PRACTICES OF TACTILITY, REMEMBERING AND PERFORMANCE.

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ABSTRACT

‘Practices of tactility, remembering and performance’ is a practice-led inquiry in which performance-making and writing are equal partners. The thesis comprises a performance folio and a dissertation. The folio comprises two performance works.

the backs of things
This 35-minute work for two dancers had a public season mid-way through the candidature (September 8th – 11th 2005). A DVD documentation is submitted with the dissertation.

here, now
This 50-minute multi-modal performance was presented for assessment during a public season of six performances (March 22nd – 25th 2007). It is a solo piece in which I perform. The work was attended by the examiners and a DVD documentation is submitted with the dissertation.

The dissertation provides a ‘narrative of a practice’ focused on tactility, remembering and performance. It elucidates what has arisen through the dual modalities of performance-making and writing. The dissertation is not an exegesis of the performance folio. Rather, it is a critical and reflective account of the practice within which the performances reside.

The arc of emergent meaning in the narrative of practice comprises three phases: Precedents; Choreographic Tactility; and Intercorporeal Remembering. In the first phase, I discuss the precursors to my subsequent practice of tactility and remembering. I detail how I sought to diminish the effects of the objectifying gaze by staging a series of interventions into the visual field of the dance. In the second phase, I articulate my use of touch, naming it a practice of choreographic tactility. I outline the connectivity of touch and suggest that it fosters an understanding of the intercorporeal
nature of selfhood. I posit practices of tactility as arenas for a relational ontology.

In the third phase, I take the notion of intercorporeality thus established and show how it engenders an embodied knowledge of remembering. I define a range of heuristic devices that I established so as to craft remembering in my performance practice. Finally, I draw the discussion of tactility and remembering towards what I term an ‘aesthetics of tactility’. I describe this as a performance domain where intercorporeal remembering is privileged. This is instantiated in the poetic remembering of here, now with which the dissertation closes.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;
ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;
iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.
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INTRODUCTION

i) Preamble

The dissertation offers a critical and reflective narrative of my practice, in which the protagonists are tactility, remembering and performance. Performance-making and writing are the two modes of inquiry in the research. Indeed, I understand my practice itself to be the dual activities of performance-making and writing. The dissertation details meanings that have arisen through both modes of inquiry. It could thus be described as a narrative of what my practice as a whole has come to mean.

Much of what the practice means resides in the performance works that have arisen and remains inseparable from those works. Certain meanings evade language and can only be experienced through live engagement with the particular performance works in question. However, other meanings can be pared from the practice within which the performances sit. These meanings lend themselves to language; perhaps they are in fact better explored in language. It is these meanings that the dissertation aims to elucidate, so as to communicate aspects of my practice in ways that are different to the communication encapsulated in the performances.

To put it another way, the narrative of practice I offer stands in distinction to a hermeneutics or exegesis of completed artworks. In the dissertation, I seek to draw out the tacit knowledge emerging through my practice. This is different to offering an interpretation or even a contextualisation of my performance folio. While acts of performance are of course part of a performance practice, I resist analysing the performance works themselves. Performances communicate knowledge on their own terms. I thus provide very little commentary on the ‘final’ works, focusing instead on the

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1 There are a multitude of opinions regarding the proper relationship between the artwork and the written component of a PhD in the creative arts. My stance is most akin to that of Barbara Milech, who suggests that the creative work and the written component are equally important investigations conducted in different modalities (Milech, 2006, p. 10).

I structure the narrative of emergent meaning in my practice via a chronological unearthing of distinct periods of research. It could be described as an archaeological phenomenology. Often, though not always, a performance season served as a provisional ‘full stop’ to a phase of inquiry. It was necessary to allow the dust to settle after a performance season. Slowly, through writing, I would attempt to ‘make sense’ of the research period within which the performance had taken place. By ‘making sense’ I do not mean creating sense where previously there was non-sense. Rather, I mean undertaking a process of critical reflection housed in language. This enabled me to stitch together a particular kind of ‘sense’, voicing meanings that might otherwise have remained unnoticed and unnamed.

The foci that surfaced through ‘sitting with’ the practice in this way are tactility and remembering. Sketching an arc through these aspects of my performance practice, I divide the narrative of emergent meaning into three phases: Precedents; Choreographic Tactility; and Intercorporeal Remembering. It must be noted that charting a narrative is an intervention, an historical project of identifying and tracing certain lines of interest from amongst a mass of experience. There is an intrication of looking forward and looking back when attempting to describe the emergence of an entity in this way. This is particularly true when that entity is in a constant process of becoming, as with one’s practice: other stories could have been told. In the next section, I provide a précis of the narrative I have elected to chart over the course of the dissertation.
ii) Précis

Part I: Precedents

Part I, comprising Chapters One and Two, is an archaeology of precedents. I discuss two periods of creative endeavour, namely *Ink* and *the space between us*, and I detail one central philosophical notion that is implied by these two periods of work. I describe a growing distrust of the dynamics of quotidian visual perception, a distrust that accompanied my preoccupation with Bill Henson’s nocturnal photographs. This led to a softening of the field of vision within my practice. In *Ink*, this took the form of rehearsing literally in the dark. In *the space between us*, it took the form of a series of ‘eye practices’ that reconfigured both the way we danced and the way we perceived one another while dancing.

My interest in the philosophical dimensions of vision and its problematisation supported a focus on ways of witnessing one another in modes other than the baldly visual. Intercorporeality emerged as a focus at the end of this research period, and has remained throughout the inquiry. The passage through *Ink* and *the space between us* laid the ground for my interest in touch as a metaphor, and practice, of intercorporeal remembering.

Part II: Choreographic Tactility

The second phase of inquiry moves fully into the territory of tactility. I tend to use the word ‘tactility’ rather than ‘touch’. Tactility suggests a kind of capability, an inclination, an attribute, a potentiality, an orientation towards touch, rather than solely the noun or verb of touch. Part II comprises Chapters Three, Four and Five, articulating my practice of choreographic tactility in three stages. I draw on an intensive creative period when I worked with two women in creating the performance work *the backs of things*. I examine the connective nature of touch and how I honed it into a choreographic strategy. I posit touch as a condition of the possibility of empathetic human relationships and outline how this notion augmented my emerging practice of choreographic tactility. I then explore what is
particular to the sense of selfhood that arises through actively engaging in tactile practices.

The cumulative effect of these three chapters is to cast tactile practices as an arena for a relational ontology. I examine in detail the capacity of touch to foreground a different style of perception to that of quotidian vision. This opens onto a different order of selfhood. In my practice of choreographic tactility, I worked at the border of the skin to find modes of intercorporeal communication. A grounding motivation for doing so was my abiding interest in memory. Tactility cuts to the quick of embodied selfhood and makes palpable the layers of remembering that constitute the self.

*Intermezzo: A Narrative of Practice*

This section, inserted between Parts II and III, provides a meta-commentary on the relationships between the different phases of the inquiry. It clarifies the status of memory as a sustaining, albeit shifting, obsession throughout the entire period of research. Where Parts I, II and III provide an archaeological phenomenology of the practice, *A Narrative of Practice* tells the unabashedly personal story of the motivations, failures and realisations that propelled the inquiry. It also provides meta-methodological commentary, in that it yields a map of my evolving understanding of the nature of practice-led research.

*Part III: Intercorporeal Remembering*

The third phase of inquiry comprises Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. I take the model of intercorporeality established in the dissertation thus far and use it to articulate a thoroughly embodied model of remembering. I use the word ‘remembering’ rather than ‘memory’ for particular reasons. I use ‘remembering’ as a gerund to serve as a constant reminder of the ongoing activity involved in remembering. This takes us away from the notion of ‘a memory’ and towards the notion of an embodied rememberer who actively gathers her past into present actions.
In Part III, I link philosophical, ethical, neurobiological and performative considerations of remembering. I first establish a framework for discussing the use of images in performance practices, so as to escape the bind of thinking of memory as a mental snapshot. This gestures towards a ‘gestalt’ of corporeal imagining that is used throughout Part III. I then describe a range of heuristic devices for crafting remembering within performance practices. Finally, I revisit my preoccupation with intercorporeality, fleshing out its ethical and temporal dimensions.

I make the claim that intercorporeality is a form of remembering. This entails a discussion of the interplay of embedded corporealities within the self. This interplay is offered as the grounding condition for a particular performance domain, which I describe as an aesthetics of tactility. Part III closes with a discussion of the performance of remembering in the presence of others. The intercorporeal self is carried into performance via the imaginative functioning of memory. This discussion turns full circle and recalls some of the sensibilities present in Ink, the work that marked the inception of the inquiry.

**Coda: Reverberations**

In lieu of a traditional conclusion, I provide a speculative and poetic coda. I cast the notion of ‘resonance’ as a guiding intuition that sustains the inquiry. I then embark on a poetic remembering of the performance work *here, now*. This piece forms part of the performance folio of the thesis, and was attended by the examiners. Among other things, I regard it as a performative synthesis of the central concerns of the inquiry. The poetic remembering of *here, now* aims to avoid the nostalgia of performance documentation, and instead encourage the reader to actively imagine a performance out of the written materials at hand.
iii) Collaborators

In Part II, I draw on my extensive collaboration with two women in the development of my practice of choreographic tactility: Jo White and Michaela Pegum. My research would not have been possible without their participation. In various forms, our collaborations have spanned several years (2003 – 2008), and surfaced publicly in a variety of contexts. Most of the tactile interactions I refer to in Part II derive from an intensive eight-month phase within the longer period of our work together. This took place during the two-year period where I could not dance due to spinal injury. It culminated in the performance of the backs of things. The video document of this work forms part of the performance folio of the thesis.

iv) Writing

The combined activities of making and of writing constitute a ‘gestalt of inquiry’. By this I mean that in my research the two activities exist in an active relationship where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In the dissertation, I try to hold this gestalt intact by embedding the dual inquiries of writing and making within the writing itself. The shifts in my performance-making and writing strategies are written into the dissertation in the varied forms of the writing. These include discursive, narrative, poetic, conversational and reflective writing.

My use of the word discursive here needs some explanation, so that it does not translate in the reader’s mind into ‘theory’. I situate my inquiry outside the unhelpful binary of theory/practice, and so avoid evoking it at all costs. Rather, by discursive, I refer to a style of writing that generates knowledge through using discipline-specific epistemological paradigms. Thus, for example, a phenomenologist generates knowledge by using Husserlian or Merleau-Pontian paradigms, and these paradigms are embedded in their writing. The discursive writing included in the dissertation comes from a variety of fields including phenomenology, feminism, ethics and psychology.
Often I engage with these writings on their own terms, by ‘writing back’ or ‘writing with’ their discursive mode. At other times, I engage with these writings through other writing styles, such as journal or reflective writing. I use the discursive writing of others as one means of exploring in writing the philosophical, ethical, or psychological implications of my practice. This is in distinction to exploring the underpinnings of my practice. That would imply a set of ideas existing prior to the studio work. Instead, I am interested in what the performance practice opens onto and what questions it throws up that can be explored through writing.

Different writings serve different purposes in the dissertation. Through these writing styles, the ‘meta’ stance that a method chapter would provide is instead dispersed throughout the dissertation. It arises where appropriate to the story of the practice that is being narrated. As mentioned, the writing often seeks to explore the philosophical implications of the practice. At other times, it articulates aspects of the practice so as to offer them as heuristic devices for working with remembering and tactility. Both these writing styles look towards the past reflectively. They have the benefit of hindsight but the disadvantage of standing at a considerable remove from the experiences in question.

In contrast, there are italicised journal notes scattered throughout the dissertation. Daily records of studio activity and reflection, these have the advantage of immediacy but the disadvantage of being wrenched from the flow of time. They perhaps take on something of the nostalgia of the relic or the photograph. Nevertheless, I preserve the present tense and conversational tone of this writing, to remind the reader that these ideas have emerged in/as the practice of working with tactility and remembering in the studio.

I also include extracts from a conversation with Jo and Michaela. This conversation took place a year after the collaborative working period leading up to the backs of things. We had a studio session to re-visit some
aspects of our tactile practice. We wanted to re-enliven our memory of what had emerged in our practice at that time, and see what remained. We then spoke about it, and parts of our conversation are dotted throughout Part II. The presence of this conversation foregrounds the dialogic nature of the practice.

I mentioned at the beginning of the Introduction that I seek to bring into language the tacit knowledge emerging through my practice. I attempt to weave this tacit knowledge into novel relationships with the discursive writing of others. My hope in doing so is twofold. I hope that the tacit aspects of my practice that are brought into language might illuminate the discursive writing in ways that are idiosyncratic to my practice. Conversely, I hope that the discursive writing might draw out otherwise unnoticed aspects of my practice. This has certainly been the case for myself as author of a practice entailing both performance-making and writing. I hope that it might also be the case for the reader who encounters the narrative of practice contained in this dissertation.
PART I: PRECEDENTS
CHAPTER ONE: IN THE DARK

A sense of puzzlement, dislocation, disturbance, is part of what keeps us looking. The central subject never quite declares itself, and it takes us a little time to realise that the real subject may be the act of looking itself; which is perhaps why the really striking feature of so many of the figures is the quality of their gaze (David Malouf in Henson, 1998, p. 9).

Introduction

In this chapter and the next, I prepare the ground for subsequent reflections on tactility, intercorporeality and remembering within my practice. To this end, I conduct a brief ‘archaeology of practice’. Of my practice, I ask: what preceded the choreographic exploration of tactility and remembering? From what ground did these interests spring? There are many ways these questions could be answered. In these two chapters, I focus on two periods of creative endeavour and one central philosophical topic.

The first creative period in question was the creation and performance of *Ink*, a work for four dancers created directly prior to embarking on the PhD research. The second was a period of studio investigation that did not result in any performance work but served to clarify my research interests. The question that has surfaced through writing about these periods of creative work is the following. What is the structure of quotidian visual perception? In this chapter I show how my early practice entailed subtle resistances to the objectifying gaze. The aim of this chapter is to show how these resistances paved the way for my inquiry into tactility and remembering.

Firstly, I show how I altered the visual field of the dance when making *Ink* through rehearsing in the dark. This pragmatic intervention was a blunt but effective means of fostering alternative perceptual possibilities. I then outline phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke’s notion of ‘separative perception’, to clarify what I sought to achieve by turning off the lights (Behnke, 2002). Finally, I expand on the philosophical implications of this with reference to Luce Irigaray’s poetics of the dark (Irigaray, 1993).
i) Ink

Several strands of experience coalesced in a working period spanning 2002 and 2003, culminating in the performance of *Ink*. The experience of being in the dark was the thematic genesis of the work and also a strategy within its process. Three interrelated factors gathered together to shape the focus on the dark. It began with the hunch that there was something about quotidian visual perception that disturbed me. I became distrustful of vision’s tendency to objectify the surrounding world. The unfolding of this nascent distrust will be registered over the course of the dissertation. A second factor was the way this distrust was undergirded by personal circumstances. I was a novice choreographer and reticent in leading a group. I was uncomfortable with being observed while I choreographed. Over time, I sought to engender performance practices that fostered different kinds of witnessing to that of the bald, objectifying gaze. Thirdly, I was drawn to the chiaroscuro qualities of Bill Henson’s photographs, particularly his untitled exhibition of 1998 – 2000. Henson’s nightscapes invite a particular kind of seeing that is as much about what cannot be seen as what can. They became one of the undercurrents fuelling my movement scores for *Ink*.

David Malouf’s comments on Henson’s photography open this chapter. Part of what drew me to Henson’s photographs was the kind of puzzlement and dislocation Malouf describes. In 2002 I spoke with Henson about the dark and about the peculiar vacillation between intimacy and distance that characterises many of his nocturnal figures. For me, there is a sense in which the figures hold their own, and refuse to submit entirely to one’s regard. Engaging with the photographs while making *Ink* honed my attention to a certain style of perception. Without yet being able to say what that style was, I went on to try and evoke it in *Ink* and in subsequent performance works.

