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Ecologies of Embodiment: Video Essays II

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Dominique Rivoal, "The Shared Space of Hackney Marshes" (9:04). My aim as the filmmaker is to develop a somatically informed film-making practice, investigating how attending to soma while operating my camera, can further reveal aspects of relationality within the filmmaker and mover dyad and environment that contains us. // Daniel Portelli, "What the River Doesn't Say About Itself" (9:55). Along a river surrounded by branches and root systems of a mangrove forest, musicians drift on a boat performing music and engaging in eco-acoustical awareness, sensory activation, and perceptual openness. This video essay inquiries into the relationship between cinematic art and how we experience ecology. // Florian Goeschke, "Of Speeds and Slownesses: Co-composing with a Giant Snail" (6:18). The video essay reflects the process of co-composing with a giant snail. What began as a lecture in the context of an online conference for Artistic Research turned out to be a multi-layered phenomenon in dealing with the question of one's own time and temporality and that of another species. // Fani Kostourou and Takako Hasegawa with Theatrum Mundi and Dancing Architects, "Embodied Understanding of Spatial Transformation" (8:55). This is an excerpt montage from a longer film work documenting the choreographic movement research and spatial observation experiments that took place during Theatrum Mundi's Movement Lisbon Lab in October 2021, to address Lisbon's uneven and seemingly inaccessible urban landscape.

Keywords: relational; somatic; correspondence; mangrove forests; cinematic dispositif; heterotopic coupling; interspecies collaboration; realtime composition; speculative fabulation

VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.9823.

Available for download here: https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.9823.mp4.

VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[Please note: This is a transcript of a video article. Some metadata elements may appear more than once in the document, in order to be properly read and accessed by automated systems. The transcript can be used as a placeholder or reference when it is not possible to embed the actual video, which can be found by following the DOI.]

[0:10]



["The Shared Space of Hackney Marshes" by Dominique Rivoal"]

The shared space of Hackney Marshes

Keywords: relational – somatic- correspondence

with Claire Loussouarn & Dominique Rivoal

For the last four years, movement practitioner Claire Loussouarn and filmmaker Dominique Rivoal, have met here in Hackney Marshes, committing to return each month to engage in body-site correspondence.

Although this whole project is co-created, this essay is a more personal reflection on my filmmaking practice that includes diary extracts written after each monthly encounter. Dominique Rivoal is a Filmmaker and Authentic movement practitioner based in London.

May 2021

My aim as the filmmaker is to develop a somatically informed film-making practice, investigating how attending to soma while operating my camera, can further reveal aspects of relationality within the filmmaker and mover dyad and environment that contains us.

Corporeal images are not just the images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relations with the world. (David MacDougall, 2006)

"One of the strongest indicators on the state of mind of the filmmaker is how the camera moves, or when it does not". (MacDougall 2019)

It's a windy day. We are working at the edge of the wide open space where the plants remain uncut. This area feels like a world of its own...

I recall entering this encounter feeling disconnected, hiding behind my camera while fiddling with the settings. Attending my own soma helps me to remain present without engaging in mental projections. A low camera integrates the movement and vitality of the plants with Claire's presence. And after a while, upon being still, I get reabsorbed into a flow of exchange feeling recharged and reconnected.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold writes that a practice of correspondence is transformative in the sense that each of its elements can take on something of the other.

Over the years my frame has moved away from being solely fixed onto the mover to widen and include the environment, which I now consider to be a collaborator in its own right and not just a backdrop.

Somatic filmmaking means placing one's own attention on sensing rather than looking, this is a different register of attention that helps the practice of filmmaking to move away from its ocularcentric tendencies.

With the intention of remaining fluid and available to what is arising, and, inspired by the mover's own somatic practice, I use peripheral vision, reciprocal touch between me and the land, while engaging in deep listening to the sounds of the Marshes.

Upon returning to the same place and with each iteration, I have gained a perspective on how different scales of movement such as a global pandemic, the cycle of the

seasons, unpredictable human intervention, a fluctuation of intimacy with the mover and ants crawling on my skin can affect my own movements.

The camera that records the movement of its operator can facilitate a conscious attunement between humans and environmental movement during the process but also upon reviewing the footage, which can offer further insights about the frame of mind of its operator. I realised for instance, that for at least a year, I was avoiding this angle of the Marshes that contain houses in order to present a romantic wilder version, in which these were absent!

