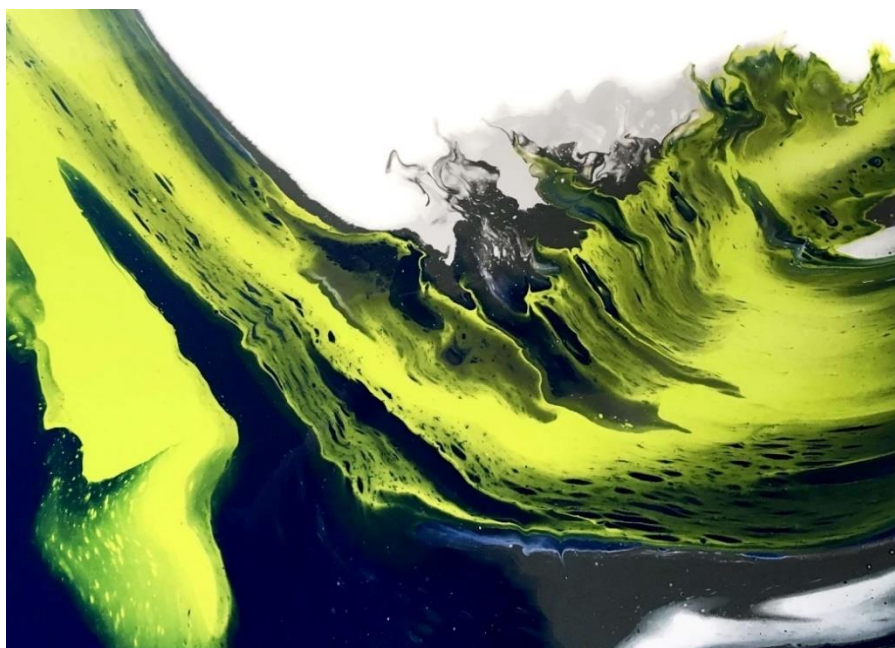


Fig. 36: *Immerse Yourself*. Emma Boutet.



Fig. 37: *Fleeting Moments*. Emma Boutet.



Fig. 38: *Fluid Perceptions* solo show. Emma Boutet.

As an antidote to the pixel-perfect control of my background and freelance work in design, I started creating fluid paintings as an exercise in relinquishing control over materials. It gave me the opportunity to step back and watch in wonder as the paintings created themselves, with only a flame and motion. I observed the colours interacting, merging, and flowing into one another - creating unrepeatable results. This became a metaphor for dance, the dance of materials, of colours, of control, of society. Questions surrounding authorship, autonomy, improvisation, behaviour, and convergence came up repeatedly, leading me deeper into understanding the nature of materials and motion, what it means to be alive, and movements within society - simply by acting as a catalyst and a facilitator.²⁴ The most thought-provoking aspect of exhibiting this work was showing it in public places, knowing it was reaching a 'non-arts' audience. This was what I found most exciting - from builders to babies, teachers to actors - diverse audiences encountering the unexpected was how I could see I wanted to develop my practice - not through painting, but somehow, through people and experiences.

²⁴ "At the heart of my body of work there is movement, time, space, fragmentation & flow. The transient, ephemeral nature of motion and emotion are recurring central themes. Mediums include: sculpture, dance, drawing, painting, video, photography, found objects and 3D printing. I explore the infinite, silent language of dance, and how it connects us with the spiritual Self and collective unconscious. Improvisation through intuitive gestures is extended as a metaphor for creativity within all fields of human existence - so essential to the future of mankind in our unprecedented era of technological innovation. I apply physical, philosophical and digital layers and lenses with which to interrogate materials and concepts. Mistakes and glitches are treated as opportunities for further development, often embedded within a piece. Documentation of journeys in time, actions and words is another important aspect of my work, becoming a material with which to visualise and share experience." Emma Boutet. Artist Statement. 2017-19.

2014-2020: TANGO FLASH MOBS



Fig. 39: Tango flash mob, Liverpool. Emma Boutet.

I became part of a local tango community; learning, practicing, dancing socially, and performing tango flash mobs. These photos were outside Liverpool Lime Street Station, and this visibility informed my later explorations into the potential of dance-based practice-as-research in contemporary art in the public sphere. I contemplated about how people in the streets, cars, buses, out shopping and going to work saw this event that they may never see in a gallery or studio. My participation in these flash mobs made me consider my personal experience, and as this is an autoethnographic reflection, I will briefly look to parts of my 'story' to help understand why this is important to me:

I was born in London, and for the first ten years of my life, I was on Portobello Market, W11 every day - an area recognisable from the film *Notting Hill* – and known for being a melting pot of cultures, sights, and sounds. I had the culture shock of a lifetime when, at ten, my family moved to Snowdonia, North Wales. I witnessed first-hand how the area had an overwhelming epidemic of negative thinking, violence, drug issues, alcohol issues, depression, disconnection, and boredom. This was undeniably caused by the nature of the area and the lack of opportunities, diversity, and inspiration, impacting the mindset and life experiences of people living there. At thirty, I eventually managed to extricate myself and my two children - a move triggered, and embodied by, the experience of waking up one morning with Bell's Palsy (facial paralysis), caused by stress in a 'grey and beige' job. I knew neither my children nor I could ever fully express ourselves or reach our true potential there, and something had to change. We moved to Liverpool, where I became aware of what art could be and what people can do, which made an immense positive impact; but the area's issues levels of urban decay, dereliction, homelessness and substance abuse were disturbing - making me question the psychological impact of neglected

cities, as well as the rural areas I had moved away from. At thirty-seven, I eventually made the life-changing move back to London – where I am eternally grateful to be able to embrace the differences, diversity, opportunities and of course, dancing. After eight years of paralysis, only three weeks after this move, I was able to smile again.

This geographical and personal journey has shown me, unquestionably, the immeasurable difference it can make in people’s lives to be able to experience true diversity, unexpected events and happenings and the enrichment that is possible with genuine cultural democracy.²⁵ I have seen for myself how a lack of meaningful connection and experiences affects people’s mental health, self-image, environment, dreams, aspirations, family, friends, income, opportunities and conversations; past, present and future. This location-based limitation on human experience makes me consider the nomadic nature of touring artworks and events that can be presented across rural areas, towns, cities, and countries – and how this turns audiences into collaborators, co-creators and artists in their own right.²⁶

²⁵ A world with opportunities to see and hear, yes. But so much more: a world of opportunities to create—where everyone has substantial and sustained choices about what to do, what to make, what to be; with everyone drawing freely on their own powers and possibilities; their (individual and collective) experiences, ideas and visions. this is cultural democracy. This is when people have the substantive social freedom to make versions of culture

King’s College London. “Towards a Cultural Democracy: Promoting Cultural Capabilities for Everyone”

²⁶ “The Movement for Cultural Democracy believes ‘in the genius in everyone, in everyone an artist and everyone a scientist, and that creativity in community can change the world for the better.’”

Francois Matarasso. *A Restless Art*.

2021-22: MA CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICE: PUBLIC SPHERE



Fig. 40: Royal College of Art, Dyson Building, Battersea, London.



Fig. 41: Studio shot.

During my MA Contemporary Art Practice: Public Sphere at RCA, I began with the intention of exploring ideas surrounding both my personal and social experience of dance. I was interested in how social dance crosses the invisible lines of language, race, culture, age, gender, sexuality, status, personality, profession and income; with diverse individuals coming together without conforming to the status quo of typical nightlife in the UK.²⁷ Instead, here, moving your body, being close to complete strangers and being part of something bigger than yourself is all part of the experience; counteracting the dissociated existence that so many people experience as we lock ourselves away behind closed doors as we type and scroll our way through our days. The flattening of hierarchies through social dance, and the unquestionable sense of connection it creates, to the Self and to others, is something that I definitely think informs the kind of dance-based contemporary art in the public sphere that I intend to create in the future.

²⁷ "The amount of people I've known and met, come into contact with, associate with, and also the diversity of the whole stratosphere. People who go to work in the Federal Union Building all the way through to working the streets in Central Park, so I find the dynamic quite interesting - and no separation of economic or social barriers. It's all just by someone's passion in a dance."