I sought a sense of ‘puzzlement’ in relation to the subjectivity of the performer. I sought a ‘dislocation’ of received ways of perceiving the
dancing other, something that would keep us looking, and perhaps help us look differently. To this end, the creative process of *Ink* staged an intervention into the visual field of the dance, quite literally by rehearsing in the dark. We worked at night, with the studio lit only by the small amount of streetlight that entered. Working in darkness and semi-darkness softened the edges of self-consciousness, lending a certain freedom to my interactions with the dancers.

In the dark and semi-dark, different sensibilities surfaced and different processes of sense-making were engaged. In conversation, Henson noted that being in the dark changes the nature of our relationship to our surroundings, and that our sense of gravity changes. This alternative sense-making calls to mind Isobel Crombie’s description of Henson’s work for the Venice Biennale of 1995: “[i]nstinct and the senses replace the intellect as the primary means of understanding and implicitly we realize that the secrets of this world are now being revealed” (Crombie in Henson, 1995, p. 13).

When making *Ink*, the dancers and I experienced the dark’s capacity to shift our relationship to gravity. This occurred in both literal and imaginative ways. Depriving the dancing body of its habitual visual means of orientation meant a literal loss of balance, as though gravity were pulling us downward more strongly than usual. Our sense of sight is akin to the pull of gravity in that we rely very heavily on it in our everyday negotiation of the material world. Clear-sightedness helps us maintain verticality. With these two orientating markers (sight and the pull of gravity) disrupted, there was an invitation for other senses to come to the fore.

*Ink* represents an intuitive attempt to loosen the predominance of vision within my practice. In the next section, I explore the philosophical implications of this attempt, using phenomenologist Elizabeth Behnke’s analysis of ‘separative perception’. To clarify what I sought to get away from, both choreographically and personally, by switching off the lights in
Ink, I explore the structure of vision as a style of perception. With Behnke, I introduce the notion that styles of perception create and support styles of being in the world, and thus necessarily create and support styles of making and representing dance.

**ii) Separative seeing**

My references to visual perception thus far might seem to indicate that vision is in itself at fault. It is important to clarify here that vision is not some ‘evil’ that can be removed by closing one’s eyes or turning off the lights. Nevertheless, dancers and somatic practitioners do often make a point of closing the eyes – a habit I analyse in Chapter Two. The habit of closing one’s eyes does not aim to shift the fact that we see. Rather it aims to shift a particular paradigm for experiencing the world that is most readily apparent in quotidian visual perception.

By ‘quotidien’ I mean everyday. That is, the way we generally see things when we are not attending explicitly to the act of seeing. In phenomenological terms, this is seeing in the ‘natural attitude’. Elizabeth Behnke explores this notion in her phenomenology of vision and touch (Behnke, 2002). She addresses the ways in which corporeal orientations underpin the way we live in the world in the natural attitude. Behnke points out that there are strong links between our styles of perception and the ‘style’ of the world in which we then find ourselves. She articulates her inquiry thus:

I am investigating the correlation between the typical perceptual style of the lived body, as it is habitually lived in a given historical and cultural context, and the pervasive structural features of the lifeworld (again, in the given historical and cultural context) (Behnke, 2002, p. 3).

She goes on to define the ‘perceptual style of the lived body’ via an important nexus of ideas. Firstly there is the body’s habitual style of perceiving the world, but there is also the perceived world itself, which is ‘styled’ by our perception, as well as the body’s ability to perceive itself.
This perceptual triad indicates important intertwining between self, world and perception:

In short, the general “style” of the world in which I live is necessarily, and intimately, interwoven with my style of corporeal existence and my habitual style of perceiving (Behnke, 2002, p. 3).

The ways in which our corporeal style creates our mode of perceiving the world is not something we ordinarily pay attention to. We tend to elide the manner of perceiving and focus our attention instead on that which we perceive. This renders us unaware of the extent to which we are invested in what we perceive:

Perceiving, and its bodily roots, are passed over in favor of the perceived, so that we tend to live at the term of our intentional arc, with the things themselves, oblivious to our complicity with their givenness (Behnke, 2002, p. 3).

Behnke notes, with Merleau-Ponty, that though our corporeality is the condition of possibility for inhabiting the world, that very corporeality is for the large part mute. She notes several experiences that might be considered to breach the prevailing silence of the body. The experience of pain or illness is a particularly instructive example. While everyday experiences of pain or illness can serve to draw our attention to our neglected corporeality, and can even be seen as the body’s attempt to make its presence felt, the experience of extreme pain is a somewhat different matter.

Health psychologist Malcolm MacLachlan charts the language of people who have suffered severe pain, particularly burns victims. There is a tendency to distance the self from the body, even to the extent of using detailed medical language to describe one’s own dermal pain. It is as though in mimicking the common objectification of the ‘patient’ (already itself a term of objectification) by the medial profession, the sufferer gains distance from their own pain. MacLachlan also cites studies of sufferers of life-long pain, where the objectification of the body is particularly apparent:

…those parts of the body which functioned ‘normally and therefore silently’ were given little attention, but…dysfunctional or painful
parts of the body were placed outside of the self, so imbibing the self with a form of dualism (MacLachlan, 2004, p. 32).

Schilder, in his monumental study of the body image, also notes the tendency to cut off the parts of the body where pain is experienced. This is exacerbated when it is the whole body that hurts:

When the whole body is filled with pain, we try and get rid of the whole body. We take a stand outside our body and watch ourselves (Schilder, 1950, p. 104).

This concept resonates with me in terms of my own recovery from long-term pain, through the healing modality of Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis. There, when working through long-held patterns of cervical subluxation, I had the marked sense of departing from my body and viewing it from above. I include these examples of pain because they bear structural similarities to vision. The experience of extreme pain points towards the mechanism whereby the body becomes an object for us as perceiving subjects. It is particularly revealing that the distancing of self from pain is often articulated via the visual metaphors of viewing or watching. Behnke cites other kinds of situations where we ‘watch ourselves’ from outside and thus make of our body an object:

[...] the awkward surge of self-consciousness when the look of the other impales me; the way I become “other” for myself, when looking in the mirror, for example, or scrutinizing the calluses on my hands (Behnke, 2002, p. 4).

In accordance with the phenomenological imperative to return to the things themselves, Behnke looks to her own lived experience in order to elucidate the structure common to these examples. She explores what perceptual style sustains the structure whereby we become ‘other’ for ourselves. She gives a phenomenological description of looking at a coloured ball, and uses this to distil several features common to vision. While her description gains its detail from being about a particular ball, an important feature of that ball is

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2 Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis is a method of body-mind integration that uses low impact touch to the spine to help it to self-correct through a series of spinal breathwaves. I refer to my experience of touch, emotion and movement in this healing modality several times in the dissertation. It has become indelibly intertwined with my improvisation.
its typicality. That is, it is a type of thing that is readily available to vision and so a description of it is a description of a style of perceiving.

Behnke notes that only part of the visible world is ever present to us at one time. We may move around an object or within a scene to gain different vantage points, and these vantage points will yield different information about the object of our perception. But at any one time, only one perspective of the visible world makes itself available to us. Our perception of the visible world tends to be that it is ‘over there’. Even when an object is very close to us, vision gives it to us as something that is apart from us. This is what gives sight its status as a distance sense, and perhaps also its epistemological prestige. Further, vision’s distance is not only spatial and epistemological, but also ontological. Objects of visual perception are of a different order of being to that of the perceiving subject, as Behnke notes:

The ball that I see is not only spatially distant from me, separate from me in that I am “here” and it is “over there,” it is also separate from me in another way: it is alien, other, not-me, not merely thrust apart from me, but set over-against-me, object to my subjectivity (Behnke, 2002, p. 6).

As mentioned above in the case of pain, there are situations, often of a medical nature, where this sense of alienation is experienced within the perceiving subject. This is also possible in more ordinary experiences, such as in Behnke’s following example:

I stare at my hands as I type, and as they become visual objects for me, as they fall prey to the alienating regard, they cease to function – they stiffen involuntarily, and no longer transmit the flow of thought onto the page. To the extent that I render myself present to them through this perceptual style, they are no longer on the side of my subjectivity; I am estranged from myself (Behnke, 2002, p. 6).

The tendency of vision to render things static goes two ways. Behnke names her gaze a ‘stare’, a quintessentially fixed style of seeing. To stare we are generally static ourselves, and we are generally staring at a static object. Behnke notes that when she looks at a visible thing, particularly when she needs to see it in detail, she tends to hold herself still. She may move around
an object to gain different perspectives, but she holds still to view it clearly.
The staticity of us as perceiving subjects is a typical bodily attitude that
helps sustain the object as other. Behnke summarises this bodily attitude
thus:

The typical perceptual style emerging in this description is one in
which a subject faces an object, over there and other, in such a way
that the subject is limited to a perspective. Both the subject and
object are typically static, and the style as a whole is a general
manner of rendering oneself present to something through the body;
its typicality is that of a pervasive and operative style of corporeal
constitution (Behnke, 2002, p. 7).

She names this type of seeing ‘separative seeing’. As Behnke herself notes,
it is necessary to qualify, on several fronts, the notion that separative seeing
is constitutive of a way of being. It must be emphasised that separative
seeing is not the only way to see. Other visual styles have been articulated.
In the field of phenomenology, the most prominent of these articulations
have linked seeing with touching.3 Luce Irigaray’s notion of darkness as the
tactile milieu of sight lies in this lineage, as will be discussed later in this
chapter.

There have also been articulations of alternative structures of seeing in the
field of dance. Lisa Nelson and Barbara Dilley, for example, have
established practices involving vision that extend far beyond the limitations
of the objectifying gaze, as will be outlined in Chapter Two (Dilley & Stark
Smith, 2005; Nelson, 2004). In my own work, I have sought to soften the
prevalence of separative perception via a variety of strategies. Initially,
these strategies involved modifications of the visual field in which the dance
took place, by working in darkness and semi-darkness. Ultimately, my

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3 The opening philosophical stance of the dissertation has been to articulate Behnke’s
phenomenological analysis of separative perception. One logical unfolding from this
opening would have been to examine Merleau-Ponty’s intertwining of touch and vision
(Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968), as well as Irigaray and Vasseleu’s re-working of that
theme (Irigaray, 1993; Vasseleu, 1998). However, my research is practice-led, and
ultimately the practice led me in other directions. In my writing, the use of touch as a
strategy for disassembling the hegemony of separative seeing traces the arc of touch as it is
used in my performance practice. Thus, in Part II, rather than referring to the established
Merleau-Pontian enfolding of vision and touch, I refer to discourses of touch that
concretely fuelled my performance practice.
strategies for softening separative perception involved practices of tactility and of remembering, as will be recounted over the course of the dissertation.

It is also important to note that the style of perception detailed by Behnke is most readily apparent and described through the modality of vision, but is not exclusive to that sense. This reminds us that the structure of separative perception is an ontological structure as much as a sensory one. Thus, for example, it is possible to objectify the other through violent (separative) touch, as argued by ethicist Linda Holler, whose work will be explored in Chapter Four.

Other interventions into the negative effects of separative perception have come from phenomenologists who have sought to critique occularcentrism on the grounds of its moral implications. As Behnke notes, a prominent example of this is David Levin. Throughout his oeuvre, Levin has suggested (like Behnke) that occularcentrism entails objectification. In his account this paves the way for both alienation and domination (Levin, 1985, 1988, 1993, 1997). However, his exhaustive writerly critique of the moral implications of occularcentrism lies outside the aims of the dissertation. Through elaborating a practice of tactility and remembering, my hope is that the dissertation might provide a ‘critique in practice’ of the limitations of separative perception. In this context, my movement from vision to touch becomes something other than a denigration of vision and an exultation of touch. Rather, the thesis as a whole (comprising performance works and dissertation) can be seen as an emerging practice of non-dualistic perception.

The qualifications outlined above enlarge the ground from which the description of separative seeing arises. I have included Behnke’s succinct formulation of separative perception at this point in the dissertation for a number of reasons. The fact that scholars and artists such as those mentioned above have sought to intervene in the order of separative perception does not make further intervention obsolete. Rather, that artists
and scholars continue to interrogate separative modes of perception is evidence of the fact that separative perception prevails as a limiting Weltanschauung, where Weltanschauung is understood as not only a ‘view’ onto a world, but also a view that is constitutive of that world. As Behnke articulates it:

… given the separative style, the entire world of everyday life will testify to dualism. In other words, the lifeworld and the reigning perceptual style display the same pervasive structural features (Behnke, 2002, p. 8).

She points out that the aim is not to get rid of separative perception altogether. There are definite advantages to the possibility of detachment and distance. What Behnke seeks to critique is the dominance and privilege assigned to vision’s capacity for detachment and distance. The dominance of one perceptual style assigns it a truth-value to which it does not, in itself, have any particular claim. This has the effect of excluding other possible styles of perceiving and with that, other possible worlds.

One field in which separative perception has been assigned a truth-value to the exclusion of other modes of perception is in narratives of subjectivity. In the psychoanalytic narrative, it is in daylight that, as infants, we first see a mirror reflection of ourselves. This reflection is formative of selfhood. It gives us two important pieces of knowledge: that there is always a viewpoint to be taken on us, and that this external viewpoint is all that others can have of us. This notion is found in Jacques Lacan’s famous formulation of the mirror stage and Merleau-Ponty’s articulation of the infant’s earliest relations with others (Lacan, 1977; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). In both accounts, vision is considered necessary to the acquisition of a sense of self, and to the knowledge that our bodies are separate from those of others.

For Lacan, the shift to self-observation provided by the mirror is also an emotional rift. The self is now caught between what it previously felt itself to be and what it now sees itself to be as an image in the mirror (Lacan,
The visually perceived image alienates the self from what was previously an uninterrupted introceptivity. In the psychoanalytic understanding, this internal alienation provides the model for a similar alienation from others. Via the perspective on ourselves that the mirror gives us, we become aware that an external perspective is all that others can have of us. Relations with others consequently take us away from internally sensed ‘reality’ and into the realm of selves as they are seen or as they imagine themselves to be.

The importance of the mirror phase for Merleau-Ponty is that it initiates the child into an understanding of its coexistence with others (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 140). For Lacan, its importance is that it initiates the child into alienation. For me, the importance of the mirror phase is that it is a narrative of coming-to-selfhood that has been highly influential and remains pervasive within contemporary cultural and critical theory. It is a narrative of seeing the self in order to understand selfhood. In my practice, I have sought ways of ‘unseeing’ the self in order to understand selfhood differently. In the remainder of the dissertation, I weave narratives of how we can use touch and remembering to engender different understandings of selfhood. I began this chapter by introducing some of the motivations and qualities of \textit{Ink}. In the next section, I extend my discussion of working in the dark. I describe \textit{Ink} in relation to Luce Irigaray’s poetics of the dark, in which darkness is reconfigured as a positivity that can engender non-dualistic perception.

\textbf{iii) Night vision}

In making \textit{Ink}, I intuitively sought to dim the effects of separative perception by dimming the lights. In doing so, I sought a dancing selfhood that was not derived primarily from visual images of the self. I wanted to draw out movement and performance qualities that did not derive from our sense of how we were being seen. In the psychoanalytic account mentioned in the previous section, an internalised sense of visibility is structured into our quotidian experience of vision. By seeing ourselves in the mirror, we
internalise the external perception of ourselves, causing a divided self-consciousness. If this is the case, then perhaps one way to lessen the degree to which the dancer’s internalised visibility influenced her movement was to significantly disturb the material conditions of her seeing.

In a sense *Ink* was a rather blunt first attempt to sidestep what I felt were the problems entailed by separative perception. I simply worked to disrupt the objectification prevalent in quotidian visual perception by concrete means, making us physically both less seen and less able to see. Later, in *the backs of things*, I would attempt to disrupt separative perception by engendering a tactile witnessing of the moving other. This is explored via the practice of choreographic tactility in Part II, and via the notion of intercorporeal remembering in Part III.