...this moment awaking me into direct experience: my hair blows in the wind casting a shadow on the Lcd screen where Claire is moving – everything feels perfect and simple. I have the recognition that I am enmeshed in a world – and through the simple act of slowing down, I become a part of this assemblage of cow parsley, comfrey, flying crows, clouds, humans and lenses.

An important aspect of this practice is to refrain from taking up every impulse to move the camera but instead simply witness the motional world as it enters my frame. In foregrounding my attention to movement, I try to enter a pre-verbal level, where I can notice the trajectories, the pace, the swaying without referring to labels, concepts and identities.

Filmmaking is a process that can offers an opportunity to be being present to choice, surrender and transitions, it allows me to better grasp when I am moving from my own volition and when I am being moved or activated relationally by something greater than myself. In this way filmmaking can act as an agent of connectivity and assist an eco-somatic practice.

With mover Claire Loussouarn

Filmmaker & voice Dominique Rivoal

Special thanks to Vida Midgelow, Stefanie Sachsenmaier, Vesna Lukic and Middlesex University.

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[9:19]



["What The River Doesn't Say About Itself" by Daniel Portelli]

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters in which this work was made, the Gadigal and Wangal people of the Eora Nation. We pay respect to Elders past, present, and emerging. We recognise their continuing and intrinsic connection to the land, rivers, and mangrove ecosystems, and acknowledge that First Nations way of life has been devastated and continues to be devastated by colonisation. Sovereignty was never ceded. It always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Gadigal and Wangal Country, Sydney, Australia

What the River Doesn't Say About Itself

Along the river, surrounded by branches and root systems of a mangrove forest, musicians drift on a boat performing music and engaging in eco-acoustical awareness, sensory activation, and perceptual openness – appreciating the higher order purpose of the river, as a form of forest therapy.

eco-acoustical awareness sensory activation perceptual openness forest therapy Through this video-essay I explore how a mangrove forest can affect sensoriperceptual meaning and into the production of thoughts and sounds. Questions like; How our body matrix, peripersonal space, and bodily consciousness affects the mangrove.

body matrix peripersonal space bodily consciousness

How we can engage in deep embodiment practices involving motor schemas and body memories to create a neurological binding with a wider ecology.

Ear Fungus

(Auricularia Cornea)

How can humans listen, relate, correspond, and synthesise with the articulations present within living systems?

Agnès Varda's Imagination of materials

Inspired by filmmaker Agnès Varda and her concept of the 'imagination of materials', the performers, like characters in a film, are given names and personalities that embody one aspect of the mangrove: pneumatophore, rhizophora, microalgae, vivipary.

pneumatophore rhizophora microalgae vivipary

The performers engage in switching between two counterposed ways of thinking and being: the focused mode and the diffuse mode.

focused mode

diffuse mode

This is applied to their instrument, body, and the perception of the river.

Diffuse awareness known as the multiplicity of sensation. Or, embodied processes that transcend our sensory modalities, known as the supramodal.

The performers are in syntheses with their environment, for example, the instability of the boat is matched with the instability of air pressure and lip positions on the mouthpiece of trumpet.

As a top-down exercise to challenge subjectivity and the normative tourist approach to how people perceive the mangrove, I enquire into the relationship between cinema and how we experience ecology.

Post-phenomenological perspective

Derived from a post-phenomenological perspective, regarding the impact of cinema and the whole mediascape on people.

Badu Mangrove

The emphasis is not just what we see but the processes behind what we see.

If cinema can be thought of as a 'brain' or a 'body that thinks', to quote Deleuze, then the mangrove is also a brain that can depict thought in an indirect way and simulate the production of thought.

Thoughts and mental images are also an apparatus of organic processes. Like how neurons extend their neurites through micro-tunnels to establish connections with each other to make structures of new thoughts. The mangrove is also a communal system of energetics, tunnels of material exchanges, mainly through oxygen, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, salt, light, water, methane.

mangroves offset their methane emissions

storing up to five times as much organic carbon as tropical upland forests

This is one of the most polluted rivers in Australia

mainly due to colonial-based negligence where the mangroves were seen as 'undesirable'

noosigns

What if we were to look at the mangroves through the Deleuzian concept of the 'noosign' or thought-images, which is when we project ourselves and our mental concepts onto images, like a landscape or a root system.