On a Zephyr Productions. *Tango, Siempre*.

2021-22: DANCER'S TEMPLE

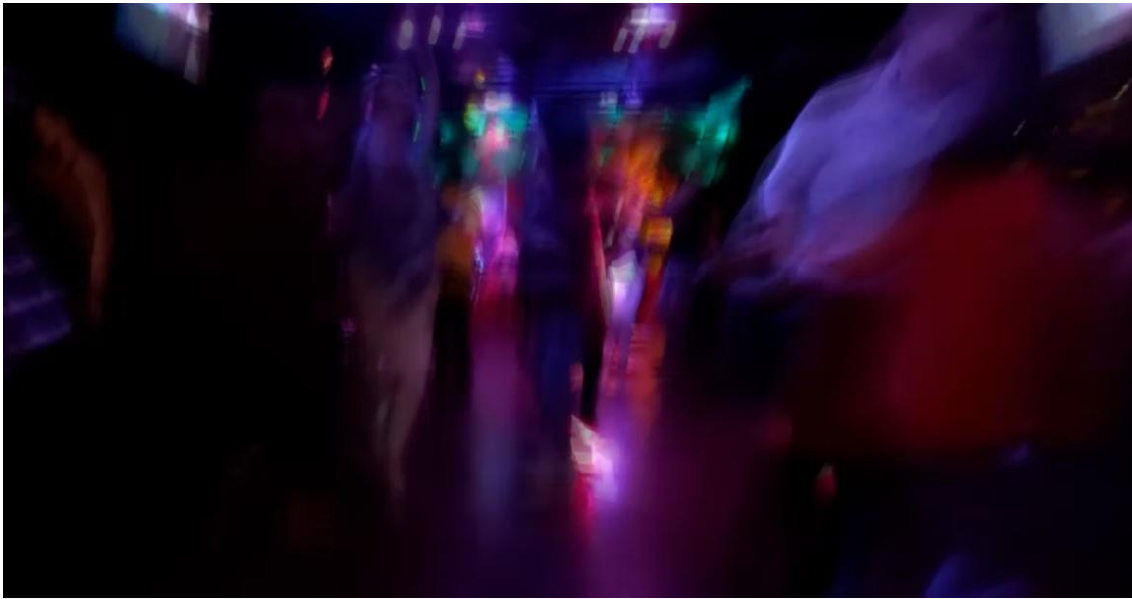


Fig. 42: *Dancer's Temple: Origin*. Emma Boutet.

Video Link: <https://emmaboutet.com/dancers-temple-origin>

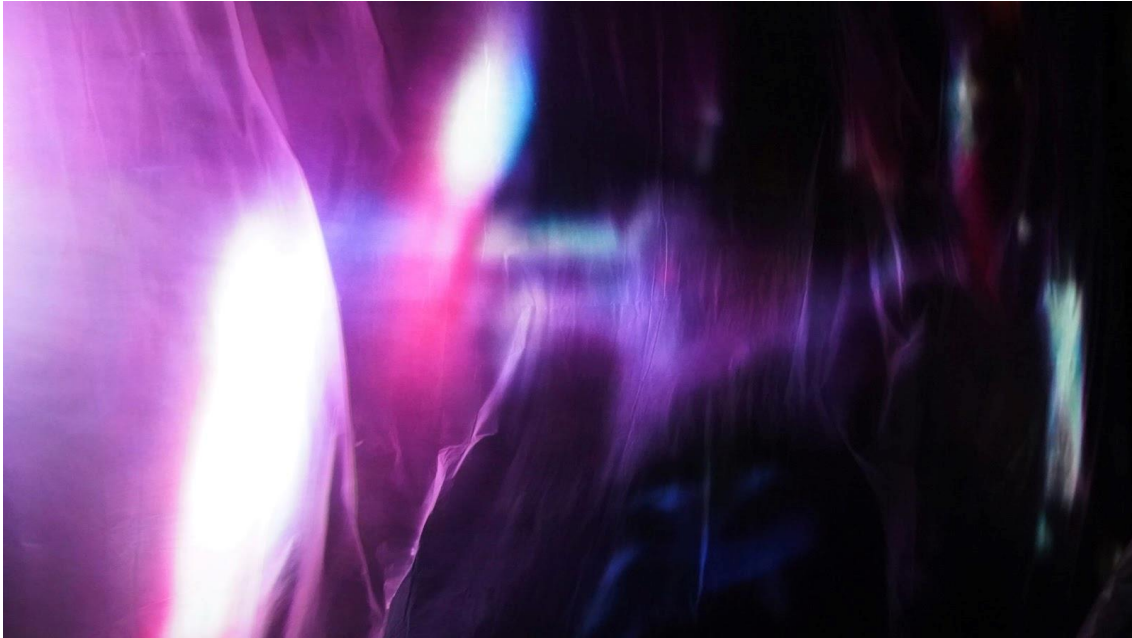


Fig. 43: *Dancer's Temple*. Emma Boutet. Documentation: Blake Hart-Wilson.

Video Link: <https://emmaboutet.com/dancers-temple>

Dancer's Temple explores affective, immersive experience and behaviour of materials and viewers; inspired by the social experience of salsa and the inner experience of dancing tango. I shot the original video of Latin dancers in a dance club in Temple, London, before experimenting with abstracting the video in *Dancers Temple: Origin* and projecting it across surfaces and spaces. With the vast array of facilities at RCA, I challenged myself to create affective art with the most minimal materials and processes; to test my theories and concerns on affective contemporary art, and my abilities as an artist to create something that creates feeling, from materials as simple as a dust sheet, light and air.

I have been fascinated by polythene for years; it defies the expectations of gravity, moving in fluid slow motion, as though underwater, with hypnotic effects that encourage interaction - a key element that I wanted to work with. I used 12ft x 9ft and 25ft x 9ft pieces of this ultra-lightweight material, suspended from architecture and stretched across spaces, working with video, light, sound and movement of the body. I used a fan to move air quietly and continuously across the material, demonstrating its visually fluidity, vapour-like forms, and its constant desire to move. It created an immersive environment for the audience to enter the work, interact with the material, and view the work from the inside out, not just the outside in; moving past the problem of 'the space between' a viewer and a work – so that rather than simply remaining a spectator or voyeur on the edge of the work, the audience is invited to become *part* of the work - an important step in moving my practice forwards.

Viewer Responses

“I feel like my soul is dancing in front of me.

I can feel it with my deep soul.

Expansive feeling.

I can feel it with the colour with so much emotion.

So it's really like seeing.

Like touching.

It feels so close with you.

I like that you can see the movement.

You feel it's easy to reach there.

But it's transparent and light.

How can you really touch the light?

It's like the weight of my soul.”

–Viewer 1: Experiment #1

“It is all around you”

–Viewer 3, Experiment #1

“I feel so much joy!

I feel like a child in my mother's womb.”

–Viewer 5, Experiment #5

Dancers Temple - Test 3

Tags

journal reflection dance

Created

December 10, 2021 11:52 PM

+ Add a property

 Add a comment...

Seeing the security guard (C) inside Dancers Temple today was absolutely incredible... He must have spent about four minutes in there.. just feeling the material and looking at the light..

I wonder if time felt different for him? I wonder if it passed more quickly..?

I know I got pretty lost in there.

+ :: It was brilliant to have B there. I'm really happy that he got to experience it for himself - and to hear his reaction! He was exploring it for a good while himself - even longer than C, and really playing around with it - lying on the floor taking photos and videos and such... which was great to see!

It really does invite interaction... playfulness... observation...

As the security guard said - it felt like "it was all around" him

I think it really does have a feeling of enveloping, surrounding, almost comforting, soothing

Also - when looking at one of the pictures with B in it - it made me realise that it makes the audience 'dance' with the material - as the material dances with and around and in front of the viewer... he literally looked like he was dancing because of how the material draped around and over him...

It was really surprising and actually quite moving to see...

I think it elicits a sense of wonder, curiosity, dream-like world, 'out of body',

I said it made me think of Disembodied Embodiment - then wasn't even sure of the meaning of disembodiment - looked it up and it turns out it's:

Noun. A soul, spirit, or consciousness that has been disembodied, or which otherwise lacks a physical form.

re: "I feel like I'm watching my soul dancing"

Fig. 44: Digital journal reflection on Dancer's Temple viewer experiences.