When first moving in the dark while making *Ink*, our initial awareness was of the lack of light. But within moments, that lack lost prominence as we found what the dark had to offer: it could support an improvisational state that was less available in full light. In *Ink*, I used improvisation as a site for exploring what it was to move in the dark. We later tried to carry these sensibilities over into the set choreography. The improvisations had a soft and vulnerable quality to them. There was a sense of watching out for one another so that no-one came to harm, a sense of mutual dependence.

The notion of mutual dependence that we encountered in the dark studio has resonance with Luce Irigaray’s identification of a certain obscurity and reciprocity at the heart of vision. In her essay, *The invisible of the flesh*, Irigaray engages with the later writing of Merleau-Ponty to foreground the tactile basis of perception (Irigaray, 1993). In this section, I focus on Irigaray’s poetics of the dark. This poetics informed my understanding of what was at stake in the process and performance of *Ink*.

For Irigaray, touch, rather than vision, is originary. The fluidity of the subject’s interface with the material world originates in the womb: in
intrauterine life, amniotic fluid provides the medium, the interface, within which touch already exists. Irigaray’s poetic formulation of this state is interestingly underscored by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen’s identification of prenatal touch and movement as the basis of perception, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. For both Irigaray and Bainbridge Cohen, perception originates in the darkness of the womb, in the tactile interrelations between mother and child. This nocturnal state both precludes vision (the unborn cannot see and cannot be seen except via imaging technology based on sound, namely the ultrasound), and lays the ground for the possibility of vision, in that early tactile perception provides a template for subsequent poly-sensory perception. Irigaray suggests that an essential invisibility lies at the heart of intrauterine perception. Mother and child are mutually invisible and yet perceive and are perceived via the modality of touch:

They touch without the possibility of seeing each other, and without for all that finding the one behind the other. A look forever organised, or disorganised, around an impossibility of seeing (Irigaray, 1993, p. 153).

The invisibility of the maternal sojourn is not to be understood simply as the absence of light and vision: rather, invisibility is a positivity. In her discussion of Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty, Elizabeth Grosz notes that the possibility of vision emerges from the invisible tactile exchange between mother and foetus:

The tangible is the invisible, unseeable milieu of the visible, the source of visibility; it precedes the distinction between active and passive and subject and object (Grosz, 1994, p. 106).

Thinking of the dark invisibility of the womb as a generative place that precedes binary distinctions was useful in thinking about the use of darkness in *Ink*. Irigaray’s identification of an essential obscurity within vision provides different ways of thinking about the night. The invisibility of intrauterine experience takes place in the darkness of the womb, although darkness does not always imply invisibility. Though darkness and invisibility are not the same thing, they share the common feature of being
negatively construed. In the dualities that mark and permeate our language and relationship to the world, night would be defined as a lack of light – that lack against which day distinguishes itself.

However, we could follow Irigaray’s lead and understand darkness and light as related in a similar way as invisibility and vision. On Irigaray’s model, invisibility, that element in which perception is born, provides the milieu out of which vision emerges, and as such is a positive element. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a negativity, a lack, in the developing sensory plurality of intrauterine life. The foetus does not experience a lack of sight: clear vision is yet to come, but the fact that full sight is a future event is not known to the foetus. Its experience is of tactile and kinaesthetic plenitude.

Irigaray talks of darkness poetically, in the same breath as invisibility. I used darkness somewhat differently in *Ink*, working with diminished visibility rather than invisibility. However, Irigaray’s poetics of darkness has resonance with how I imagined and used the dark. In *Ink*, the dark was not a place of non-seeing, where vision was altogether impossible, but a place of seeing differently. The assumed certainty of daylight’s vision was brought into question, allowing different meanings to be unearthed. Semi-darkness may have initially seemed to us to be a disorienting lack, but soon became a fruitful positivity, akin to Irigaray’s description of invisibility as the fruitful ground of perception. I think that something of the possibility for positive plenitude that exists in the tangible invisibility of the womb could also be said to be present in the darkness of the night. I tend to call the night an element, and this is not accidental.

Metaphors of darkness and water merged in the writing that accompanied *Ink*, and are expressed in the title of the work. And indeed, it is partly Merleau-Ponty’s use of metaphors of water that prompts Irigaray to reflect on foetal life. She draws attention to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the visible as a kind of conjunctive tissue cleaving us to objects in the world with an intimacy as close as that between ‘the sea and the strand’. Of his aquatic
metaphor, she says: “If it were not the visible that was in question, it would be possible to believe that Merleau-Ponty is alluding here to intrauterine life” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 152).

Water and darkness are linked in intrauterine experience, and their linkage persists in the way we imagine the dark. The dark often seems to me to function in an elemental way like water: at the end of the day, it floods in like a subterranean stream. At night, it is as though objects touch the surface of the dark as element, and are touched by it, soaking it up as they might water. There is a certain permeability and mutuality at work in the dark: objects inflect each other more fully and the boundaries between them are less defined.

Spending a large part of rehearsals in almost darkness came some way to achieving the new movement qualities I sought in *Ink*. The dancers commented on the feeling of freedom they experienced. There was a sense of emotional safety in the improvisation and the interpretation of the choreography, a sense of not being exposed in the vulnerable moments of spontaneous arising as we would have been under the starkness of neon studio lighting. We were novice improvisers, and cradling the movement in semi-darkness was key to creating a safe emotional environment for the intimate quality I sought. I wanted to establish a sense of privacy in the dance, to create the feeling that this nocturnal movement was going on anyway: it existed irrespective of whether or not it was seen.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have articulated some of the precursors to my inquiry into tactility and remembering. I have suggested that throughout my inquiry I have sought in various ways to soften the effects of separative perception. In the early phase with which this chapter deals, I sought, in dancing, to see differently by fostering a practice of ‘night vision’. By way of conclusion, I touch on the performance domain I sought for *Ink*. This serves as a précis of
this period, because the structure of separative perception is particularly apparent when presenting dance in conventional theatre spaces. For Ink, I wanted instead to create a sense of sharing a private event. I wanted the dancer to have her own sense of agency, as if the movement were occurring of its own accord, regardless of whether or not it was the object of another’s gaze.

Attempting to ‘perform’ these sensibilities was in some senses oxymoronic. Perhaps, in my attraction to working in darkness, what I sought was some kind of originary prenatal state, prior to the subject/object distinctions that tend to arrive with clear vision. There is a certain nostalgia entailed in these desires. However, in imagining their possibility during the creation of Ink, I began to reflect on intimacy, distance, interiority and intersubjectivity. This period clarified my desire to ‘see differently’ in performance-making. The search for a non-objectifying gaze provoked reflection on the interpersonal nature of collaborative creation and of performance. These thoughts were the genesis of an emerging ethics of performance-making, to be further outlined in Part II and Part III of the dissertation.
CHAPTER TWO: EYE PRACTICES

What do we see in a dance? To get to the bottom of this, I found myself reverse-engineering both the composition of my movement and the composition of my seeing (Nelson, 2004, p. 20).

Introduction

After *Ink*, I began a new phase of working with others. This phase came to be termed *the space between us*. I shifted away from creating movement phrases by myself and then imparting them to other dancers. This had been my model of working during *Ink*, and in that model, improvisation was used only as a way of warming into the choreography. Now, I wanted to use group improvisation as a way of choreographing. What followed was a rather murky creative period that lasted a year, in which I generated very little satisfying, repeatable material. Whilst the performance outcomes from this period were negligible, the trial-and-error nature of this phase was instructive. It helped me identify the qualities I sought to foster in the dancers with whom I worked.

Shifting the qualities of one’s seeing is a practice common to many artists working with improvised states that hinge on an integration of body and mind. Barbara Dilley is one such artist, and she has developed improvisation strategies specifically for the eyes (Dilley & Stark Smith, 2005). In an interview with Nancy Stark Smith, she names these strategies ‘eye practices’. I have appropriated the term to describe a range of strategies in my own work and that of others. For Dilley, the emphasis on vision emerged in response to the closed gaze that often characterises contemporary dance, where the focus is tuned internally.

I was not aware of Dilley’s eye practices during *the space between us*. However, I subsequently found that her articulation of the eyes had some surprising points of congruence with strategies I had developed. The

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4 Barbara Dilley was a member of the Merce Cunningham Company and the Grand Union dance/theatre collaboration in the 1960s and 1970s. She teaches embodied awareness at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado.
practice of ‘night vision’ that I had started in *Ink* fed into a variety of styles of seeing in the subsequent period of studio research. In this chapter, I trace the emergence of these styles of seeing in my practice with Jo and Michaela. I discuss strategies such as ‘closed eyes’, ‘fishtailing’ and ‘seeing out the back of the head’. These are discussed in relationship to Dilley’s eye practices as well as other movement practices where particular emphasis is placed on ways of using the eyes. I aim to show how such ‘eye practices’ can yield refreshing interventions into the dominant mode of separative perception.

Working with different kinds of seeing was a crucial part of my early collaborations with Jo and Michaela. For both Dilley and myself, interrogating and varying the ways we used our eyes when dancing was an essential part of engendering a different kind of dancing awareness. Ultimately, this leads to a different kind of dancing selfhood, as will be suggested throughout the dissertation. This is in line with Behnke’s notion, outlined in Chapter One, that styles of perception are interwoven with styles of being in the world.

As with night vision, my use of ‘eye practices’ was fuelled by a desire to lessen the rigid confines of separative perception within the studio process. I tried to instigate different modes of perceiving one another in movement. The cumulative effect of the eye practices was that I came to observe different qualities as a choreographer. Through the long cycles of improvisation of this period, I came to identify a style of movement that seemed not to belong to any one dancer, but rather emerged in ‘the space between us’. There was an emerging co-authoring of movement states, such that one’s customary sense of self expanded to mesh with the corporealities of others. Throughout the dissertation, I use the phrase *the space between us* to refer to this period of work. It marked the emergence of intercorporeality as a research focus. In the remainder of the dissertation, I detail how this focus developed through practices of tactility and remembering.
In the previous chapter, I provided the groundwork for a ‘critique in practice’ of separative perception. I discussed the choreographic strategies of *Ink*, Behnke’s notion of separative perception and Irigaray’s poetics of the dark. This was presented as a kind of archaeology of the research foci of the dissertation. I aimed to describe the conceptual and creative precursors to my subsequent inquiry into tactility and remembering. This chapter aims to provide the second phase of this archaeology. Practices of tactility and of remembering imply a focus on intercorporeality. I show that the focus on intercorporeality was made possible by the eye practices of *the space between us*.

i) Closed eyes

When I began a studio session with Jo and Michaela, we usually started with our eyes closed to quiet whatever had been going on prior to coming into the studio. Moving with the eyes closed was as much about warming up particular sensibilities as it was about warming up muscles and tendons. Closing the eyes let one’s awareness slip into the tissues of the body. For Dilley, closed eyes is the realm of interoceptive sensation (Dilley & Stark Smith, 2005, p. 40). In this phase of our work together, I moved with the dancers, also with my eyes closed. I guided the parameters of the movement of the trio by voicing what was going on in my own body. I drew attention to different parts of the body, different sensations, different degrees of engagement. We would try to locate parts of the body that were dormant, not yet awake, not yet articulate, and place attention there.

Sometimes we wanted to slip into a state that was accessed the day, the week, the month before, but found that its qualities were not there. Each day’s body is different and yesterday’s channels are not necessarily open. Sometimes it was a body-part that was dormant, sometimes it was a dynamic of movement that was not yet at our fingertips. We shifted the dynamic and loci of awareness accordingly, scanning the body to sense where attention was needed. Closing the eyes facilitates subtleties of
somatic awareness, and one’s ability to access such subtleties accumulates over time.

The habit of closing one’s eyes as a means of swiftly accessing interoceptive awareness is common to many contemporary dancers. It is also common to many therapeutic body-mind practices. There is a sense in which the distancing effects of separative perception can be softened by closing the eyes. In her Body-Mind Centering® (BMC®) teaching, Alice Cummins often starts sessions with the suggestion that we might try to “lose the idea of ourselves”. In approaching this task with my eyes shut in her class, it seemed that the ‘idea’ I needed to lose was the internalised visual image of myself moving. This image can cleave to one’s dancing, particularly if one’s early dance training involved concentrated learning in front of a mirror. For detailed interoceptive sensing, one needs to loosen the grip of Lacan’s specular image, outlined in the previous chapter.

Behnke notes that it is not easy to do so, and in fact it requires considerable practice (Behnke, 2002). She provides a phenomenological description of cultivating bodily awareness ‘from within’, and begins by lying down and closing her eyes. She notices two things: that lying down does not eliminate the posture of uprightness in the body, and that closing the eyes does not eliminate the effort to see. She carries the perceptual style of ‘looking at’ things into her attempt to experience her body from within. That is, it is possible to ‘feel’ something in one’s foot, but feel it from an outsider’s perspective.

However, both these hangovers from separative perception can be shifted with practice, and we can more fully inhabit what is going on in our foot, for instance. In effect, this means no longer making an object of our own body, and instead giving credence to interoceptive knowledge, as Behnke describes:

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5 Alice Cummins is a Melbourne-based dancer, performance-maker and certified Body-Mind Centering® practitioner who performs and teaches in Australia and internationally.
What is required for this phenomenon itself is thus a peculiar shift of consciousness from experiencing an object known as “my own lived body” to actively “living-in” this “body sense” (Behnke, 2002, p. 11).

Behnke’s observations and Cummins’ class instruction both underscore the fact that the persistent residues of separative perception can only be shifted through sustained effort. In movement practices, dancing with closed eyes provides an important beginning. Once this is established within a practice, there is scope to develop a range of visual strategies to provide a broader choreographic palette. Softening the field of vision is one such strategy, as will be discussed in the next section.

ii) Soft eyes

In my work with Jo and Michaela, opening the eyes would happen gradually. At first we let in only glimmers of the room, just opening the eyes very softly for a second. Short glimmers of visual information were enough to locate us in space, and gave us just enough confidence to take risks with weight, without letting go of the interoceptive sensations and imagery. From these glimmers, we developed a practice of ‘fishtailing’. We let in fragments of another person’s movement, not trying to grasp the movement fully, but letting it get away like the tail of a fish departing. We opened the eyes softly just for a second and allowed whatever we apprehended of the other person’s moving take shape in us, in our own movement.

This soft and partial gaze engendered a different kind of seeing to that of separative perception. It allowed our attention to remain in the internal kinaesthetic sensations even while seeing briefly outward. By keeping attuned to the internal sensing whilst softly seeing outwards, the gap between what the eye takes in and the body’s response became shorter. It was as though we became able to receive the kinaesthetic information of the other on the level of nerves, muscles, bones, breath and energy.
This style of seeing has aspects in common with Dilley’s ‘peripheral seeing’ (Dilley & Stark Smith, 2005, p. 40). She describes this eye practice as a state where the eyes are only half opened, focussed not in front, but instead hazily absorbing the edges of the world. Similarly, the practice of fishtailing enabled us to attend to peripheral movement. It is not a matter of catching sight of movement and then turning to focus on that movement. That would be to make the periphery the centre. Rather, peripheral seeing and fishtailing enable the absorption of information from a broad field of vision by deliberately not focussing on any single thing. Dilley’s ‘infant eyes’ also involves a broad field of vision, but in a different way:

[i]t’s actually a way of letting the eyeballs move around like a baby’s eyes, not trying to analyze. You are just noticing without naming. It liberates the head. The eyes are looking all around, fascinated, like an infant would be. It’s returning to a childlike experience of looking at the world before naming, before judgement, before concept, etc (Dilley & Stark Smith, 2005, p. 40).