They are puzzling, gestural, and an indirect way of portraying thoughts and empathy towards characters and objects on screen. There's also opsigns, purely optical, or sonsigns, acoustical images.

biological automavision

In a process I call a biological 'automavision'. The mangrove aerial roots become opsigns for the performer's sonsigns, to internalise, correlate, and intensify their experiences.

Mangrove noosigns are embedded into body representations, or body signs, then into acoustical images, or acoustical signs.

The practice of careful perception, higher order learning, and conceptual change about the mangrove can guide people to greater empathy, awareness, and attention to conservation.

Like the body, a boat is also a heterotopia, together forming a heterotopic coupling.

heterotopic coupling

They are both moving spaces capable of inhabiting spaces of otherness. It's about creating a juxtaposition of these spaces, all coalescing and coexisting within a placeless place.

Special thanks to:

The performers and co-composers:

Elizabeth Jigalin (accordion, melodica), Joseph Lisk (trumpet), Danica Hobden (zither) who are: The Music Box Project: https://www.themusicboxproject.com/

Dr Clare Britton for lending us the boat – http://clarebritton.net/ – The boat's name is Sally, made by Clare as a part of her PhD portfolio in fine art. The same boat was used for each performer. The footage and music were combined in post–production.

See: Britton, C 2020, A Week on the Cooks River. PhD Thesis. University of Sydney.

Places where this work was set

Gadigal and Wangal Country, Sydney, Australia.

We do not know the traditional First Nations name for the river as the name has been lost to history. It has been suggested that the name is Goolay'yari meaning Pelican, but there is no consensus. The river continues to be called the Cooks River (Irish, 2018).

First Nations artist Jason Wing and Nathan Moran both point out how offensive it is to have the river named after Captain Cook. Inscribing colonial language into our landscape contributes to what Wing describes as the "erasure of Aboriginal history" (Milgate, 2018; Britton 2020).

Footage of the river was combined with footage of a more abundant mangrove the Badu Mangroves of Olympic Park to give the illusion they are one in the same offering a glimpse into what it may have been like before European settlement.

What the River Doesn't Say About Itself

Author: Dr Daniel Portelli, Independent Researcher (concept, co-composer, project manager, filming, editing, voice over – was not a performer on the boat)

Journal of Embodied Research,

for the Special Issue on Ecologies of Embodiment, 2022.

Abstract: Along a river surrounded by branches and root systems of a mangrove forest, musicians drift on a boat performing music and engaging in eco-acoustical awareness, sensory activation, and perceptual openness. This video-essay inquiries into the relationship between cinematic art and how we experience ecology, engaged through concepts of the dispositif, opsigns, sonsigns, heterotopic coupling, and other deep embodiment practices.

Keywords: mangrove forests, cinematic dispositif, heterotopic coupling

Short bio: Daniel Portelli is an experimental music composer, sound artist, researcher, academic from Australia who completed a PhD in composition at the University of Huddersfield at the Centre for Research in New Music.

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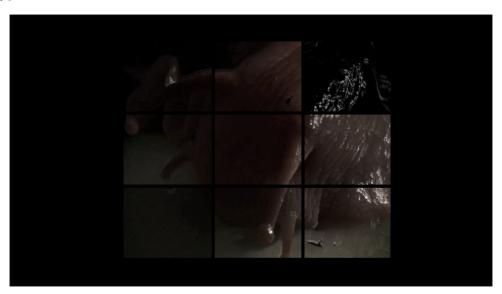
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[19:19]



["Of Speeds and Slownesses" by Florian Goeschke]

Of Speeds and Slownesses -

Co-composing with a Giant Snail

"It is time to compose — in all the meanings of the word, including to compose with, that is to compromise, to care, to move slowly, with caution and precaution."

Bruno Latour, An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'

This video essay reflects on the process of making music with a nonhuman animal and a computer.

The collaboration began during an online Artistic Research conference, where I gave a performative lecture that was accompanied and interrupted by tinkling sounds, triggered and influenced by a giant snail.

Putting myself into a situation of not exactly knowing what is going to happen while talking about cybernetic control has been an intentional overload that could be best described as an attempt to practise a "mastery of non-mastery and, with that, the possibility for mutuality in place of the colonization of nature and ourselves." (Taussig 2020).