2021: SUNSHINE WONG

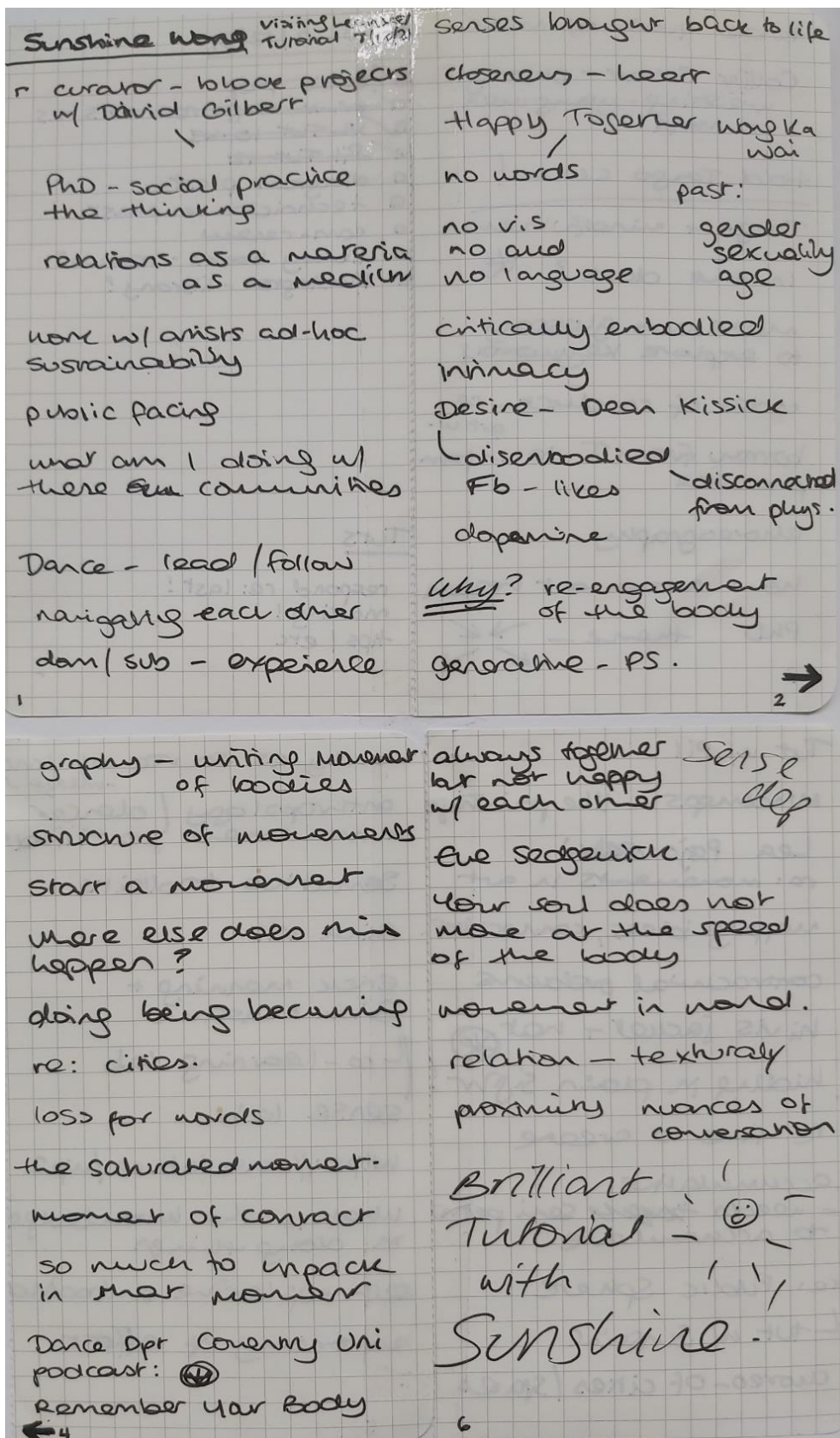


Fig. 45: Cahier shot.

During a Zoom conversation with Dr Sunshine Wong²⁸ we discussed different aspects of dance, from both personal and social perspectives, including: relations as a material / medium; intentions for communities; dancers navigating each other and space; power relationships in dance partnerships; misinterpretations of 'leading' / 'following'; senses brought back to life; closeness of two hearts, intimacy and tenderness; absence of verbal, visual, audible sensory input; social dance transcending barriers; tango as 'the introvert's dance';²⁹ critically embodied intimacy; motivations to re-engage with the body; generative qualities of Public Sphere; codes of conduct in dance; the sacred moment of the Tango Embrace; borrowing from tango to inform practice; writing movement of bodies and structures of movements; questioning choreography in society and cities; doing - being – becoming; how movement happens, and how social movements start; the saturated moment, the moment of contact, and unpacking that moment; and remembering your body as a source of knowledge.

This elicited many new and recurring questions and observations of dance, its personal and social qualities, and politics of movement. This expansion of ideas and investigation deepened and broadened my understanding of what this body of work can explore, why it matters, and where this could venture in the future.

²⁸ Sunshine Wong. PhD. Art, Critique & Social Practice

²⁹ Ultimate Tango. "Tango's Closed Embrace: The Introvert's Dance".

2022: BRIDGE II

Fig. 46: *Bridge II*. Emma Boutet.

Bridge II demonstrates how external influences subconsciously moved me so far from my work it became almost unrecognisable. It had no connection to my original intentions and was so distant from my initial conceptual objectives that in the end, it did nothing for me, especially in comparison with the original version of *Dancer's Temple*, which I felt so connected to; as though it had a life of its own; this piece feels empty to me because I allowed invasive external opinions to get in the way of the work.³⁰ When met with scepticism at my choice of materials, I decided to stick with my choice – which, even though it arose from a place of wanting to protect my explorative research, still meant that outside influences were making me stick with something that I might have otherwise discarded earlier, or at least worked in a way that aligned with my conceptual inquiry. I realise that my 'creative stubbornness' can sometimes get in the way of the clarity of internal presence, and it shows me that I was not truly in contact with myself or my work - something that I know is essential, particularly when creating work that centres around connection - and that this needs to stay at the very heart of what I do.

³⁰ "Cherish your visions and your dreams, as they are of your soul, the blueprint of your ultimate achievements."

Napoleon Hill.

2022: DANCE WITH THE INTANGIBLE



Fig. 47: *Dance with the Intangible*. Emma Boutet. Dancer: Ruishuke Chen.

Video Link: <https://emmaboutet.com/dance-with-the-intangible>

Dance with the Intangible is a video capturing gradual, slow motion trajectories of the dancer and material. Their trace precedes them, allowing a prediction of the passage of movement from one point to the next - where each motion is almost, but not quite, frozen in time; not fully captured or described. The dancer and material are in unison to begin with, flowing, swooping and swooshing in harmony; but gradually the material begins to overshadow the dancer; until in the final moments, it consumes them.³¹ Only days before submitting this dissertation, this reflexive process made me realise this video tells the story of how I was feeling at the time. That final moment of the video, where the figure disappears beneath the material; is how I felt when I realised that, without even knowing, I had allowed external factors to almost consume my practice, both consciously and subconsciously. It made me remember that during my artistic process, I *must* pay attention to that deep, all-knowing part of the Self that exists within each of us.³²

³¹ "Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swaps of the not-quite, the not-yet, and the not-at-all" Ayn Rand, 'Atlas Shrugged'

³² "How do I immerse myself in the desert?' 'Listen to your Heart. It knows all things, because it came from the Soul of the World, and it will one day return there.'" Paulo Coelho. 'The Alchemist'. p. 134

2022: SITUATION

In Spring 2022, I decided to take dance out of my practice because of frustrations in communicating dance-based concepts through language in art contexts. What I discovered was that my practice was like a fire triangle - with no fuel. I couldn't work, I couldn't focus, and I experienced a block, lasting months; but worst of all, I stopped dancing.³³

Instead, I began studying situational, relational, participatory, socially engaged work in the public sphere; where people, moments and memories become the work in themselves; in unexpected, unpredictable, and ever-evolving ways. I also researched public art's ability to operate from the other side of the barrier of the gallery or studio wall.³⁴ For me, this is essential for cultural democracy³⁵, where contemporary art can reach and connect with more people than typical, regular arts audiences, who make up a fraction of the population, or the tiny fraction of total arts audiences that are actually going to see any specific work in any specific gallery.³⁶

³³ "A dancer dies twice – once when they stop dancing, and that is usually the most painful." –Martha Graham

³⁴ "The gallery wall is introduced as literal and metaphorical limit of phenomenological experience ... the wall becomes a membrane through which aesthetic and commercial values osmotically exchange' ... Michael Asher's sandblasting of the wall (Galleria Toselli, Milan, 1973) exposes the gallery as signifying container" Claire Doherty, 2009, p. 2.