Dilley describes the wide-eyed gaze of infancy as a perceptual mode that does not ascribe concepts or value judgements to that which is perceived. She makes the important observation that this style of seeing liberates the movement of the head. This calls to mind the epistemological values associated with quotidian separative seeing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, vision is extolled as providing the detachment and distance necessary for epistemological certainty. This is generally achieved by holding the eyes, and thus the head, still. Resisting the habitual need for the epistemological certainty of still vision yields a different style of movement. It is a style of movement characterised by a looser engagement of the head and neck.

Rosalind Crisp’s has similarly suggested that different movement qualities can arise when the head and eyes are not regarded as primary but rather are like one limb among others (Crisp, 2002). In an article detailing aspects of her improvisation practice, she includes the eyes in a range of potential

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6 Rosalind Crisp is an Australian dance artist based in Paris. She has been an important influence on my work, most particularly through my participation in the National Dance Laboratory in 2004.
techniques of noticing. A technique for the eyes might include “noticing seeing softly and widely with relaxed eyes that are no more important or tense than any other limb” (Crisp, 2002). The suggestion to think of the eyes as a limb serves as a reminder that we generally tend to think of the eyes and head as being the seat of consciousness. This in turn reminds us that modes of perception are far from neutral, and support both ways of knowing and ways of moving.

Crisp’s suggestion that the eyes need to be soft and relaxed also calls to mind Behnke’s observation that shutting the eyes does not necessarily terminate the body’s striving to see. The prevalence of vision can create a postural residue with the head craned forward and the eye muscles strained. I offered some prompts to Jo and Michaela that were in a similar vein to Crisp’s. I offered, for instance, the image of the eyes seeing out the back of the head, to shift the frontal posture associated with quotidian vision. It opens up the intelligence of the back of the body. I also suggested imagining eyes in the hands and feet. These suggestions provide ways to soften the activity of one’s eyes and disperse the range of vision so that it becomes less pointed.

In this section and the preceding one, I have described various eye practices. I have sketched an arc of possibilities, from closed eyes to fishtailing through to thinking of the eyes as a limb. Deliberately working through the range of these qualities of vision facilitates a range of movement qualities. This both opens up a broader choreographic palette and serves to disrupt the flat plane of separative perception. In the next section, I detail a further eye practice in which the relationship between internal sensing and external visibility comes to the fore.

iii) Seeing double

Working with closed eyes and softening the visual field of the dancing are two useful strategies for subverting separative perception. One criticism that could be levelled at such strategies, however, is that they create a focus that
is too interoceptive. This can lead to a style of dancing that does not open itself sufficiently to a witness. In an effort to move in ways that do not reproduce the alienating effects of separative perception, one can run into the opposite ‘problem’ of introverted dancing. In proffering a critique in practice of separative perception, it must be remembered that both distance and detachment are necessary at times. Dance artist Lisa Nelson’s practice is one in which the interoceptive exists in a taut relationship with the specular, and this makes for rich improvisation states. In this section, I outline the particular ways in which she has married detachment and interoception.

In an article that chronicles the development of vision in her practice, Nelson writes about the slippages between seeing and dancing (Nelson, 2004). She notices the way a singer relates to her own voice, moving the face to ‘tune’ the sound. It is a feedback loop whereby the singer perceives her sound and then tunes the muscles of the throat and mouth to shape the perceived sound. Nelson considers this ‘tuning’ to be an analogy for dancing and seeing dancing.

Early on, what interested Nelson in dancing was to see “the details of an extruded inner life” (Nelson, 2004, p. 22). She wanted to see more of the internal movement of dance than she was seeing in the New York scene of the 1970s:

I yearned to see something else. Something underneath the dancers’ interaction with each other and the architecture of the space, something of the dancer’s interaction with herself – the internal dialogue that shapes the surface (Nelson, 2004, p. 22).

Both Nelson’s practice and mine have entailed a questioning of vision. This questioning involves both ways of seeing dance and ways of seeing while dancing. In the statement above, Nelson articulates her motivation for this questioning of vision. I include it here to suggest that in both practices, the questioning of vision stems from a similar desire. That is, we both sought

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Lisa Nelson is a USA dance-maker and videographer with a particular interest in the role the senses play in movement.
‘underneath’ qualities, ‘the details of an extruded inner life’. In my inquiry, I have sought qualities of dancing and of selfhood that were not readily apparent in the way we usually use our eyes when dancing and when perceiving dance. Ultimately, this led to a practice that revolved around tactility and remembering.

In Nelson’s case, the desire to see ‘something else’ became a motivation for a style of improvisation that bore a very special relationship to vision. In the 1970s, Nelson stopped dancing because she was unable to find ways of generating this ‘something else’ in her choreography. She immersed herself with working with a video camera, recording the rehabilitation of infants with developmental problems. This entailed an intense focus on minute movements, all seen through the camera’s lens. Through this immersion, she gradually found her way back into dancing, as she puts it, “through my eyes” (Nelson, 2004, p. 22).

This videographic re-entrance into dance was markedly different to the dance stemming from quotidian visual perception. The visual dynamics of the video camera enabled Nelson to develop a pronounced and flexible relationship between interoception and the specular image. Indeed, she articulates this double seeing via the metaphor of the mirror:

I slip from one side of the mirror to the other, back and forth, from considering seeing it to considering doing it or feeling it. Shooting and editing video placed me on both sides of the mirror at once (Nelson, 2004, p. 23).

Nelson’s extensive experience of seeing movement through the camera’s lens came to pattern her dancing with an oscillatory quality. In videoing infants, she had become aware of the organisation that precedes a movement, an organisation apparent in the eyes and the musculature of the infants. She was then able to ‘see’ this moment before movement in her own dancing, even while sensing it interoceptively. The moment before movement became something observable and therefore changeable. She also links this ability to the plasticity of post-production editing. In editing
videoed movement, she noticed that there was a correlation between the split-second inserts she composed and a tendency in her own improvisation for fast transitioning, almost like jump-cuts.

As Nelson’s experience demonstrates, what we see infiltrates our corporeal capacities and affects how we move. However, the inverse is also true. In the act of shooting dance, Nelson became acutely aware of the movement of her own body, and how that movement affected what she saw. In what seems like an echo of Behnke’s point about the inextricability of styles of perceiving and of being, Nelson notes:

The familiar principle that the act of observing changes the observed was evident and the inverse was also palpable – what was observed changed me. Most compelling, I came to see, was that how I observed changed both me and what I was looking at (Nelson, 2004, p. 24).

Nelson describes the interleaving of self, seeing and moving via the metaphor of figure and ground. When her eyes explored a still object, it was the movement of her eyes that was the figure. If, as when videoing dance, both the eye/lens and the subject were moving, the relationship between figure and ground shifted back and forth (Nelson, 2004, p. 24). This capacity to shift between figure and ground, subject and object, is akin to Nelson’s capacity to slip from one side of the mirror to another.

In her capacity to ‘work’ the relationship between subject and object, Nelson provides a powerful intervention into the dominance of separative perception. Distance and detachment are used as a creative counterpoint to interoception, providing a dialectic that sustains the improvisation. She keeps this oscillating re-positioning very active within herself while dancing. Her description of this experience is reminiscent of Dilley’s description of ‘infant eyes’:

Sometimes I followed my eye’s appetite. This experience was the most sensual, as my eye tracked the seductive edges of light and dark, unconcerned with naming, playing with rhythm and pattern. Sometimes, the content within the frame captured my curiosity and I
would organize the movement of my looking to make sense of it…. Sometimes my eye followed my ears, or my attention wandered to recuperate from the ferocity of my focus. The leadership shifted constantly from sense to sense, from what was before me to what was inside me, from sensing to making sense (Nelson, 2004, p. 25).

The oscillation between sensing and making sense is the oscillation between interoception and distance. For Nelson, it provides a way to stay curious. Her re-entry into dance via the camera’s lens generated a unique style of movement. It took vision as its base but in ways markedly different from the style of dancing given by quotidian visual perception. Though to a much lesser degree, the camera’s lens also provided me with a useful counterpoint to the interoceptive focus I was fostering. In the backs of things, the phase of work detailed in Part II, the camera came into its own as a device for seeing double.

During the backs of things, I worked in close proximity to Jo and Michaela, such that their movement felt like an extension of my touch. Due to the depth of my interoceptive engagement with their movement, videoing the improvisations provided me with much-needed distance. With time, it gave me the distance I needed in order to shape the improvised material into a choreographed work. I edited video material away from the studio, on the computer. This digital composing was my means of setting material during this period. But because of my tactile relationship to Jo and Michaela’s movement, I was feeling it from within even as I looked at it on the computer’s screen. This productive slippage between ‘seeing it’ and ‘feeling it’ is akin to Nelson’s observation that she could be on both sides of the mirror at once.

iv) Synthesis: seeing with

In this section, I synthesise the eye practices detailed thus far and show how they fed into varied ways of perceiving one another in the studio. This had implications for the research focus that emerged towards the end of this phase of work. As a trio, we gave tiered ‘responses’ to each other’s improvisations. One person moved without having chosen a particular
score. A second person witnessed and wrote down their impressions, while a third person witnessed and prepared to move in response to the first person’s movement. Because we were involved in a rotation of moving in response to one another, we ‘saw’ each other in ways that are quite different to separative perception. That is, rather than seeing a moving other ‘over there’, we ‘saw with’ each other. Knowing that we would be responding in movement and in writing meant that, to a degree, we lived the movement of the other with them.

I have already detailed how the quality of the gaze was formative in our improvisation. It was also formative of a style of witnessing each other’s movement. Playing with the gaze helps keep the pattern of witnessing and responding lively and fresh. Seeing hazily, de-focusing the eyes deliberately, allows one to absorb and respond to broad sweeps of emotion and dynamic. Hazy witnessing can encourage strong associations to surface. This could be an image, a memory, a mood, an emotion, an era, a context, a skerrick of narrative, or a dream. Watching with a sharper focus can encourage attention to more concrete details. This might mean a keen observation of anatomical function, kinetic charge, or a movement pattern that was sensed and followed. These ways of witnessing one another are obvious extensions of the styles of seeing we employed while dancing, detailed in previous sections.

The tiered series of moving, witnessing and responding of this period generated a great deal of material. But I struggled to find effective ways of refining it. After experimenting with different approaches, I gravitated towards a strategy that prefigured my use of touch. The following journal excerpt records the studio session where I stumbled into this strategy. I worked individually with Jo and Michaela. They improvised using a score

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8 The term ‘witnessing’ derives from Authentic Movement, where it is used to describe a way of attending to the other’s movement, a kind of phenomenological stance of noticing what occurs while attempting to leave one’s preconceptions as much to one side as possible. It was developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse, a pioneer of movement therapy (See for example Pallaro, 1999).
that combined prompts of an anatomical and a poetic nature. I added further prompts in such a way that it was like a duet.

11th June 2004

I scored right in there with Jo or Michaela. I stayed close, one metre away, moving with them, speaking quietly, more like a duet than an external witness. I slipped between hazy and sharp eyes. We worked the scores together, trying to refine them, augment them, find their angles and limitations.

Michaela was working on ‘recollect’ using her wrists. I prompted her intermittently with these scores: remembering the shape of his face / finding a shape in the clouds / remembering the dimensions of someone absent.

Michaela then worked on ‘I want to show you something’ using her sternum. I prompted her intermittently with these scores: I’m trying to show you something and you’re not even looking / Now you’re looking I can really show you / You can see it now, I don’t have to show you.

With Jo we worked on ‘hold my own agenda’ making small O and U shapes with her body. I prompted her intermittently with these scores: I am not phased by anything / My face is waterproof, my body is not.

The record of this day’s work marks our emergence from the murky period and the clarification of some pressing interests. I was right up close to Jo and Michaela as I offered verbal prompts and catalysts while they improvised. I used different styles of seeing, continuing to resist patterns of separative perception. My proximity and the varied styles of seeing meant that I was ‘seeing with’ and this foregrounded my interoceptive involvement with their movement. The sensation of interoception even while offering
external prompts meant that my role as choreographer in this task was to be both sides of the mirror at once, akin to Nelson’s double seeing.

My prompts sought to draw out the intersubjective nature of their orientation, furthering the departure from the objectification of quotidian vision. I wanted to coax the movement from its intense interiority into a more open and relational place. It was a complex task, and slow at times, but something important crystallised: it was as though the movement emerged ‘in the space between us’. I became very interested in the creative potentials and the ethical dimensions of this co-authoring of movement states.

During the space between us, I had wanted to find ways to be and move together other than via direct contact work. The co-authoring of movement states described in the journal excerpt above seemed to take me some way towards that. It seemed to people the space with others, even while dancing alone. I had the impression that Jo and Michaela were accompanied in their movement. They appeared to be oriented towards an absent other, and this orientation quickened the space around them. This crystalline quality became something I sought in subsequent work.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, my aim has been to show how the eye practices of the space between us continued the ‘critique in practice’ of separative perception that began when I turned the lights off in Ink. Both the darkness of Ink and the eye practices staged interventions into the visual field of the dance, lessening the alienating effects of separative perception. Further, I have tried to show how the eye practices led to a focus on intercorporeality. Working with different visual strategies brings about different movement qualities and also effects how one perceives the moving other. This two-pronged effect of the eye practices meant that as a choreographer, I came to notice different qualities than I had noticed prior to using these visual strategies.
The focus on intercorporeality that emerged towards the end of the space between us paved the way for the research foci that are detailed in the remainder of the dissertation. That is, the practices of tactility and remembering had their origins in this experimental phase when my attention gravitated towards the space between people. This gravitation stemmed from the softening of separative perception generated by the eye practices. Cumulatively, Chapters One and Two have aimed to provide an archaeology of the foci of the inquiry. They have charted the emergence of a style of non-dualistic perception, and shown its importance for my performance practice.
PART II: CHOREOGRAPHIC TACTILITY
CHAPTER THREE: THE CONNECTIVITY OF TOUCH

Through touch, two persons, the toucher and the touched, can become a new ensemble (Feldenkrais, 1995, p. 139).

Introduction

In this chapter, I articulate the connectivity, the ‘new ensemble,’ generated by choreographic tactility. I work through various understandings of how touch functions, so as to arrive at an understanding of the specific nature of tactility within my practice. I take the primordial nature of touch within human development as a starting point. My aim in doing is to avoid simply restating the importance of touch to the human organism. Rather, I take the developmental importance of touch as a given, and use this to elaborate the model of touch found in my practice of choreographic tactility.

In my studio practice with Jo and Michaela, we found that we gravitated towards touch as a means of entering the realm of movement improvisation. In this chapter, I identify and examine some of the aspects of touch that make it such a fruitful modality in which to improvise. I begin with an account of how we used touch even in warming up, before beginning to improvise. I link the use of touch in warming up to the supportive touch of infancy, and go on to explore the inextricability of touch and movement in the infant’s experience. I suggest that tactility is cumulative, building up in layers, such that our present experience of touch relates to future and past experiences of touch. The cumulative layering of touch is well understood by practitioners of certain healing modalities, in which very subtle practices of touch have been developed and articulated. I outline the understanding of touch common to these modalities, namely Intricate Tactile Sensitivity.

These notions are used to build towards my own understanding of touch as an elastic sensing between dancer and choreographer, which I term ‘tactile echolocation’. Through being our earliest sensory experience, touch cuts to the quick of our corporeal selfhood, yielding a symbiotic relationship.
between toucher and touched in movement. The understanding of tactility that I establish in this chapter is an essential precursor to the two chapters that follow, where I take the notion of tactile echolocation into wider realms of ethical and choreographic relationships.

i) Warming up

Warming up for a studio session with Jo and Michaela was not just about limbering muscles, tendons and joints. We used touch so as to wake up a certain kind of emotional and kinaesthetic connection. We became very accustomed to beginning a studio session with touch work. If I attempted to start a session in a non-tactile way, I was met with gentle dismay. Starting with touch allowed us to slip into a milieu of connectivity that came to characterise our work together. Jo and Michaela started with their eyes shut, to quiet the trace of the day’s activities and to enter into the introceptive realm, into the intelligence of muscle, bone, sinew, organ, skin. The following account, reconstructed from my studio notes during the period of using touch as a strategy, articulates this shift.