In order to do so, an instrument had to be developed that could be played by minuscule body motions influencing a computer generated real-time composition.

Frame Difference as a method for visual motion detection has been chosen in order to detect these tiny movements.

Frame difference registers the difference between two consecutive video frames and represents it as luminosity. The greater the difference between two adjacent video frames, the brighter the image and the more often sounds are triggered.

First tests were done by translating hand movements into sound.

A close-up video of the giant snail was then recorded and the triggering of each sound was adjusted to its movement speed.

Here you can see both the original video and the video of the frame difference and you can listen to the tinkling sounds that are triggered by the speed of movement.

In order to register the motion speed more precisely the video screen is split into 9 segments, each showing a different amount of activity as 9 different 'micro time zones'.

The resulting data is used to trigger a gamut of 9 different sounds that are allocated to each of the respective video segments. Their spatial distribution from left to right and from front to back can be perceived in case you are wearing headphones.

These sounds that are also modulated in their respective pitch, intensity, duration, timbre, are created by using granular synthesis — a sound processing technology that breaks down sound recordings into small particles or grains that are played back at very short intervals.

Additionally, the amount of activity in each video segment is exaggerated by slowing down or speeding up the respective segment.

Furthermore, the video segments change from showing the frame difference to the recorded video frames in relation to their respective playback speed.

In his lectures on Spinoza, Deleuze describes the characteristics of a body: "[...] however small [it] may be, it is defined by an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body."

And further: "The important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as a form, or a development of form, but as a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and accelerations of particles. [...]. In the same way, a musical form will depend on a complex relation between speeds and slownesses of sound particles." (1988 p. 123).

The development of a musical instrument that makes relations of speeds and slownesses tangible thus leads to surprising aesthetic results.

I consider this to be a speculative and at the same time epistemic instrument.

What if other nonhuman or human animals were asked to play this instrument? A horse (Equus ferus caballus), a plant (Plantae), a human (Homo sapiens sapiens)?

What possible kinships among these musicians in regard to their relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses could possibly be found?

What alternate taxonomy could derive from that?

What if two or more bodies encounter each other to collaborate?

Of Speeds and Slownesses -Co-composing with a Giant Snail

Florian Goeschke 2022

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Michael Taussig: Mastery and Non-Mastery in the Age of Meltdown. The University of Chicago Press Chicago, 2020.

Florian Goeschke is a composer and sound artist. He currently is a PhD candidate at the Tangible Music Lab, Linz / Austria. His research focuses on interface technologies for sonic collaborations between human, non-human and machine players.

Keywords: Interspecies Collaboration, Real Time Composition, Speculative Fabulation [25:40]



["Embodied Understanding of Spatial Transformation" by Fani Kostourou and Takako Hasegawa]

In October 2021, Theatrum Mundi partnered with Lisbon Architecture Triennale, choreographer Rafael Alvarez, architectural theorist Takako Hasegawa, and architecture collective à la sauvette, to explore our embodied understanding of the built environment, and the connection between topographies of the body and of the landscape.

Focusing on the core ideas of the two choreographic workshops in relation to urban mobility, this video essay introduces the choreographic movement research and spatial observation experiments to address Lisbon's uneven and seemingly inaccessible urban landscape.

It reveals how our embodied understanding of the place and the movement structures our social relations and the physical relations in the city's ecologies.

EMBODIED UNDERSTANDING OF SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION

Palácio Sinel de Cordes Lisbon, Portugal

Introduction:

Fani Kostourou, Theatrum Mundi

Architect, Urbanist (Greece/UK)

We are exploring topographies, uneven topographies of bodies as well as landscape. We become part of [them], explore [them].... but also the relationship between them, but at the same time [we] focus a little bit on the micro scale, which means on our own body, on our own gestures at the micro level, and try to connect that level with the level of the city.

Theatrum Mundi is a centre for research and experimentation in the public culture of cities helping to expand the crafts of city-making through imaginative responses to shared questions about staging of urban public life.

Based in London and Paris, Theatrum Mundi works through performance, design, publishing, research and teaching with partners across Europe and the Mediterranean.

Workshop: 'SOMETHING' Body in Progress

Rafael Alvarez, BODYBUILDERS

Choreographer, Dancer (Portugal)

I propose here to share this approach to dance, thinking that dance is also a common universal language. That's why I like to think it's very democratic, in a way because everybody can use their own body to relate, to communicate, to be alone also. This possibility of dancing alone is also very romantic in a way.