³⁵ Francois Mattarasso. *A Restless Art*.

³⁶ "In 2019/20, 0.5% of respondents said they has visited a museum or gallery at least once a week in the last 12 months, 4% at least once a month, 17% three to four times a year, 15% twice in the last 12 months, and 14% once in the last 12 months. Around half of the adult population (48%) reported that they had not attended a museum or gallery in the past 12 months. These estimates were similar to 2018/19." .Gov. "Museums - Taking Part."

A key reference here was Jeremy Deller, whose situational participatory work in the public realm connects with people on vastly different levels and scales from typical art in galleries and museums. Deller's work connected me back into previous research on relational art in the public realm, and its potential for reaching people - by being visible. If art is hidden away in a gallery, most potential audiences cannot be affected by the work, because these two 'bodies'³⁷ have not come into contact. Deller often speaks about how he tries not to make things, but tries to make things happen,³⁸ inspiring confidence to explore liberating ways of working conceptually, without conforming to object-based art. This opens up ideas of performance, situational work, interventions, provocations and treating the streets as my studio. Deller discusses how, as an artist, he thinks of his art as "a catalyst",³⁹ ⁴⁰ highlighting the unknowable potential for positive impact by bringing people together through art experiences and creating memories that can last far beyond the moment that it exists within.

³⁷ "Affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves." Gregory Seigworth, Melissa Gregg. *The Affect Theory Reader*.

³⁸ "My work is about making art around ideas and trying to make them happen, which is essentially the definition of conceptual art." Jeremy Deller.

³⁹ "Acting as catalyst or instigator, Deller creates provocative works about social history or recent events that encourage us to look at one kind of "culture" through the lens of another." Contemporary Art St Louis. "Jeremy Deller: Joy in People."

⁴⁰ "Art isn't about what you make but what you make happen," much of what he creates is ephemeral and short-lived, and is intended to be experienced in the public realm—beyond the confines of conventional galleries. Jeremy Deller. "Jeremy Deller: Joy in People."

2022: PLEASE DO NOT BEND

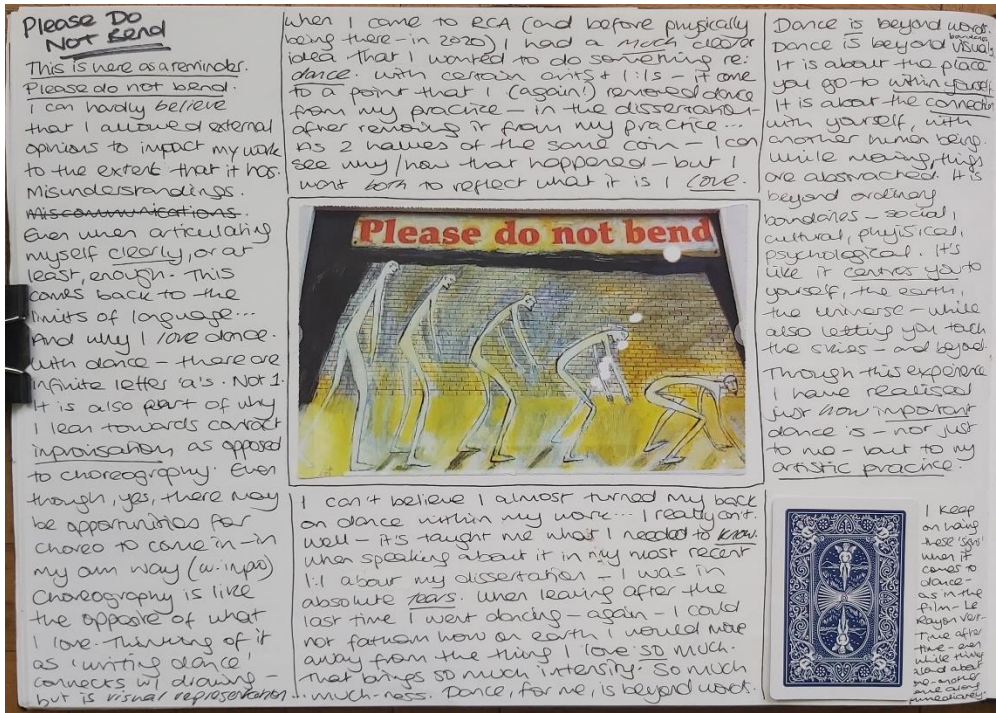


Fig. 48: Please do not bend. CAP sketchbook.

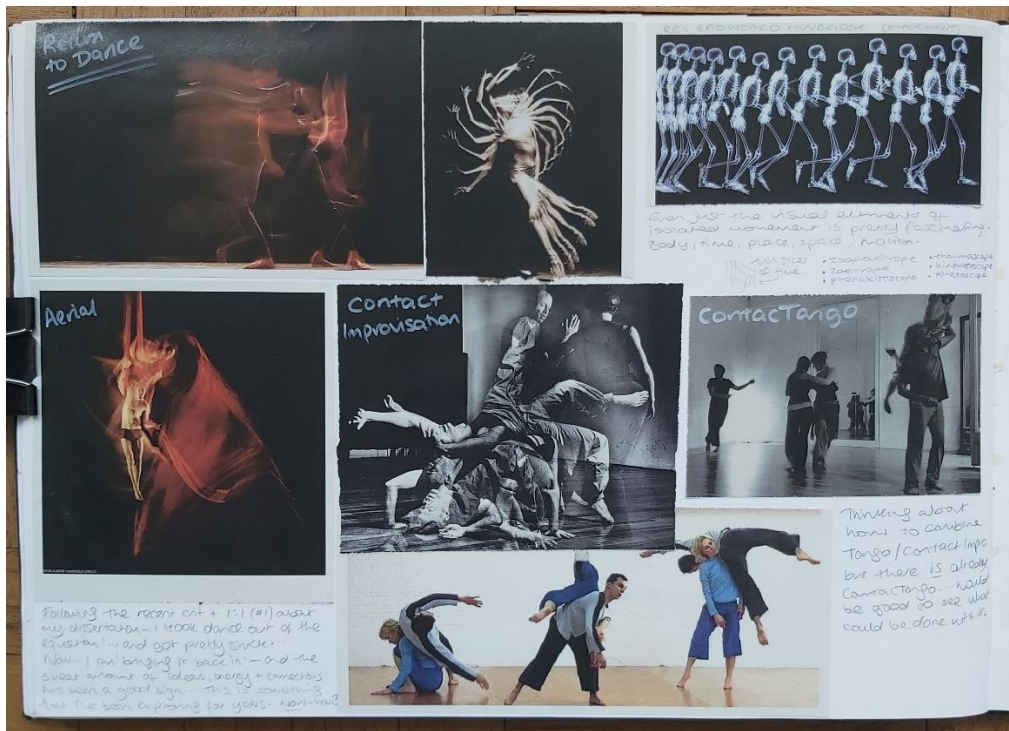


Fig. 49: Return to dance. CAP sketchbook.

I want to be able to do what I came here to do...

Actually ended up in tears while speaking about how, when reading that paper about how Tango is a metaphor for soul - that it moved me to tears to think about how I had 'turned my back' on dance simply because of the issues of trying to communicate it other people through words....

That is my whole point.

+ :: Art needs to move people - affect people - without words - in the way that dance can do.