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*We are just beginning. Michaela stands in front of me and closes her eyes in preparation for the session. I start by moving to the left of her and placing the palm of my left hand on her sternum and the palm of my right hand on her back, between her shoulder blades. I shuffle her torso back and forth laterally between my hands. This goes on for a while. I shift my hands down to her belly and the small of her back and perform the same lateral movement, back and forth. From the back, I place my hands on either side of her hipbones and shuffle her back and forth with tiny lateral movements. The gentle shake goes down her legs and into the floor, as well as reverberating up her spine and out her head. Then I remove my hands, and watch the resonance of this touch/movement stimulus subside in Michaela. She exhales. We’re ready to go on now. It’s like the shuffling movement has created static electricity, a band of energy between us.*
Rather than aim immediately for movement, this mobile touch aims to generate a particular relationship, the relationship from which the movement will later spring. The shuffling touch gives Michaela a chance to slip into the mode of touch without yet responding. It gives me a moment to slip into that mode too, to sense what is going on for both of us, and to sense what might be appropriate for this session’s work. I feel comfortable with this beginning. We have done it so many times that it already has the reassuring quality of a small ritual. It connects us immediately, and this mode of connectivity is essential to the close-knit style of work I’m interested in conceiving with Michaela and Jo. As an initiation, it is directly and deeply corporeal, indeed intercorporeal. I do not have to communicate ideas in words or images or by demonstrating movement. We are immediately in the same milieu, and things will emerge here, between us.

As noted above, touch work while ‘warming up’ did not need to result in movement on Michaela’s part. The aim was primarily to ground us in a particular kind of relationship, to establish a lively tactile connectivity between us. To understand what we were drawing upon from our respective storehouses of corporeal memory in order for connectivity to arise so rapidly for us through touch, it is useful to understand something of the role touch plays in infant development. Literature from the fields of psychology and the health sciences that addresses touch pays particular attention to infant development. Touch psychologist Matthew Hertenstein’s recent study of tactile communication between adults is a notable exception (Hertenstein, 2006).

That the bulk of the literature from these fields deals with, or at least refers to, very early infancy stems from an important characteristic of touch: in the early vulnerable period of human life, touch is essential to survival and wellbeing. In multiple ways, the primordial touch of infancy creates a blueprint for subsequent tactile interactions and emotional development. Because of the developmental embeddedness of touch, refining and extending our tactile sensibilities became a very transformative strategy in
the choreographic context. Examining some of the manifestations of the primacy of touch in infancy provides insight into this process.

The beneficial effects of touch are well documented in the literature on infant development (Blackwell, 2000; Field et al., 1986; Hertenstein, 2002; Jones & Brown, 1996; Liaw, 2000; Mathai, Fernandez, Mondkar, & Kanbur, 2001; Montagu, 1986; Muir, 2002). Touch provides a degree of continuity in the difficult transition from intra- to extrauterine life. Continuity is given in part through the hands, through loving touch. Anthropologist Ashley Montagu, in his seminal volume devoted to touch, to what he terms the “human significance of the skin”, characterises the transition from the uterus to the world thus:

Within the womb the fetus is enclosed and intimately bounded by the supporting embracing walls of the uterus. This is a comforting and reassuring experience. But with birth, the infant experiences a more or less open-ended environment (Montagu, 1986, p. 293).

The efficacy of touch-based therapies recalls this primordial truth. To be ‘handled’ gently and supportively in a therapeutic context can loosen some of the defensive rigidity acquired in life subsequent to infancy. By revisiting modes of supportive touch that were hopefully experienced in infancy, touch-based therapies can shift entrenched patterning and open possibilities for new kinaesthetic and emotional behaviour. So too with movement improvisation: by providing supportive touch, dance that stems from straining and striving can be softened and the muscle tone can re-approach that of supported infancy. In my studio work, warming up using touch became a kind of remembering. It recalled the supportive touch of infancy and allowed us to move from a place that was less defensive than some of the postural attitudes that are adopted in dancing and in life. I believe this is in part what made us crave touch as an emotional and kinaesthetic ‘warm up’ to our studio sessions.

*I only draw on a small amount of literature from the field of psychology, as I find its perspective limiting in relation to my work. Even when dealing with tactile communication, touch is considered uni-directional, and very little attention is given to the intrinsic relationality of touch. Regarding Hertenstein’s research on tactile communication, Muir calls for a model that accounts for the bi-directional, dynamic and contingent aspects of touch (Muir, 2002, p. 98).
ii) Touch and movement

The supportive touch of infancy is intertwined with the experience of movement.\(^\text{10}\) Indeed, touch and movement interleave so completely that there is a name for their conjoining, as Hertenstein notes: “together, cutaneous and kinaesthetic process comprise the somasethetic sense” (Hertenstein, 2002, p. 71). In comparison with other therapeutic modalities, Body Mind Centering® (BMC®) comes to the fore as an important melding of therapeutic touch and movement practices. Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, the founder of BMC®, emphasises the tactile experience of the unborn, and links touch with movement. She considers the coupled sensations of movement and touch to be the first forms of perception to develop:

In utero, as the fetus moves, it receives immediate tactile feedback from itself and from its environment – its body parts rub against each other, against the wall of the uterus, and against the amniotic fluid (Cohen in Hanlon Johnson, 1995, p. 200).

This calls to mind the contemporary dancer’s common predilection for starting a studio session on the floor. Floorwork is comforting: through rolling, stretching and pressing one gradually ‘finds’ one’s embodied self through supportive tactile contact with the floor. Bainbridge Cohen regards the experience of movement to be a mode of perception, a belief that marks a departure from the classical categorisation of the five senses.\(^\text{11}\) Privileging tactile movement as a mode of perception is markedly evident in the work of sculptor Rosalind Driscoll. She became interested in the tactile qualities of sculpture when she began making paper and book forms, which needed

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\(^{10}\) The link between touch and movement forms the basis for David Morris’ argument for a shift from thinking of ‘corporeal schemas’ to thinking of ‘moving schemas of perception’. He argues that haptic actions engender a crossing over between self and world that could move theories of perception into a different realm (Morris, 2004). While his account provides a fine analysis of touch and movement, his focus is on the haptic manipulation of objects whereas mine is largely on tactile relationships between people.

\(^{11}\) Bainbridge Cohen links the exclusion of movement from the five traditional sense categories (touch, taste, smell, hearing, vision) to the history of ideas: “It is fascinating, and, I must confess, frustrating to me that the sensations of movement and visceral activity have been excluded from this grouping of the major senses. As all sciences are reflections of the socio-politico-religious ideas of their time, it is appropriate that the historical repression of bodily sensation in Western Culture has been transmitted as a matter of scientific fact” (Cohen in Hanlon Johnson, 1995, p. 196).
to be handled in order to be known (Driscoll, 1995, p. 42). When making larger works, she privileges haptic perception:

I constantly bear in mind the anatomy and kinesiology of fingers, hands and arms as I work on the sculptures. How different it is to feel something between both hands or to use each hand independently; to keep a straight line from elbow to fingertips or to bend and rotate at the wrist; to move horizontally or vertically; to travel along a surface or through space. The sculptures are like scores for improvisation, designed to provoke a range of movements (Driscoll, 1995, p. 43).

Acknowledging the primordial coupling of movement and touch is instructive for my practice. It clarifies why choreographic tactility led to rich movement states. It also clarifies why I felt so kinaesthetically connected to Jo and Michaela’s movement. Despite the fact that I was unable to dance during the main period of working with touch with Jo and Michaela, I did not experience the sensation of total stasis that often haunts the injured dancer. It was as though, in the small amount of movement I did to work flexibly with touch, my movement extended into theirs. My mobile touch morphed into their extended movement, blurring the line where touch ended and movement began. The vicarious experience of movement registered in me on a level far deeper than the visual. I attribute this to the developmental coupling of touch and movement, where, in touching, one expects movement. As Bainbridge Cohen outlined above, tactile movement provides the first paradigm through which we experience the world. Touch is never still. It always invites further touch, repetition and movement. In fact, it is hard to imagine a static touch. In my case, the gestures of my touch carried into the movements of another person, but I experienced it almost as if it were my own movement.

The tendency of touch to accumulate, to always be more than a single touch, is explored by scholars quite removed from the study of infancy. Karmen Mackendrick writes about the inextricability of language and the body, and starts by exploring ‘the touch’ as a somatic figure of speech (Mackendrick, 2004). In her account of touch in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, she notes the relatedness of touch and movement when she discusses the repetition that
characterises the language of love (Mackendrick, 2004, p. 52). For Mackendrick, language is deeply tactile: touch, repetition, movement and language are interlinked. Repetition in language is a form of movement, in that it draws our attention to rhythm and marks the passage of time. Repetition imbues the language we use in our attempt to reach a loved one. For Mackendrick, this is akin to the presence of movement within the touch with which we might also approach that loved one:

The tactility of language is in some measure the motility of language; its recognition means recognizing fluidity. In fact, exploring touch in general we note how often and how intensely, if scarcely surprisingly, the tactile is linked to the motor, tactility to motility and kinaesthesis. A philosophical discussion of touch tends, with seeming inevitability, toward a discussion of palpation and manipulation, of stroke and caress. But still further, to a discussion of walking, to dancing, to the movements of the muscles. Movement is allied with repetition: to stay is not to repeat. We move; we move on, and we return (Mackendrick, 2004, pp. 59-60).

Mackendrick writes about touch within a volume that deals with the fleshly nature of language. Her poetic account is illustrative of the tactility she finds in language. That she links tactility so closely with motility harks back to the linkage of the two senses in infancy, to our very first experiences of the world. The intertwining of touch, movement and repetition is evident in the fact that the human organism will still seek tactile stimulation through motion when loving touch is not available.

Ethicist Linda Holler, in her study of touch as the basis of a relational ontology, cites the example of orphans discovered in Romania who were rarely touched, but who rocked themselves continuously (Holler, 2002, p. 28). No doubt there was something rhythmical in the rocking movement that calmed the infants’ distressed nervous systems, but I see also an attempt to satisfy the skin’s hunger for the touch it did not receive from other humans. I am reminded of a calf on my supervisor’s farm: one of a twin, it was rejected by its mother who would not let it suckle or nestle into her body. It presses itself against the paddock fence, seeking the comfort of the pressure against an upright object, in the absence of its mother. Similarly, in his
account of beginning to perceive the world through touch after losing his sight in childhood, Jacques Lusseyran describes the emotional importance of pressure:

As soon as my hands came to life, they put me in a world where everything was an exchange of pressures. These pressures gathered together in shapes, and each one of the shapes had meaning. As a child I spent hours leaning against objects and letting them lean against me. Any blind person can tell you that this gesture, this exchange, gives him a satisfaction too deep for words (Lusseyran, 2006, p. 27).

Sensations of pressure, rocking and spinning are comforting because they provide a feeling of attachment to the world. Holler notes that such sensations “may provide a feeling of containment, the feeling of being and dwelling comfortably in one’s body, a feeling that infants normally acquire by being held” (Holler, 2002, p. 37). In Chapter Four, I will explore more fully the sense of selfhood that is engendered through touch. Here, I mention it in passing, as my emphasis is on the importance of the linkage of touch and movement and how that articulates into my choreographic practice.

Touch is so often coupled with verbs of motion: the fetus rubs; the calf presses; the orphan rocks; the blind child leans. These instances of self-stimulation are in large part about comfort and quieting distress. But they are also paths for learning about the self in the world. Through haptic action, combining touch and movement in engagement with external objects, we learn to orientate ourselves in an open-ended world. Tactile motions are part of a complex process of spatial orientation. When we first began to work with touch, and Jo and Michaela had their eyes shut, there was initially a tentativeness to the movement. There was a period of adjustment as they learnt to orientate themselves in space via the reference points of my hands.

Once, as I moved my hand slowly across Jo’s back and some of her weight fell backwards into my hand, I was reminded of holding my baby cousin, who was at that time too young to support herself in an upright position. Her
tiny body was only held up by supportive hands, hands that were her central reality as her eyes struggled to focus. For Jo and Michaela, responding to touch in movement necessitated surrendering much of the sense of control that sight gives us. While this felt like a new experience, it could equally be seen as a return, a corporeal recollection of navigating the world through touch.

The integration of touch and spatial awareness is an important part of the transition from the closed intimacy of the womb to the open-endedness of the world, and, for Montagu, the success of that transition hinges on the quality of the maternal tactile relationship:

> The infant needs to learn on the firm foundation of closeness, what closeness, proximity, distance and openness mean. In short, he has to learn the meaning, and the manner, of accommodating himself to a great variety and complexity of spatial relationships—all of which are closely bound up with his experiences of tactility, principally in relation to his mother’s body (Montagu, 1986, p. 294).

The infant gradually gains a clearer use of sight and comes to rely on vision to navigate the world. In our dancing, we dive backwards and reverse this process, trying to lessen the hegemony of vision and move from touch instead. Surrendering the control given by sight and instead moving in response to the touch of another can give rise to experiences of both delicacy and exhilaration. Orientating ourselves in space via the touch of another opens us up to a long-forgotten facet of our subjectivity: our orientation towards the world in infancy via the loving touch of others. When dancing, if there is a deep sense of trust between mover and toucher, then the pleasure of finding oneself supported tactilely by another can be profound. It opens us and moves us. And as we go further into the practice of choreographic tactility, it moves us more, and more quickly. This dance is one of emotional and kinaesthetic surfing, dermic surfing.

Deep emotions can surface, via the moving contact with the surface of our selves, our skin. On a cellular if not on a conscious level, we hold the imprint or memory of the originary maternal touch. It is always a touch that
invites repetition, a touch that is coupled with movement. Rosalind Driscoll has harnessed this corporeal imprinting of touch in her tactile sculptures:

> Touch provides a direct, intimate relationship with the artwork. Meanings are based in movement and sensations. Unlike the distance inherent in looking, by touching, we join the sculpture, sometimes briefly assuming the qualities of the object: feeling for example, tall and thin as we touch a tall, thin sculpture, or spacious inside as we explore an interior space, or balanced as we find a symmetrical pattern. Often the object suggests specific associations and memories, and sometimes it is the very motion of touching that evokes memories or feelings associated with that motion, like playing an instrument or making love (Driscoll, 1995, p. 43).

When remembering our work with touch a year after we completed the *backs of things*, Jo and Michaela recalled aspects of the opening of self through touch. Michaela said, “I feel like it [the touch work] unravels me sometimes… I feel like I’m going to fall apart” (Michaela Pegum, personal communication, 20th July 2006). Jo immediately rejoined with the observation that that is what the fetus does: it is curled up and then unfurls in relation to its mother’s body. The fetus is touched, and it unravels like the tendril of a plant. As if to illustrate this movement, Ashley Montagu describes the infant’s tactile-kinaesthetic/spatial integration via a botanical metaphor that is also a metaphor for the way Jo and Michaela began to orientate themselves in relation to my touch. Thigmotropism is the directional movement of a plant, particularly a tendril, in relation to a surface with which it has come into contact:

> From his early orientations to the spatial dimensions of the world the child relies virtually entirely upon his sense of touch, and by this most primitive of all sensory agencies, by thigmotropism (from the Greek *thigma*, “touch,” and *trope*, “turn,” that is, by responding to contact or touch), learns to find his way about in the world of the environment his mother provides. The child’s first space is tactile. Initially, it is passively tactile, experiencing tactile sensations that are gradually converted into perceptions, that is, sensations endowed with meanings. With these meanings, the child then actively begins to scan the world for itself (Montagu, 1986, p. 301).

Touch shifts from passivity to a thigmotropic desire to move in response. Bainbridge Cohen, in discussing the tactile-kinaesthetic stimuli that she
gives to infants who have impaired neurological functioning, suggests that the thigmotropic desire to move in response occurs within a tactile dialogue between selves:

Touch plays a major role in the opening of the child to itself. However, it is not only a mechanical stimulation, but one aspect of open communication between two people in playful dialogue within a totally receptive, perceptive environment (Cohen in Hanlon Johnson, 1995, p. 202).