Let's just start by, in a way, recognising the lines on our hands, then we can move to our body, almost like we are drawing a map or a path on our body. We are just signing different regions on our body, and then we can move to the space and we can also draw in somebody else's skin.

Try to embody this pink stripe, the stairs, the lights, the circle, the tree, really try to be the shapes and the lines, and then try to move them around, try to organise the space in a different way.

Try to find out a way to relate to your rock in a way of finding your intimacy with your rock.

Workshop: Textures of Gestures // Movement Glossary
Translating Urban Materiality as Vocabulary of the body
Takako Hasegawa, Dancing Architects
Architectural researcher, Educator (UK/Japan)

This idea of change and movement, and shifting perceptions [in] relation to all the spatial qualities or ambience or spatial elements [are all part of architectural experience]. Spaces are configured according to our body scale and movement. And if you extend this idea of choreography, then of course the plan is a notation.

You know, the architectural plan is [what is] making us move, and the city is also choreography, and then the universe, the infrastructure, everything is also choreography.

And then we move, and then everything also becomes a motion. It's very, very human activity, that in themselves [there are] lots of individual qualities. And then we are all individuals, we all move differently. And that's the value.

It will be about how you feel, about how you express or communicate, the quality you understand or feel... And then use this physical memory, movement memory. So you make your own [movement], it comes from you, and it's a question: How do you feel? How does this thing make me move? Then try out as many but repeat it. Repeat as many times that becomes distilled and becomes your body [movement] language.

Take your body memories into and out to the street and then adapt to the new environment.

Discussion

[Takako:] Yesterday was a really nice warm up and an understanding of the space and the individual endeavour. And today I was hoping to be more intimate and sort of personal.

[Rafael:] We were exploring, really this relation, this dialogue with architecture, with urban space with public space today. For sure that activates a different relation with your own body.

[Rafael:] Because [there is] always a very fine line between being in the space and performing, even in our everyday life, even the traffic, people traffic. We are always representing something, our identity is always shifting, the way we decide to present ourselves, the way other people see us. So there's always a performative aspects on our movements.

[Takako:] Learning about certain choreographic language as a basic is fundamental, like [as] in architecture, we also have common knowledge, and beyond that, then it becomes yours.

[Fani:] What makes dance, dance? And how can [dance making] be a mechanism for also collectively reclaiming space?

"Embodied understanding of spatial transformation" is edited and written by Fani Kostourou and Takako Hasegawa.

It is a montage excerpt from the film "Topographies of Body and Landscape" that documented Movement Forum Lisbon Lab, produced by Metafilmes and directed by Vítor Hugo Costa.

Movement Forum was organised and curated by Theatrum Mundi, as part of the 2021 European Programme of the Future Architecture Platform under the theme of "Landscapes of Care".

The programme questioned the design of urban (im)mobilities in the cities addressing 3 themes: Power and Gender (London), Wilderness and Queer counter-publics (Paris), and Topographies of Body and Landscape (Lisbon).

The programme was co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

Embodied Understanding of Spatial Transformation

Authors: Fani Kostourou & Takako Hasegawa

Fani Kostourou is Associate Director of Theatrum Mundi and teaches at the University for the Creative Arts and Central Saint Martins. She is an architect, urbanist and researcher working around urban cultures, morphologies, and design.

Takako Hasegawa approaches architecture through choreography, and as choreography. She has founded Dancing Architects as a research platform that engages with movement as an agency for architectural thinking and process as open possibilities.

Movement Lisbon Lab

Curators:

Fani Kostourou, John Bingham-Hall, Elahe Karimnia (Theatrum Mundi)

Contributors:

Rafael Alvarez (BODYBUILDERS), Takako Hasegawa (Dancing Architects), Pablo Castillo Luna, Ernesto Ibáñez Galindo, Héctor Suárez González (à la sauvette)

Participants:

Anna Ulrikke Andersen, Aseem Inam, Elahe Karimnia, Fani Kostourou, Gloria Calderone, Iro Xyda, Joanna Kuczora, John Bingham-Hall, Julia Albani, Marzia Magnanini, Rafael Alvarez, Rebecca Faulkner, Rui Filipe Antunes, Takako Hasegawa, Victoria Noakes

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