Works of art are the symbols through which humans communicate what lies beyond ordinary speech...

Dance, affect, embodiment, experience, society

Another thing with dance is that I *keep on* having these 'signs' - not in some 'woo woo' way... Clear signs. I finally feel like I am on the right path.

The path I was on since 2014 - and even earlier. How did I let this happen?!

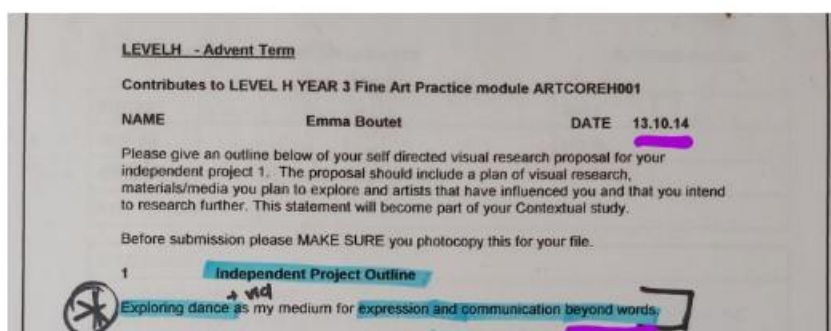


Fig. 50: Digital journal entry with BA reflection from 2014. 20 May 2022.

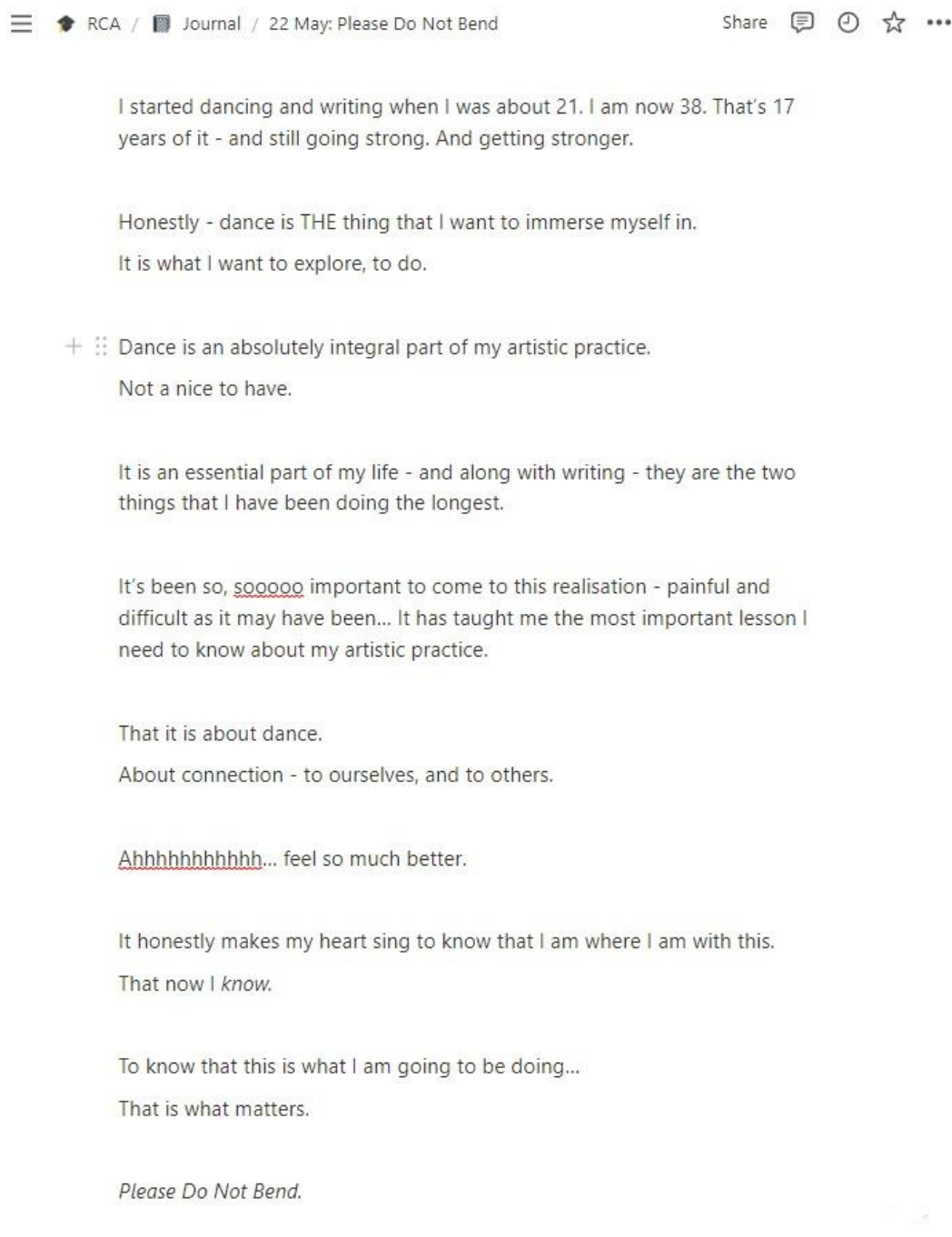


Fig. 51: Digital journal entry. 22 May 2022.

When I eventually brought dance back into my practice and this dissertation - one month before the deadline, I immediately experienced a surge of creativity, inspiration, connections and 'signs'. Instead of the turmoil I had been in for months, I felt a deep sense of happiness within my mind and body; not just that I felt happy, it felt like my *body* was happy; and my heart, my mind – were at last, at ease. This experience of wandering too far from my path made it clear what feeds and fuels both my artistic practice and my Self. It taught me the importance of bringing my own body into expressing the embodied experience in this contemporary art practice-as-research. Looking at this moment in time, where I am spending two years of my life studying at the Royal College of Art – I can look back at the past year and looking to the year ahead with an immense sense of clarity, direction, and trust in my process. I can now also see that I have been conducting dance practice-as-research in the public realm not just for eight years, since specifically exploring dance through art; but also, throughout seventeen years of exploring dance practice and thousands of personal experiences as an artist dancing my way through the public realm.

2022: RAFFAELE RUFO

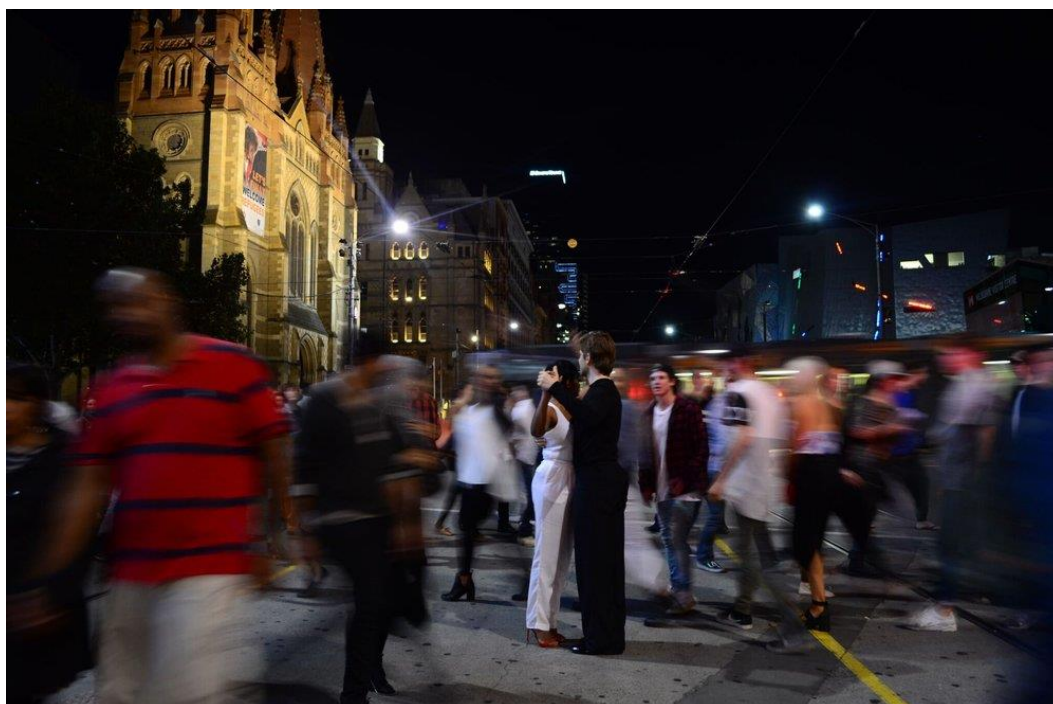


Fig. 52: *Crosswalk Tango*. Raffaele Rufo and Ilma Ali.