Phylogenetically, the tactile and kinaesthetic systems are older than vision and hearing. In Chapter Four, I will discuss Linda Holler’s account of two autistic women who faced great difficulty in having open communication through touch. Here, I mention her account briefly because it contributes to my discussion of the connectivity of touch. Holler notes that educators working with children who have developmental disorders capitalise on the connectivity engendered by touch and movement. Children with Pervasive Developmental Disorders become calmer and more connected through engaging in physical exercises based on touch and motion rather than hearing and vision (Holler, 2002, p. 36). Exercises based on vision and sound do make children calm, but tend to do so by enabling them to withdraw into worlds of their own. Touch and movement, on the other hand, entail an engagement with others, generating calmness through connectivity.

In this section, I have argued for the inextricability of touch and movement in the infant’s entry into a world of others, and shown how this developmental fact feeds into my practice of choreographic tactility. In warming up, we allow the touch of the other to sink into us in preparation for opening up to a playful improvisational dialogue. This preparatory touch provides the developmental, emotional and kinaesthetic ground from which can emerge the thigmotropic desire to move in response. In Chapter Four, with Holler, I will show how touch and movement combine to engender a feeling of wholeness where we can stay attached to both self and world rather than having to shut down or choose between them.
iv) Tactile patterning

Touch is a cumulative endeavour. In Part III of the dissertation, I will explore the particular relationships between touch and remembering. Here, I will lay the ground for that later discussion by exploring the ways in which tactile sensibilities develop over time. I articulate the temporal development of touch as a kind of patterning. Touch opens us to ourselves, and to the others who touch us. It also opens us towards a future, in laying down the patterns of our future learning capacities and our capacity to give and receive touch. In my work with Jo and Michaela, I became acutely aware of how tactile patterns developed between us, shaping both our movement interactions and the ensuing choreography. The touch I give is always in relation to the touches I have given and the touches I will be able to give. The notion of tactile patterning describes the way past touch determines our current and future capacity for touch, but also allows for plasticity and change, or re-patterning.

My ways of touching Jo and Michaela became more refined over time. So too with their responses: we found that the perception of and response to choreographic tactility can become more precise and differentiated over time. Again, this facet of our work is steeped in developmental precedent. At birth, all babies have receptors found at the surface of the skin, which develop over time in response to the continuing touch the baby receives. The skin’s receptors allow tactile information to be communicated to the brain via the nervous pathways. These nervous pathways become progressively more specialised, allowing the infant to respond differently to different kinds of touch.

Touch fosters the maturation of different sized neurons (the basic functional unit of the nervous system), different degrees of myelination (the sheathing of some nerve cells for insulation and the transmission of impulses), and the development of synaptic structures (the way in which the gaps between nerves cells are structured so as to enable the transmission of signals). In a
study of the tactile needs of premature infants, nurse Jen-Juian Liaw observes that “(t)actile stimulation gives humans a base for higher order operations and determines many of the initial “cell assemblages” that form the roots for future learning” (Liaw, 2000, p. 85). In revisiting and refining our tactile sensibilities as adults in the practice of choreographic tactility, it was as though we reassembled our cells.12 Through the cumulative use of touch, we assembled new pathways, both movement pathways and pathways for rapidly connecting touch to movement. We exploited the plasticity of the nervous system to develop and manipulate our tactile patterning.

The sense of cell re-assemblage came about through progressively re-sensitising ourselves to touch. The skin has the capacity for exquisite sensitivity. However, in a society where the amount of touch received often recedes the older one gets, the skin’s sensitivity can become numbed by our collective forgetting and ignoring of touch. This has the effect of lessening our sensitivity to touch. It lessens our attunement to the detailed specificity contained in an individual touch, and indeed, lessens our potential for receiving future touch. In our work, we found that this could be changed, and that the skin relearns quickly. Skin is intrinsically sensitive in that it possesses sophisticated receptors and its sensitivity can be shifted according to the amount and quality of touch received. This will be elaborated more fully in my discussion of autism in Chapter Four.

Holler cites research showing that the nerve cells that deal with tactile stimulation are highly developed in the cortexes of rats who receive touch, while in those rats that are not touched, the richness of the neural connections declines and the size of the cells shrinks. This shows that the amount of touch received determines future capacity to receive touch. Selves that do not receive sufficient touch become ‘touchy’ or ‘jumpy’: for the touch-deprived, touch can provoke a sensory overload, as is often the

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12 There is an interesting confluence of ideas between the notion of cell assemblage and re-assemblage in human development, Bainbridge Cohen’s emphasis on cellular learning and Deborah Hay’s notion of cellular consciousness, even though the latter is not explicitly framed around touch. However, these confluences are beyond the scope of the dissertation.
case with sufferers of autism. Touch can be overwhelming for such individuals.

The touch of another while dancing can also be overwhelming. I found that the touch used in the early stages of a session needed to be either quite sparse, or quite constant, but not in-between. Sparse touch left the nervous system plenty of time to absorb the information. Touch that was relatively constant soothed the nervous system: we could sink into the information rather than being on the alert for the potential surprise of the next touch. In touching Jo and Michaela, I was aware that the reach of my touch was much further than the immediate contact under my hands.

Touch reaches into the future in that it imprints a style for later receptions of touch, but it also, in a parallel movement, reaches into the past. My ways of touching now are the cumulative result of the ways I have been touched in the past. Fortunately, my experiences of touch in infancy were positive. My good fortune was pointed out to me by a friend, whose own experience was otherwise. She had been brought up in a family whose stoic values thwarted ‘excessive’ displays of affection. In adulthood, she felt she did not know how to touch others, and experienced this lack so keenly that she completed a course in massage so as to become comfortable with touch.

As this anecdotal evidence suggests, the touch we receive impacts not only on the way we receive future touch, but also on the way we go on to touch others. This is borne out by research in psychology, where longitudinal studies on non-human primates shed light on the long-term effects of touch deprivation. With the exceptions of the Romanian orphans and the infrequent instance of a child brought up extreme sensory deprivation, it is very difficult to get long-term impressions of the effects on humans of significant touch deprivation. Consequently, research has been carried out on apes, at times with quite inhumane cruelty. However, if one can lay

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13 Montagu details experiments by Harry Harlow, which involved depriving primates of their mothers in an effort to discover if they could still develop normal communication with their own infants (Montagu, 1986, pp. 38-44). In her commentary on Harlow’s
aside the cruelty, the results are telling. Blackwell cites a study of non-human primates, which indicates that insufficient touch during infancy can inhibit the primate’s socio-emotional development. For example, patterns for future parenting behaviour are established early in infancy such that “[t]he best predictor of the amount of time a mother will spend in contact with her infant is the degree of contact she had with her own mother” (Blackwell, 2000, p. 27).

Such findings from developmental psychology confirm the inkling I had early on in the touch work with Jo and Michaela that choreographic tactility was a cumulative endeavour. The neural pathways for receiving tactile information became more enriched and detailed the more we worked in this way, such that deep states of tactile connectivity could be more quickly and effortlessly accessed. This is also suggested by the example of my friend, who was able to overcome her resistance to touch by undertaking a specific practice of touch, in her case massage. She continues to practice massage from time to time, to stay ‘in touch’ with the connective gestures of touch.

Touch cannot but generate connectivity, as a 2006 study by Hertenstein confirms (Hertenstein, 2006). He examined the potential of touch for communicating specific emotions between adults. The results suggested that this was dependent on whether or not the emotion in question involved interpersonal connections. It was found that touch could indeed communicate distinct emotions. The emotions communicated were those where the individual feels an emotion that inherently implicates another person. Emotions that are oriented towards other people could be clearly ‘decoded’ by the receiver of the touch. Hertenstein notes:

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14 Hertenstein conducted studies where participants were divided by a curtain, and thus unable to see one another, though one participant placed their arm under the curtain so that he or she could be touched by the other. One participant then tried to communicate distinct emotions to the other by touching their arm. One study was conducted in the United States, a country considered to have a low degree of tactile interaction, and a second study was conducted in Spain, a country considered to have a high degree of tactile interaction (Hertenstein, 2006).
[n]one of the self-focused emotions – embarrassment, envy or pride – was decoded via touch. And consistent with recent claims about the role of emotion in the evolution of cooperation, the prosocial emotions – love, gratitude and sympathy – were all decoded by participants (Hertenstein, 2006, p. 531).

A further level of the study asked observers to detect what emotion was being conveyed via the tactile stimulus they witnessed visually, and showed that “individuals can, from visual observation alone, detect emotion in tactile behavior” (Hertenstein, 2006, p. 532). I would suggest that such ‘observation’ is never exclusively visual, and that in the moment of witnessing the tactile interactions of others, we are calling on our own storehouses of tactile memory, piecing together information from touches we have received in contexts that approximate the one being acted out in front of us. So too in performance, where our kinaesthetic response to what we witness is underscored by our own corporeal histories. This notion is further articulated in Part III.

Just as I have suggested that choreographic tactility is a cumulative endeavour, so too with the touch we perceive in the social contexts addressed by Hertenstein’s study. We rely on patterns we know, kinaesthetically, neurologically and emotionally, to ‘make sense’ of touches we receive. But the detection of emotion is not so much a detached decoding of the other’s experience as it is a ‘feeling with’ the other. We draw on our own accumulated memories of being touched in order to understand the emotion being evoked in the tactile interaction we witness: we witness with our own enervated skin as well as our eyes. In Part III, I will show how I believe this ‘feeling with’ is at work in the intercorporeal domain of performance.

v) Tactile echolocation

Witnessing with our enervated skin is a form of listening to the other that is distinct from the distancing perception that is often characteristic of vision, as elaborated in the first two chapters of the dissertation. In this section, I
draw attention to certain qualities of tactile interaction that dissolve the
distance inherent in separative perception, a notion I critiqued with Behnke
in Chapter One. The dissolution of distance can be described as a
progressive ‘tuning’ to the vibratory qualities of touch. Jacques Lusseyran
articulates how his hands started to take on an agency of their own when
they were no longer in the service of his eyes (Lusseyran, 2006, p. 26). His
account provides insight into the latent haptic potential of fingers, the five
digits of each hand seeking detailed information:

When I had eyes, my fingers used to be stiff, half dead at the ends of
my hands, good only for picking things up. But now each one of
them started out on its own. They explored things separately,
changed levels, and, independently of each other, made themselves
heavy or light (Lusseyran, 2006, p. 26).

With this emerging subtlety of perception, Lusseyran made a remarkable
discovery about the nature of the object of tactile perception:

Movement of fingers was terribly important, and had to be
uninterrupted because objects do not stand at a given point, fixed
there, confined in one form. They are alive, even the stones. What is
more they vibrate and tremble. My fingers felt the pulsation
distinctly, and if they failed to answer with a pulsation of their own,
the fingers immediately became helpless and lost their sense of
touch. But when they went towards things, in a sympathetic
vibration with them, they recognized them right away (Lusseyran,

The focus on pulsation as a necessary quality for responsive touch is also
found in certain healing modalities. Understandings gleaned from these
modalities have helped me form a conception of touch as an elastic sensing
that can survive beyond the moment of skin-to-skin contact to incorporate
the tactility of witnessing and of speech. The relationship between touch and
voice will be explored in Chapter Five.

Bodyworkers of various kinds have often drawn attention to the kind of
touch they employ in working with their clients, noting that it is a form of
connectivity that is about listening rather than objectifying. In his survey of
three kinds of Western Integrative Bodywork that engage with others
primarily through touch, Don Hanlon Johnson names this connectivity
Intricate Tactile Sensitivity (ITS) (Hanlon Johnson, 2000).  While this touch is different from mine in that it is therapeutic where mine is choreographic, there are many similarities between the kind of touch Hanlon Johnson describes and the tactile qualities I came to employ in my work with Jo and Michaela.

Hanlon Johnson notes that although the practices grouped under the term Western Integrative Bodywork may differ greatly, they have in common a kind of touch that forms the bedrock of the different practices: “a particular kind of learned touch […] is essential to the efficacy of any of their particular methods of touching” (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 480). Hanlon Johnson holds that the touch used in forms of Western Integrative Bodywork such as the three that he analyses (Continuum, Body-Mind Centering® and Rolfing), brings about an intricate bodily connection between client and therapist that is not found in other manipulative therapies such as Swedish Massage or traditional chiropractics. This is not to say it cannot exist in manipulative therapies but simply that it is not methodologically taught in those schools as it is in Western Integrative Bodywork schools. ITS exemplifies the intercorporeality of touch, as it emphasises the importance of one’s own corporeal awareness and sensitivity in the act of touching another. As Hanlon Johnson points out:

The systematic cultivation of sensitive touch in training practitioners of Western Integrative Bodyworks is accompanied by a parallel cultivation of intricate awareness of one’s own body in moving, listening, feeling, and sensing (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 486).

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15 Hanlon Johnson’s term Western Integrative Bodywork is an umbrella term for describing a network of continually evolving embodied practices: “[d]uring the past 150 years throughout the United States and Western Europe, there has been a widespread development and rapid proliferation of experiential approaches to the human body involving highly sophisticated methods of touch, body movement, and body awareness” (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 479). Hanlon Johnson, Professor of Somatics at The California Institute of Integral Studies, traces the history of these movements in a series of books published by The California Institute of Integral Studies in collaboration with North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California (see for example Hanlon Johnson, 1995). Western Integrative Bodywork practices have mainly developed outside the university and clinical realms, in private studios and institutes. They include such methods as Rolfing, Feldenkrais, the F. M. Alexander Technique, Sensory Awareness, Craniosacral Therapy, Authentic Movement, Continuum, and Body-Mind Centering®, among others.
Sensitivity to my own corporeal state while touching others was essential in my work with Jo and Michaela. It was not enough simply to touch them in an unaware manner. I had to call on my own corporeal rememberings of touch, movement and improvisation so as to vicariously inhabit the improvisational state in which they were working. I had to feel it within my own body, even though I was not dancing. Otherwise, touch became mechanical and did not generate connectivity between us, or newness in the dancing. I needed to keep ‘listening’, tactilely and kinaesthetically. The aims of my listening were very different to those of a bodywork therapist. However, there is something about the quality of relationship engendered by listening that is common to both bodywork and choreographic tactility. ITS seeks to establish a particular relationship between client and therapist, a relationship that forms the bedrock of future healing:

[t]he peculiar kind of contact between therapist and patient that occurs in these works is due to the intricacy of tactile contact between the two: it is not primarily psychological, psychic, or emotional – although it may include any of these. It creates a unique humane sense of connection between the two people that many claim has a profound effect on the sense of alienation caused by the effects of mind/body dualism on child-rearing and education. As such, it is related to the placebo effect in that it physically, sensually evokes a positive connection of the patient with the work of the therapist…the founders and master teachers of these works all refer explicitly to this quality of contact (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 485).

Hanlon Johnson is keen to point out that this emphasis on the quality of the relationship between client and therapist does not place ITS within a psychological model, noting that many teachers of ITS are more aligned with biomedicine’s focus on the physical body. The focus on the quality of relationship despite being outside the context of clinical psychology is indicative of a general need for empathy in medical settings. As Hanlon Johnson notes, “the humanizing quality of this very physical skill responds very directly to the widely recognized need to humanize the climate of medical treatment” (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 485). Perhaps my emphasis on touch stemmed in part from a similar ‘need to humanise’ within choreographic practice. This notion will be explored more fully in Chapter Five. It could be said that my attention, through tactility, to the vulnerability
of the women with whom I worked stemmed from my own experience as a dancer in professional environments that were far from humane.