Fig. 53: Contactango workshops facilitated by Raffaele Rufo.

Recent research into Dr Raffaele Rufo's work offered great insight on how to develop my practice-as-research; as he works specifically with tango, art, dance, embodiment, movement-oriented, meditative practices and academic inquiry to explore and articulate dance, particularly tango and Contactango. Through Rufo's development of movement-based and dance-based techniques,⁴¹ I have been able to see different possibilities for literal and abstract elements of dance, embodiment, socio-political elements of my practice in the future.

This experience of the point of contact, 'as a gateway to somatic awareness', and the 'radical interconnection' created through dance are what interest me from a social perspective. Rufo's explorations of dance crossovers and fusion offer alternative approaches to connection and potential dance forms. Rufo's reference to the inside and outside worlds⁴² echoes my aims to create immersive works in my ongoing attempt to communicate the inner experience of dance, not the visual form or performance aspects. I am not interested in the visuals, they are superficial, merely the surface of an experience. What I am interested in is the place you go within yourself when you lose yourself within a dance.

⁴¹ "In these improvisational practices, the experience of touch works as a perceptual gate to somatic awareness, creative expression and radical interconnection. Through processes of inquiry that interweave improvisational movement and phenomenological inquiry I have developed and elaborated a range of somatic techniques."

Dr Raffaele Rufo.

⁴² "Tango as a kinaesthetic form of listening which is felt between the inside and outside worlds of the dancers."

Dr Raffaele Rufo.

2022: ANN COOPER-ALBRIGHT

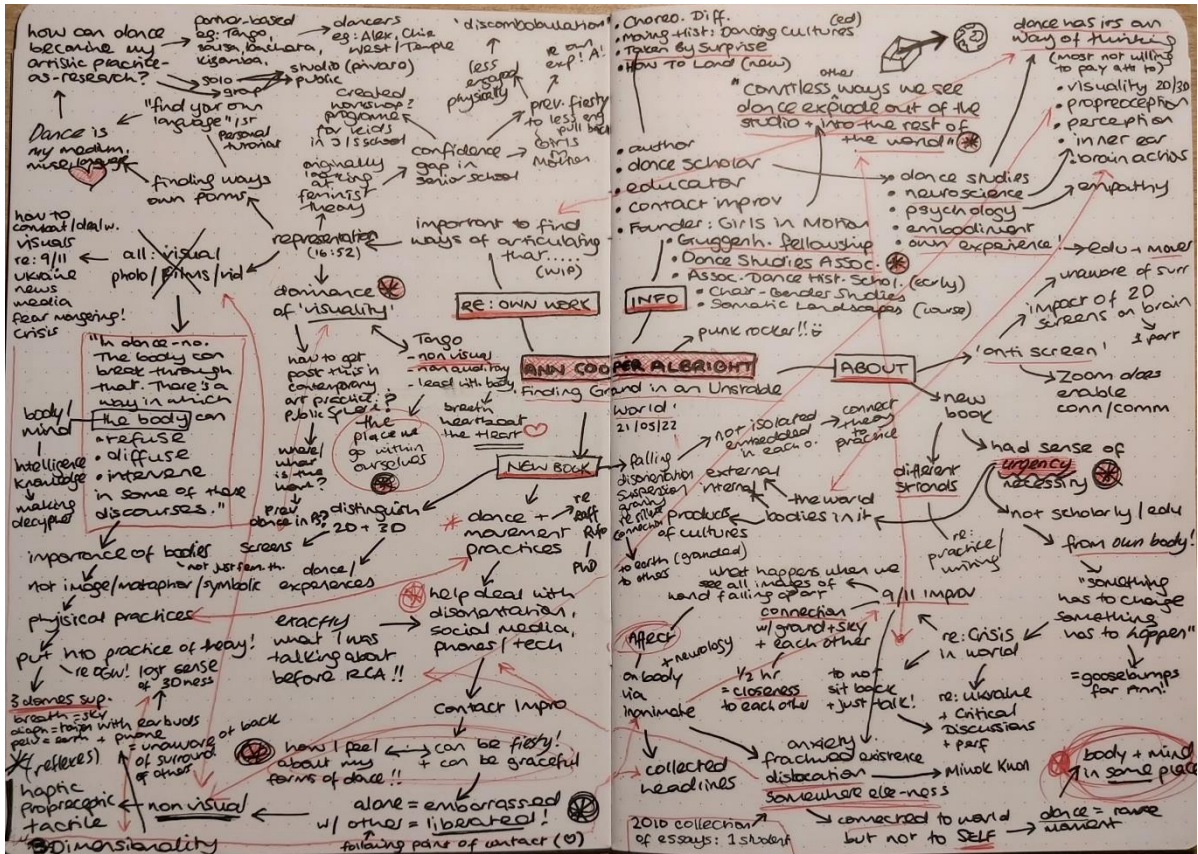


Fig. 54: Mindmap. Emma Boutet.

The key recurring problem I face in my practice is that the inner experience of dance is inadequately conveyed through visual forms – which is something that was echoed in a recent interview with Ann Cooper Albright.⁴³ She reflects some of my key concerns when previously exploring work by Muybridge, Brown, Gormley et al. Cooper-Albright discusses the problematic nature of visual representation, and how there is a dominance of visuality within contemporary culture, as opposed to the embodied, felt, 3-dimensional experience of our bodies and the moment-to-moment sensations when fully engaged and immersed in physical activity, including dance, as well as alternative movement-based, meditative, body/mind awareness practices. The dominance of visual representation remains an ongoing challenge, and often makes me contemplate ways of negating visuals when creating / presenting work.

To return to my earlier mention of trying to understand why I felt so uncomfortable being filmed dancing alone – by listening to Ann Cooper-Albright's interview, I discovered she had a very similar experience in her dance practice. In her recent interview, she talked about how, when she first began her dance practice, she felt uncomfortable when dancing alone, without this point of contact, and that it made her feel "embarrassed."⁴⁴ This directly relates to my previous personal experience, which made me feel self-conscious, awkward, wishing I had never done it, and swearing I would never do it again. I spent years dismissing performance from

⁴³ Hopkins Center for the Arts at Dartmouth. "Ann Cooper Albright: Finding Ground in an Unstable World."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

my work, proactively avoiding it when I began at RCA, and being sceptical of any suggestions to return to it. By gaining insight into Cooper-Albright's early personal experiences of dancing alone without this essential point of contact, as well as my previous research into Dr Raffaele Rufo, I realised I could relate to this experience, and that it had nothing to do with the camera, or the dancing, or even the person helping shoot the video being present. What I realised was wrong was that I did not have that vital point of connection to allow me to access my Self.⁴⁵ I came to the realisation that I need to include my body within my practice-as-research because I am seeking to explore the inner embodied experience, not the outer visual spectacle; and the only point of reference I can do that from is my own; because the only true experience of dancing that I have is when / am dancing. This also makes me consider this combined with my recent research into situation – and how I can create dance-based situations for others to also experience within themselves.

⁴⁵ "... the experience of touch works as a perceptual gate to somatic awareness, creative expression and radical interconnection."

Dr Raffaele Rufo.

2022: FUSION

Fig. 55: *Fusion*. Emma Boutet.

Video Link: <https://emmaboutet.com/fusion>

I made *Fusion* ten days before submitting this dissertation, as a direct result of several realisations during my practice-as-research, the writing of this autoethnographic reflection, and the focused, introspective, accumulative understanding this brings to years of artistic and dance-based research. Because I identified Ann Cooper-Albright's need for a point of contact as the clear reason for feeling so much discomfort in putting my own body and my dancing in my work, I am finally at a point where I feel I know exactly how to break through this significant personal barrier.

In this video, we are dancing a fusion of bachata, tango and salsa in a public space - and this is my first real experiment in bringing locational elements as well as my own Latin dancing into my artwork as an authentic form of improvisational dance practice-as-research. This contrasts with visual mark-making, mechanical movement experiments or pre-planned choreography. Nothing in this video is clear; everything has an intangible quality, rather than clearly defined forms. Only in stillness can we be defined - but when we are in motion, the camera can't catch us. We evade direct representation, slipping through the frames without adhering to formalities of composition - fusing and melding into one, appearing and disappearing more like a mist⁴⁶ than physical bodies, as the visuals of the video blur and fade with each movement. Every turn, pause, hold and spin is improvised, not choreographed, and while this video was being shot, I was unaware of the presence of the person filming

⁴⁶ Johnny Robinson. "The Heart of Tango."

for almost the entire time; my focus was on every moment as the dance progressed. The sound of the breath and the heartbeat are more discernible than the music, but even these are unclear. Despite recognising this as returning to a form of visual representation of dance, this abstracted impression offers a closer resemblance to how the experience feels, both in the moment and in my memory; from the inside - out. This is the closest I have come to expressing my inner experience of dancing.

Another consideration of this video is that we are dancing in the public sphere, both in the sense of being danced in public but also in being shared on social media, (arguably considered the 'new public sphere');^{47 48} giving this piece a different dimension to previous work in art spaces. The 'raw material' of this piece was created away from the safety net of the art studio, university walls or the empty room. It was also accessible to anyone, not just dancers or artists - it was a spontaneous action in a social space, occurring through a specific set of conditions: a situation. Creating artwork from dancing in this public space blurs the lines between the practice room, studio, gallery, public sphere, and personal experience.

⁴⁷ Çela, "Social Media as a New Form of Public Sphere."

⁴⁸ Kruse, Norris, and Flinchum, "Social Media as a Public Sphere?"

DANCE PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH



Fig. 56: Dancing salsa in Liverpool. Emma Boutet.



Fig. 57: Competing in NWP Dance Championship. Emma Boutet. Photo: Glyn Davies.

Through the years of artistic and dance practice that have brought me to this point of reflection, I recognise that personal experience is valid as a way of understanding the world, and the work we create in it. We can look inwards to find answers to questions that we seek to solve outside of ourselves, and this introspection can lead to realisations that move us beyond what we were yesterday.

In this next section: Dance Practice-as-Research, I will reflect upon my lived experience of dance - not the form, or visuals, or artworks - but the experiential, deeper qualities of this mind/body/human connection. As you may remember, this section will be organised thematically, not chronologically, and will approach specifically relevant areas within my dance practice, including where it all started, connection, embodied knowledge and, what I now know, is the essential point of contact.

WHERE THIS ALL BEGAN

My love of dance starts from as early as I can remember, where, as a small child, I recollect running as fast as I could in circles around the living room, as though I was being chased by the threatening overtones of classical music that was playing; feeling like I could not contain the tension the music created within me, and that the energy had to be physically interpreted by moving my body, in this case - as fast as possible. I would spend hours poring over vintage ballet books, admiring the impossible heights of dancers captured in a fraction of a second, as though they could touch the sky; but I never imagined that dance would become part of my life. I first stumbled across salsa in December 2005 in Central London, learned vertical dance from 2008 and fell in love with Tango around ten years ago. My dance

experience also includes bachata, merengue, cha-cha-cha, kizomba, blues and ribbon dance; but these are on the peripherals, not my focus. Whether celebrating, upset, elated, or exhausted – dance has always been there for me. It makes me smile; it centres me, grounds me, exhilarates me and energises my body, mind, spirit and soul. Over the years, I have often wondered how different my life would have been if I had never had that physical self-expression, connection, therapy, meaning and magic. How would I have felt differently? How does it affect others?

THE LANGUAGE OF CONNECTION

In the sacred moment of the Tango Embrace, you first connect to yourself, then to the ground, to the music, and to your partner - in that order. It is a meeting of two worlds. A meeting of two strangers where not a word needs to be spoken, but so much is said. It is an ephemeral experience in the space between, which, when danced close enough, disappears, and there is only connection. I am constantly listening, through my body and through the body of my partner. I cannot predict, I cannot lag behind; I am engulfed in the moment and the motion – where there is no time to think. I have to be ready to move in any direction, at a fraction of any second. I do not see their movements, but I feel them, and I interpret through improvisation. For me, dance is not about external qualities, but is something that enables me to connect to myself, to another, to a space, to music, to my body, to the present moment.

Dance is beyond words. It is its own language. It is spoken silently. Not with the eyes – but with the hands, with momentum, with haptic tones of touch. This active physical listening, call and response, being in the moment; the sensorial

experience of dancing, the pounding of my heart, the closeness of the embrace, the speed of the turns; are, I have discovered, impossible to articulate through traditional visual artwork alone. It requires something else. Something that only dance can do. When I am in a social space to dance, it reminds me of the years of practice it takes to be able to speak this unspoken language. Through the writing of this dissertation, it reminds me that dance can become my own form of language in art. The embodied knowledge I have within me is something that, as with dance itself, is beyond language, terminology, societal barriers or notation.⁴⁹

THE POINT OF CONTACT

Over the years, this point of contact has included ribbons, speakers, a piece of metal and thousands of dance partners. Where tango is concerned, it is all about the connection - the other person who makes you forget yourself while you listen intently to every move they make. The sharing of the moment, the focus on the physical communication, and the point of contact in that connection is what I believe needs to come into my practice. In tango, this point of connection is the heart. When dancing, I am constantly seeking my partner's heart, like a compass needle finding true North. This act of searching is what gives the dance its physical, visual, metaphorical, and embodied qualities; it is what distinguishes it from salsa and

⁴⁹ "Tango has managed to defy codification and definition, and continues to reveal itself as both a form of artistic expression with a colorful history and a rich metaphor reflecting the complexities of the soul." Abat, "Argentine Tango: A Metaphor for Soul."

ballroom style tango, which is danced for external approval - the judge, the audience, the other dancers. With tango, it is danced for each other, and for the Self. This is an element of tango that makes it so distinct, so profound, heightening the sensorial qualities of this dance, and the sensitivity of the dancers. In this space, it is hard for ego to find its place, because you need to move beyond what other people think of you for that connection to truly occur. I will often not remember the face of the person I am dancing with, because that is not what I am paying attention to; I am only paying attention to their heart. It is through this point of contact, this gateway to myself, this shared axis and this shared balance – that I can forget myself, forget the camera, and for a few minutes, be free.

EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

I remember how challenging it was to learn the most basic steps. To this day, I still refuse to learn their names - to codify that embodied knowledge, because my body knows in a way my mind does not, and because I allow myself to learn kinaesthetically: “the body thinks, the mind dances.”⁵⁰ Occasionally, when I have come away from dance for months or even up to a year, I have returned, to find that not only does my body remember the movements, but that I will often dance more intuitively than before, with no practice in between. Like learning to ride a bike, the

⁵⁰ David Gere. *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*.

body-mind connection is stored within us, those reflex responses and movements - empowering both the body and the mind, while bringing both into unison with each other. The level of focus that is necessary in partner-based dance becomes a form of moving meditation, being connected into the present moment, in every passing second. In tango, I also have autonomy to respond to any instrument, at any tempo I desire, with infinite possibilities of response to my partner, the environment, the moment we are in. My body learns the steps, requiring a repetition of actions that seems to defy improvisation, and by embodying these movements, the body develops a natural internal mastery of physical vocabulary and lived language. This allows deeper and deeper silent conversations, where I can lose myself in the connection to something beyond the other person, the situation, the song - I go to a place deep within myself, just out of conscious reach.