The quality of relationship that interests me is described by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, the founder of Body-Mind Centering®. She uses two analogies to describe the quality of her hands-on work with an infant called Robbie. First, she compares it to the resonance created by two musicians playing in harmony:

From this underlying resonance, I then begin to exert microforces with my hands into the bone and feel how they are relayed through the bone. I notice if they are reflected back into my hand, carried forward into the same direction as my force, or shunted into another direction. My response is always in relationship to my sensation of the microforces reflected from the bone back to me (Bainbridge Cohen in Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 481).

Without being trained in this kind of touch, I can only understand Bainbridge Cohen’s description as an image that illuminates a reflexive relationship between two embodied selves. Information arises through contact with the surface of another self, and change occurs not via intervention but via tactile listening and response. Her second analogy is that of a bat’s echolocation, which is the means by which bats locate objects by sending out an auditory signal and using the reflection bouncing back from the object to navigate their way through space:

I both follow the present lines of flow in the bone and suggest through touch alternative pathways as possibilities, always with effortlessness of movement as a guiding principle. In the case of bone repatterning, my perception is that I am exploring the subtle pathways through which minute lines of force flow through the bones (Bainbridge Cohen in Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 482).

These descriptions of touch suggest an intermingling of perception and visualisation that also occurs in choreographic tactility. The analogies of harmony and echolocation point toward the deeply relational nature of this kind of touch. Subtle shifts in the quality of touch can draw out subtle but profound responses. These interactions are deeply complex intertwinings between two people that arise from focusing on slight changes in breath, the
expanding and condensing of cell membranes, and the movement of fluid between tissues and cells. For Bainbridge Cohen, the cellular movements of expanding, condensing and flowing provide a paradigm for movement throughout the whole body and through space. The links between micro and macro movements are pronounced:

> These activities establish the pathways of the micromovements throughout the body that create the blueprint for the movements of our body through space […] deep transformation of tissue takes place when there is an ongoing dialogue between the practitioner and the client at the subtle level of the cellular matrix (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 481).

I am not trained in this depth of subtle touch, and at times I think my use of touch must be quite a blunt instrument in comparison to the exquisite sensitivity described by Bainbridge Cohen and others. However, I find Bainbridge Cohen’s analogies useful for understanding the potentialities of touch in my practice of choreographic tactility. In touching Jo and Michaela as they move, I experience an elastic blend of instigation and response, an exchange of surface and of energy that we might call echolocatory touch. It is informed, of course, by the movement of my own body as I weave in and out of the tactile exchange, as noted in this continuation of the studio notes included toward the beginning of this chapter.

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Michaela exhales. We’re ready to go on now. It’s like the torso shuffling has created static electricity, a band of energy between us. We share this space, a space of waiting and of attending. Michaela is ready to improvise and waits for my first touch. The space is thick between us, dense with focus.

Michaela and I attend to what is not yet known but will soon occur.

There’s a springiness to how this is between us. It is an elastic space where certain parameters are known: Michaela will keep her eyes shut most of the time; I will touch her; she will move or not move in response; and our shared aim is that Michaela improvise. But alongside what these parameters allow us to know, there is the unpredictability inherent in
improvised movement, which is heightened when that movement is relational, when it is occurring between two people. She can’t see me, and she doesn’t know what my next touch will be. I don’t know what her next response will be, or what my next touch will be. This nexus of known and unknown creates a charged and energetic state: there is an intensity and pliability that fuels the improvisation. It gives rise to a mode of attending to the giving and receiving of touch that goes beyond the bland alternatives of activity or passivity. This is relational movement.

The practice of choreographic tactility does not end when I stop touching Michaela and Jo as they move. In fact, in some ways I feel my skill is more developed in sensing these same dynamics at work after I have been touching Jo and Michaela, when I use my eyes in a kind of soft tactile witnessing of their movement. This mode of ‘seeing’ is like seeing sculpturally with the ‘fingers’ of the inner eye, perceiving the moving body with a heightened sense of dimensionality, rather than as a flat plane. Using my eyes in soft tactile witnessing builds on the different modes of seeing that I explored in Chapter Two. Tactile witnessing concerns not only the epidermal surfaces but also the proprioceptive response to another’s moving. In this, it moves towards the notion of being ‘in touch’ beyond actual tactile contact. This notion will be explored in Part III of the dissertation, where I discuss the remembering of touch.

Bainbridge Cohen’s analogies have resonance with the peculiar dynamic I experience when witnessing Jo and Michaela as they continue to improvise after they have received my tactile stimulus. In witnessing their movement as it recalls my recent touch, I sense the reworking of subtle lines of force in them that have responded to my touch. I sense this by kinaesthetically embodying what I am witnessing. My own body recalls the touch I gave and recognises the subtle lines of force that continue to vacillate in Jo and Michaela. This corporeal remembering takes shape in micro-reproductions of movement in my body, in response to the movement I witness. The subtle lines of force that I witness can be understood as structural, but they are also many things: emotions, tensions, desires, curiosities. My witnessing of Jo
and Michaela keeps the remembered response to the tactile stimulus at the fore of our collective experience. In witnessing, the relationship between us is an elastic sensing, similar to the bat’s echolocation that Bainbridge Cohen describes.

**Conclusion**

The underlying concern of this chapter has been to draw attention to the deep connectivity that arises through touch. The chapter has traced an arc from the supportive touch of infancy, through the complex model of Intricate Tactile Sensitivity, to the notion of tactile echolocation as used within my practice. My aim has been to identify and prise open those aspects of touch that contribute to its efficacy as a choreographic strategy.

I have elucidated the connectivity of touch by examining how traces of our infant experience of touch form the touchstone of adult tactility. The developmental inextricability of touch and movement can constructively feed into a tactile movement practice. Such a practice exploits the fact that tactility is cumulative, and that tactile patterns develop over time. I have identified tactile listening as one of the most essential qualities of the subtle tactile dynamic developed in my work with Jo and Michaela. Elastic sensing was foregrounded in my practice of choreographic tactility, and this is linked to Bainbridge Cohen’s analogy of touch as echolocation. Tactile echolocation describes the connectivity at work in my practice. It is a highly refined form of the primordial thigmotropic desire to move in response to an encountered surface. The links between Montagu’s notion of thigmotropism and Bainbridge Cohen’s notion of echolocation emphasise the degree to which our experience of touch is saturated by developmental precedent.

I have pointed towards some of the ways choreographic tactility extends beyond the moment of actual touch to incorporate soft tactile witnessing. Tactile echolocation is present both in the act of touching a moving other and in recalling the touch of another while moving. Indeed, it is also present in the use of my voice to prompt tactile recollection, as will be discussed in
Chapter Five. Acts of tactile echolocation, and the accompanying acts of witnessing with the skin, are what I refer to when I name my practice a practice of choreographic tactility.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY OF TOUCH

To be healthy morally and otherwise, we need protected yet porous relations that open and close as the membranes of cells do to create appropriate exchanges between inner and outer (Holler, 2002, p. 7).

Introduction

This chapter explores ontological aspects of the relationship to the other through touch. In both this chapter and the next, I examine the sense of selfhood that is generated through that tactile relationship. Choreographing by means of tactile echolocation is an unusual approach to making a new dance work. As outlined in Part I, it took root through my emerging interest in intercorporeality and destabilising the centrality of vision in my work, and in the context of being physically unable to demonstrate dance material to others. However, within and perhaps even prior to these contextualising factors lies a personal style of being in the world.

Since 2004, I have been seeking ways of working with others that could sit comfortably with my style of being in the world. I enjoy being the one who instigates new dance work, but I am less comfortable with being ‘in charge’ in a conventional sense. The melding of personal styles of being and relating with styles of choreographing is particularly apparent when working with touch, as will be explored in Chapter Five. Tactile echolocation provided a style of directing others in a creative process that was akin to my style of being in the world. I was ‘at the helm’, but my attention to the agency of the women with whom I worked was at the fore of my creative approach and planning.
Perhaps this was also the case for choreographer Eva Karczag when she made a work using touch, which I will examine in detail in Chapter Five. While she does not explicitly make such a link, I sense a connection between Karczag’s stated reticence about being ‘in charge’ and her use of touch as a choreographic device, as she articulates in an interview with Elizabeth Dempster:

I don’t like being in the directing role, telling people what to do… so I had to figure out a way where it would feel comfortable for me to be the person whose idea was being worked with (Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 41).

That a personal style of being feeds into a particular style of choreographing is indicative of the continuum between the world of everyday life and the world of the studio. Choreographic tactility, understood as the elastic intercorporeal echolocation outlined in the previous chapter, is a studio practice, but it is not only that. To work with touch choreographically is to become enveloped in a world of nuanced interpersonal dynamics. As a practice, choreographic tactility renders artificial the boundaries between living-in-the-world and art-making. Because touch is so intrinsically intercorporeal, repeatedly choreographing with touch sharpens our awareness of the intercorporeal nature of human existence. It invites a reconsideration of the role of tactility in our broader relationships with others.

One of my aims in using this somewhat unconventional method in my work with Jo and Michaela was to find a way for them to be more present as individual women within the choreography. Working with touch ensured that we fostered an individuality that arose intercorporeally rather than in isolation. This furthered my awareness, outlined in Part I, that I wanted to choreograph movement that emerged ‘in the space between us’. In this

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16 Eva Karczag is a dancer, performance maker and teacher. A certified Alexander practitioner, her movement practice is also influenced by other mindful body practices such as T’ai Chi and Qi Gong. She danced with the Trisha Brown company from 1979-1986, and taught at the European Dance Development Center in the Netherlands from 1990-2002 as well as teaching widely across the USA and Australia.
chapter, I broaden out the implications of this intercorporeal mode of moving.

My developing awareness of the role of tactility as a means to engender empathetic relationships with others was correlative to my awareness of the subtle collaborative dynamic I sought in my performance making. This understanding of the intercorporeality of touch is informed by ethicist Linda Holler’s moving study of two autistic women and their struggle to enter a world of emotional connections with those around them. I begin this chapter by discussing Holler’s notion of touch as the basis for a relational ontology, framed by the limit case of autism. In *Erotic Morality: the role of touch in moral agency*, Holler explores many aspects of touch (Holler, 2002). However it is her study of touch in relation to autism that is most related to my practice. For the two autistic women, Temple Grandin and Donna Williams, touch was a crucial part of coming to understand both the basic fact of embodied selfhood, and the intricate web of emotional connections that bind human beings together.

Examining the role of tactility in overcoming some of the limitations of autism provides insight into the potential role of tactility in choreographic practice. In both cases, touch immediately draws attention to how others are implicated in one’s selfhood. With Holler, I discuss how Grandin and Williams, whose autism rendered them structurally alone, used touch to both understand and deal with others. With regard to my own work, I show how we quickly discovered it was necessary to remain pliably open but also firm within oneself. We had to consciously negotiate the boundaries of the self and other in choreographic tactility so as not to slip into limiting patterns of agency and passivity. In detailing both my work and the experiences of Williams and Grandin, this chapter explores the response to the other through touch, and how that response (in)forms the self. I examine the intercorporeal sense of selfhood that can be gleaned by attending closely to tactility, in the realms of both autism and choreography.
i) From numbness to empathy

Holler argues for an ethics grounded in the lived sensitivity of the flesh rather than a disembodied rationality. Her analysis begins with the basic premise that in Western cultures, morality has involved denial rather than affirmation of corporeality. Body-denying ethics are linked to *logos* rather than *eros*. That is, guidelines for behaviour are based on “rules, authorities, and duties”, rather than on “a somatic, intuitive form of agency in which empathy, compassion, and care are the central moral qualities” (Holler, 2002, p. 1). For Holler, an erotic morality would be grounded in cultivated somatic awareness. The pivotal metaphor of somatic awareness is the sensation of touch. This is in contrast to the cultural hegemony of vision so prevalent in Western thought. As explored in Part I of the dissertation, vision is often considered a distance sense. It is linked with light, disembodied analysis and reason. Touch, on the other hand, is a proximate sense embedded with intimacy and contact.

Holler regards touch as the basis for a relational ontology. Her hope is that an ontology based on relationality rather than on the individual disembodied subject might engender different ethical parameters to those which predominate in contemporary society. Destructive patterns of behaviour are traced, in her account, to processes of corporeal desensitisation that have marked Western philosophy and moral reasoning. Reclaiming sensory and bodily awareness, thawing the body that has become numb to touch, is key to breaking such destructive patterning.

Holler’s argument has much in common with philosopher and Rolfing practitioner Hanlon Johnson’s passionate call for returning to the intelligence of the senses. In *Body: Recovering our sensual wisdom*, he

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17 In Part I of the dissertation, I discussed Elizabeth Behnke’s phenomenological analysis of separative perception. Her analysis is of course one of many critiques of the type of perception often associated with vision, such as Kleinberg-Levin, as mentioned in Chapter One. There, I stated that this dissertation does not aim to provide a writerly critique of occularcentrism. Rather, through elaborating a practice of tactility and remembering, the dissertation provides a ‘critique in practice’ of the limitations of separative perception.
examines how mind/body dualism forces us to distrust vital corporeal knowledge (Hanlon Johnson, 1992). His suggestions for how this can be shifted are based on the recognition that individual bodily awareness is a good starting point, but is ultimately insufficient. He contends that we must attend to the ways in which corporeal desensitization and distrust are part of the larger social body and the institutions that support it:

The dominant values of our culture insinuate their ways into our neuromuscular responses, shaping our perceptions of the world. Altering the morbid dynamics of our culture requires us to loosen their hold on our flesh (Hanlon Johnson, 1992, p. 14).

It is crucially important that for both Holler and Hanlon Johnson, turning one’s attention to corporeality equally requires a focus on intercorporeality. For Holler, this need is most clearly addressed through touch. As explored in Chapter Three, touch is central to our capacity to be open to the world around us. This is an opening to a world of others whose embodiment we understand through tactile interaction, for, as Holler notes:

[…] touch unites sensory and emotional feeling. The ways that we are physically touched help to determine our repulsions, attractions, and indifferences and our ability to respond emotionally to what goes on around us (Holler, 2002, p. 1).

Holler considers the retreat from touch to be a retreat into non-sense. Dermal desensitisation is linked in her account to a lack of emotional sensitivity. Withdrawing from touch affects the richness of one’s inner life, but for Holler the implications of that impoverishment extend beyond the individual. Emotional numbness is morally dangerous in that it numbs us to the pain of others. In the previous chapter, I outlined some ways in which tactile interaction is a form of patterning, where the accumulation of tactile experience over time goes on to determine how we are able to both give and receive touch in the future. Living ‘numbly’, where the skin is insensitive to touch and the emotions are correlative closed off, is also a form of patterning. It is a patterning that thickens the skin, making us literally callous.
Living numbly can become an entrenched pattern within one’s personal history. Holler suggests that it indicates disconnectedness from those parts of ourselves where pleasure and pain were once experienced, and renders us unable to be pliably open to others and to new experiences. Being literally unable to give and receive touch is a very concrete instance of a condition that could also be understood ontologically. To be numb to touch is to be disconnected and stuck, as Holler notes:

When we live in non-sense, we tend to repeat the past and, particularly, to repeat the ways we have learned to shut ourselves off from pain (and pleasure), and thus we are shut off from the possibilities of change and intimacy (Holler, 2002, p. 8).

To live in ‘non-sense’, on the level both of skin and emotion, is disempowering. It renders us unable to ‘make sense’ of our experiences and move on from them. It also renders us more susceptible to control by external authorities, a point shared by Hanlon Johnson (Hanlon Johnson, 1992, p. 15ff). For Holler, touch, understood both literally as the act of touching and being touched, and more metaphorically as a lens that draws our attention to the general intercorporeality of selfhood, is a fruitful site for re-configuring ethical relationships.