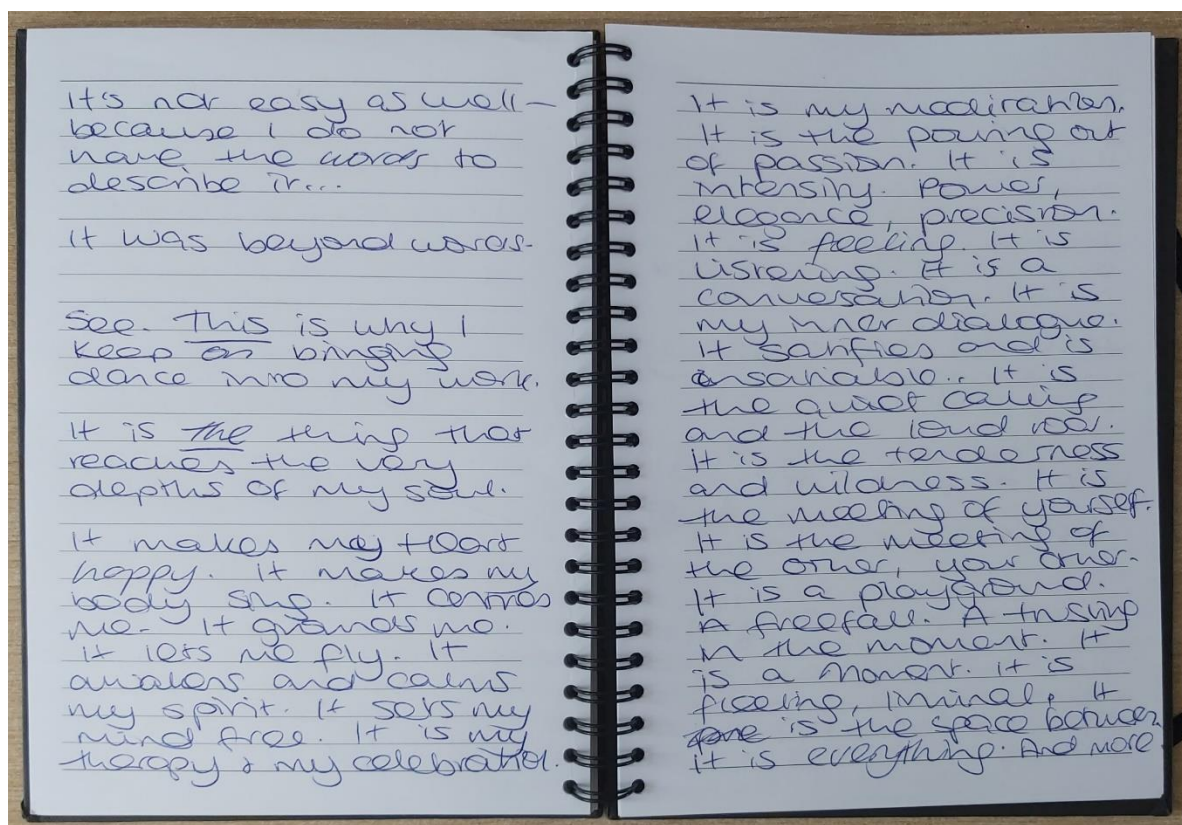


Fig. 58: Journal reflection after dancing. 1st May 2022. Emma Boutet.⁵¹

⁵¹ "It's not easy as well, because I do not have the *words* to describe it... It was beyond words. See. This is why I keep on bringing dance into my work. It is the thing that reaches the very depths of my soul. It makes my heart *happy*. It makes my body sing. It centres me. It grounds me. It lets me fly. It awakens and calms my spirit. It sets my mind free. It is my therapy and my celebration. It is my meditation. It is the pouring out of passion. It is intensity. Power, elegance, precision. It is *feeling*. It is listening. It is a conversation. It is my inner dialogue. It satisfies and is insatiable. It is the quiet calling and the loud roar. It is the tenderness and the wildness. It is the meeting of yourself. It is the meeting of the other. Your other. It is a playground. A freefall. A trusting in the moment. It is a moment. It is fleeting, liminal. It is the space between. It is *everything*. And more."

Journal entry after dancing: 1st May 2022. Emma Boutet.

FUTURE PRACTICE

In holding the question of how it is possible to convey the inner experience of dancing through art, my practice-as-research has grown to include a wide vocabulary of artistic methods, techniques, philosophies, theories, socio-political awareness, and personal insights. The next year of my MA will be spent putting into practice the lessons from this invaluable autoethnographic study, now that I can be confident that each step I take will be on the solid foundation that I have built for my future practice by writing this reflection.

I will look to tango, contact, movement-based practices and academic explorations of Dr Raffaele Rufo; the personal, spiritual and conceptual point of contact from Ann Cooper-Albright; and situational, conceptual work in the public sphere from Jeremy Deller. I intend to focus on situation-based, intuitive, conceptual, contact-focused, human-centred, socially engaged participatory approaches that can be performed, practised, embodied, and shared with others; with entirely ephemeral acts and moments becoming part of my work.

Since before starting my MA, I have wanted to deepen, refine, and expand my practice-as-research by completing a PhD, creating space to look more closely at the nuances of my research question of how it is possible to convey the inner experience of dancing through dance-based contemporary art practice-as-research in the public sphere. This will build upon the insights and specificity that can only come through artistic practice-as-research over the next year, from this point on.

Throughout this process of reflecting on my journey over the years, one of the biggest and most important lessons so far has been realising the extent that I can allow external forces to affect and even stop my work. I remember walking along the

Thames, in the midst of feeling lost, knowing I needed something - something visible, keeping me centred. Something between a manifesto, terms of engagement, a code of conduct and a statement of intent: my point of contact with the lessons from this autoethnographic reflection.

MY POINT OF CONTACT | TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT | CODE OF CONDUCT | STATEMENT OF INTENT

1. Dance is at the very heart of my dance-based contemporary art practice.
2. This is rooted in connection, affect, embodiment and situation.
3. Tango and freestyle are my most resonant, meaningful forms of dance.
4. Social dance is directly aligned to Public Sphere and social impact of art.
5. I will extend my dance practice into Contactango and Contact Improvisation.
6. I must work with my own body to convey my inner experience of dance.
7. To do so, I need a point of contact to create congruent work with authenticity.
8. I will recognise what is ready to be shared with others - and what is not.
9. I will be discerning about who / what is allowed to influence work-in-progress.
10. I will continue collaborating with dancers, audiences and creators on creative projects that are greater than the sum of their parts, with a life of their own.
11. My work must exist and be accessible in the public realm - transcending walls of institutions, galleries, museums, education, prejudice and elitism in art / life.
12. I will focus on situation-based, people-oriented, performance-based, dance-based work, centred on dance, improvisation, the unexpected and unknown.
13. I will make this visible for any time I wander too far from my own path, to keep me true to the heart, mind, body, and soul of my dance-based artistic practice.



EMMA BOUTET

2022

CONCLUSION

This autoethnographic dissertation made space to reflect on my artistic inquiry into the elusive, overarching question of how it is possible to convey the inner experience of dancing through dance-based contemporary art practice-as-research in the public sphere. Each experiment moved me a step closer, and this reflexive approach to my practice opened a wealth of potentialities. I have identified and explored the very core of what drives my work; gaining a deeper understanding of how these insights support, inform and underpin my practice. Now, even while writing this dissertation, I cannot stop myself creating new work as a result of this process of '*unearthing of the sub-terranean geographies of the self*',⁵² This led to my most successful attempt so far in approaching the question that my practice has sought to answer for so many years.

During this journey, I have discussed the results of practice-based research on artists, dancers, writers and scholars; I have documented the development of new methods and reflected upon these across the course of eight years dance-based art practice, seventeen years of dance practice and my lifelong love of dancing. In examining my personal history and current explorations, I have established the lens through which I can look to the future of my practice. This has drawn me closer to the heart of my work; illuminating possibilities for how to convey the inner embodied

⁵² David Gere. *Taken by Surprise: A Dance Improvisation Reader*.

experience of dancing; helping me understand how dance-based practice-as-research in the public sphere can have a positive impact on individuals and society.

This has allowed me to join the dots to recognise dance-based art practice as a valid, meaningful, urgent and necessary way of reconnecting individuals and society. Through the development of autoethnographically informed dance-based contemporary art practice I move closer to conveying and catalysing the inner experience of dancing; reconnecting the heart, mind, body, soul, motion, emotion and experience; and reconnecting spaces around us, between us and within us.

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