Holler explores the experiences of Temple Grandin and Donna Williams, whose autism means they have encountered enormous difficulties with tactile interaction. Autism is a developmental disorder that affects the comprehension of social relationships. Symptoms often include a marked lack of awareness of the feelings of others (a literal lack of tact) and a withdrawal from social interaction and communication with others. Autistics often seem to be in a world of their own. Grandin’s and Williams’ autism meant that touch and many other forms of social interaction were unbearable for them. In the context of a choreographic practice focussed on touch, the compelling part of their stories as relayed by Holler is that learning to bear touch was crucial to their coming to understand their selfhood and their relationship to a world of others. Learning to bear touch helped them to empathetically gauge or understand the feelings of others, or at least comprehend that others have feelings. Both women, against all odds,
came to a point where they were able to communicate their experiences in candid autobiographical reflections.

Temple Grandin suffers from Asperger’s Syndrome (AS), a form of autism that had the effect of making her unable to bear the touch of skin on skin, even in infancy. This included her mother’s embrace and the touch of one of her own legs or arms against the other. Grandin describes how she longed to be hugged, but could not tolerate the touch involved: “our bodies cry out for human contact, but when contact is made, we withdraw in pain and confusion” (Grandin in Holler, 2002, p. 18). Grandin sought substitutes for the touch she could not receive from other people, wrapping herself in rugs or squeezing herself between cushions. As with many suffers of AS, she possessed a very high level of intelligence. However, intelligence is not sufficient for understanding social interaction, which cannot be exercised through cognition alone. As noted in the previous chapter, when witnessing the tactile interactions of others, we rely on our own tactile experience to make sense of what we witness. Without any positive experience of touch, sufferers of AS have no tactile ‘sense’, no tactile patterning, with which to ‘make sense’ of the behaviour of others.

At high school, Grandin wrote in an essay that she yearned to “build a device to teach me to feel for others and to teach people to be gentle and caring” (Grandin in Holler, 2002, p. 18). This is, in fact, precisely what she went on to do. As young as seventeen, she noticed that the calves on her aunt’s cattle ranch emerged in a relaxed state from the cattle chute where they were held tightly for castration and branding. She entered the chute herself and found that in its tight hold she felt relief from her high state of nervous tension. While my own experience is undoubtedly less extreme, I relate to the sense of relief that comes from being supported tactiley.

In Alice Cummins’ BMC® classes, when I duet with her and she is supporting parts of my body with sensitive touch, I find I am able to move in ways that bypass my usual muscularity, which is the locus of my own nervous tension. She does not support my entire body, but rather places her
hands on parts of me that she intuits need support. Her touch does not literally support my weight, but rather supports my nervous system such that I can move from a place that does not cause the extreme neuromuscular firing that results in neck spasms. I experience a deep sense of relief dueting in this way. There is relief at not having to be solely responsible for my movement, a relief at feeling ‘met’ by another person in tactile movement. This experience echoes Jacques Lusseyran’s articulation of the blind person’s emotional need for tactile pressure, as mentioned in the previous chapter (Lusseyran, 2006, p. 27).

For Temple Grandin, entering the cattle shute gave her the feeling of the embrace, the ‘being met’, which she could not receive from other people. She crafted her own hugging machine. Using it daily, she gradually came to tolerate touch by another human being, and to enjoy the empathy that comes with it. The hug machine taught Grandin how to give and receive comfort through first receiving it via the skin:

[…] it enabled me to learn to be gentle, to have empathy, to know that gentleness is not synonymous with weakness. I was learning how to feel (Grandin in Holler, 2002, p. 49).

Grandin’s experience has convinced her that touch deprivation in infancy, in her case caused by autism, causes secondary neurological damage that contributes to hypersensitivity in later life. Her hypersensitivity, which was at times so extreme that she went into total shutdown, was considerably calmed by daily use of the hug machine. Though she is now able to use medication to calm her nervous system, she still uses the hug machine to support her capacity for empathy (Holler, 2002, p. 57). Her subsequent studies in psychology and animal behaviour and physiology have often focussed on tactility. Grandin has investigated the importance of a nurturing environment to the healthy development of animals, seemingly in an attempt to better understand her own situation.  

18 Holler notes that Grandin’s most recent book uses her own experience of autism to understand animal behaviour. She argues that animals are like autistic people in that their thought is structured by vision rather than language. Both autistics and animals perceive the world as a collage of competing details rather than a cogent whole. Grandin argues that her ability to perceive
interactions with animals have now come to partly substitute for the hug
animals avoids the need for a complex understanding of social interactions,
but still helps her feel calm and empathetic.

Grandin’s passage from numbness to empathy informs the way in which I
understand the practice of choreographic tactility. Her explicit use of touch
in order to feel draws attention to the degree to which tactility is always
emotive. Using touch in order to feel and thus understand that others have
feelings provides the template for an ethics grounded in corporeality. Not
only does it heighten awareness of the deep emotional effect that working
with touch can have: it also provides the groundwork for reconfiguring
choreographic tactility as a practice of embodied ethics. In this section, I
have used the limit case of Grandin’s autism to clarify the embodied ethical
template provided by touch. This template shapes the use of touch in my
choreographic practice in ways that will be explored later in this and the
next chapter. The fact that we can learn to feel emotion through being
touched underlines the potency of touch and alerts me to the responsibility
involved in electing to use it as a choreographic strategy.

ii) Corporeal boundaries

Touch not only allows one to feel emotions, but also allows one to feel the
boundaries of one’s self. In this section, I explore Donna Williams’ need for
touch as a means of understanding herself as a bounded, embodied being
(Williams, 1992, 1994). I discuss the notion of corporeal boundaries
alongside Holler’s account of its ethical implications. My aim is to pave the
way for the discussion in the next section of the need to pay attention to
corporeal boundaries when using touch in choreographic practice.

Williams’ early touch experiences were somewhat different to Grandin’s,
and were complicated by her abusive childhood (Williams, 1992, p. 8). She
was able to distinguish between different kinds of touch, and was able to

as animals do enables her to ascertain what factors in animals’ environments might be
distressing (Grandin & Johnson, 2005).
tolerate brief touch that had purely practical aims, such as for medical, instructional or safety reasons. However, touch that had a more emotional intersubjective dimension was intolerable. The unbearability of emotional touch extended to Williams’ clothes. Holler notes that for Williams, having her clothes touch the clothes of others in the cupboard “was a threat because it was too much like being touched herself” (Holler, 2002, p. 20). In another example, Williams tells of a young man she fancied who offered her his hand as they were walking. It caused her angst, and reminded her of her absolute inability to join touch with emotion. Holler interprets Williams’ experience of this emotional touch:

[…] she felt as if she were drowning or being eaten, submerged into the other. Eros was oceanic, like a tidal wave or death, overwhelming, and thus met with overload and shutdown. When confronted with connection, she entered the “Big Black Nothingness”, where the bottom of her world fell out (Holler, 2002, p. 21).

Williams herself describes the experience thus:

[…] my mind knows that affection and kindness will not kill me, yet my emotional response defies this logic, telling me that good feelings and gentle and loving touch can kill me or at the very least cause me pain. When I try to ignore this message, I go into what would seem to be a state of shock, where what’s coming in is either incomprehensible or has no significance. This state leads to my emotions committing suicide, leaving me without physical or emotional feeling and with a purely robotic mental response—if that (Williams, 1992, p. 205).

For Williams, tactile interaction confused the boundaries between self and other, causing her to feel either engulfed by the other or completely deserted by her own emotions. This is in contrast to Grandin’s more positive experience of corporeal boundaries, as related by Holler:

Grandin says that sometimes the boundaries of her body disappear into the strong tactile contact the squeeze machine provides, and she feels that she is floating (Holler, 2002, p. 49).

Psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu understands the tactile behaviour of some autistic children to be an attempt to cancel out the distance between self and
other. He cites the example of an infant who presses his body against that of
the adult, in a gesture of what Anzieu terms “adhesive identification”
(Anzieu, 1989, p. 229). Anzieu’s example recalls my reference in Chapter
Three to the calf pressing against the fence to access the supportive touch it
was denied by its mother. Anzieu considers adhesive identification to be the
use of touch to maintain a relationship of unlimited contiguity between self
and other. This behaviour seems at first glance to be the precise opposite of
Williams’ behaviour, in that she avoided the flooding in of the other that
occurred with touch. However, both impulses stem from a difficulty with
respect to corporeal boundaries.

A healthy sense of selfhood will include firm knowledge of the boundaries
between our own bodies and the human and non-human bodies around us.
In describing her concept of ‘embodiment’ within her work in experiential
anatomy, Bainbridge Cohen emphasises the proximity of embodiment and
separation.19 As soon as she begins to define embodiment, she refers to the
sense of separation that must come with it:

[…] in order to embody ourselves, we need to know what is not
ourselves. It’s a relationship. A child that only embodies its hand, for
instance, might be considered autistic…What I would call balanced
embodiment would include, “This is the end of me; this is the
beginning of something else” (Cohen, 1993, p. 63).

Williams’ inability to understand the end of herself and the beginning of
something else is part and parcel of her difficulty in experiencing herself as
a unified entity. As an infant, she did not receive enough touch to work out
the boundaries of her body and develop Bainbridge Cohen’s ‘balanced
embodiment’. She could not even locate her body in space, and needed to
tap her body and listen for the sound in order to work out where her body
was. It seems that within herself, she experienced a series of ends and
beginnings, rather than a whole:

19 Bainbridge Cohen uses the word ‘embodiment’ in ways that are subtly different to its use
in phenomenological psychology. Her notion of embodiment would roughly correlate with
the term ‘postural schema’ within phenomenological psychology.
If I touched my leg I would feel it on my hand or on my leg but not both at the same time. My perception of a whole body was in bits. I was an arm or a leg or a nose. Sometimes one part would be very much there but the bit it was joined to felt as wooden as a table leg and just as dead (Williams, 1994, p. 228).

Her description of this disorientation calls to mind Lacan’s description of dreaming of a fragmented body. In his understanding, such dreams occur at that point in psychoanalysis where there is a marked disintegration in the individual. The psychological disintegration appears somatized in dreams:

[…] in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions – the very same that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch has fixed, for all time, in painting, in their ascent from the fifteenth century to the zenith of modern man (Lacan, 1977, p. 4).

I experienced a marked sense of the disintegration of my corporeal boundaries in the early stages of Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis work. Long-held tensile patterns were shifting and it was as though my body no longer knew how to hold itself. Many of the spinal movements I found myself doing as I lay on the chiropractor’s bench reminded me of my baby cousin who was just starting to lift her head when lying on her belly. In the months when I re-experienced these early stages of infant development, I dreamt frequently and vividly of myself in bits and pieces, with oddly conjoined limbs floating through space, disconnected from any sense of integration. Though I had not read Lacan’s essay at that point, I was reminded of Hieronymus Bosch. This pattern is also seen in small children’s drawings, which often depict arms and legs emerging from the torso in ways that seem disoriented.

These early developmental stages are gradually integrated into a sense of corporeal boundaries that allows the individual to function in a world of others. For Donna Williams, this integration was interrupted by autism and abuse. Eventually, she was able to gain a sense that her body was an entity bounded by her skin. Critically, it was a combination of tactile and kinaesthetic activity that gave her this understanding, underscoring my emphasis in the previous chapter on the intertwining of the two senses.
Williams performed sensory integration work, such as stroking her skin with brushes. The aim was that through mobile touch, her hands could form a connection with her torso. She needed to connect the disparate parts of her body, so that she might, as Holler puts it, “acquire a sense of dwelling within her body for short periods of time” (Holler, 2002, p. 23). Holler speculates that it is touch – and, with Bainbridge Cohen, I would argue that it is always touch in combination with movement – that lets us know how we exist in the world:

The first and most basic thing touch may provide for us is this sense of body ownership, the pervasive background feeling responsible for the sense of existing and the ability to construct “I am” (Holler, 2002, p. 23).

Williams describes the sense of security she experienced when she finally knew that she had a body:

I had wondered what I wanted a body for. Now I knew. There was no greater feeling of self-security. This was the first security a baby knows long before it knows its mother. This was the first security in life, which had been missing. Connection with my body was the missing bridge across the impassable gorge that had stood between me and being in touch with feelings (Williams, 1994, p. 231).

Williams used touch and movement in order to teach herself that she had a body. This basic security was the essential precursor that would allow her to progress, as Grandin did, to an understanding of emotion. Williams had to teach herself, as an intelligent adult, important developmental lessons that most of us take for granted. Tactile movement was instrumental to the realisation that her existence was indelibly corporeal. While Williams’ case is obviously much more pronounced, her experience furthers my comments in Chapter Three on the capacity of touch to bring corporeality immediately to the forefront of one’s awareness. There, I noted that in the practice of choreographic tactility, we gravitated towards touch as the most effective means of ‘warming up’ the kinds of sensibilities I wanted to work with. Touch takes one’s awareness directly into the interoceptive realm while at the same time providing the template for ethical relatedness.
iii) Responsive agency

Donna Williams’ hard-won knowledge that she dwelt in her body is knowledge that many take for granted in everyday life. Occasionally this complacency is punctured, often by pain or illness, and one is forced to experience one’s embodiment differently. The limit case of autism and the experience of pain or illness are both instances of how ‘dysfunction’ can be used to understand function. In my case, both the experience of physical pain and the attempt to ‘understand’ the painful experiences of autistics have had a similar effect. Both experiences have ruptured any complacency I might have had about my own embodiment and consequently that of the dancers with whom I work. Both instances of dysfunction have honed my sensitivity to the necessity of firm but pliable corporeal boundaries. This sensitivity informs my attitudes and decisions as a choreographer. It has meant I have fostered a quality of responsive agency, both in myself and in my collaborators.

In this chapter, I have been using Holler’s examination of the function of touch for autistics to work towards a framework for understanding its potential function in choreographic practice. The function of touch for autistics as explored with Holler can be summarised thus: touch is necessary for understanding oneself as embodied through providing knowledge of one’s boundaries; and touch facilitates the passage from numbness to empathy through first allowing one to feel, and then to understand that others have feelings also. In this section, I flesh out two distinct moments from within my practice of choreographic tactility that draw out different aspects of the boundaries of selves in the tactile interaction. I explore how,

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20 The experience of pain as a catalyst for embodied awareness has been explored within clinical, developmental, psychological and philosophical contexts (see for example Leder, 1990, 1992; MacLachlan, 2004; Scarry, 1985; Schilder, 1950). As mentioned in Part I, pain, in the form of spinal injuries, has been markedly informative of my own embodiment. I find Roland Barthes’ notion of ‘punctum’ – a sudden recognition of meaning, in his case through photographs – to be a useful way of understanding how pain pierces the complacency of ‘everyday’ embodiment (Barthes, 1993). However, though I touch on pain at various points, it is beyond the scope of the dissertation to focus on it explicitly.

21 The study of dysfunction to understand function has a long history in psychology and philosophy, seen for example in the much-discussed phenomenon of the phantom limb (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Schilder, 1950).
in my practice of choreographic tactility, we re-configured our response to the other through touch.

In the course of working with touch in the studio, I became aware of the boundaries of the self in ways that were markedly different to how I might be aware of them in the ‘complacency’ of everyday life. Indeed, my attention might not have been drawn to corporeal boundaries had I not used touch as a choreographic method. My understanding of how we respond to the other through touch and how we glean an intercorporeal sense of selfhood through that interaction was informed by Grandin and Williams’ experiences. Grandin and Williams each re-configured their response to the other through the explicit and intentional use of touch. Grandin used touch to give herself calmness and comfort as a base from which to learn to empathetically gauge the feelings of others. Williams used touch to assure herself that she was a unified and embodied being, and that her selfhood did not need to disintegrate when interacting with others. For both women, dysfunction in responding to others was addressed through touch.

In a sense my practice of choreographic tactility works the other way around. Jo, Michaela and myself started from a place of robust but relatively unconsidered corporeal boundaries. Working with touch provoked an awareness of the degree to which we take those firm boundaries for granted. With Bainbridge Cohen, I would argue that one of our most important developmental milestones is to be able to say ‘this is the end of me; this is the beginning of something else’. However, we often make the mistake of basing our selfhood on the sense of separation that underpins this ‘balanced embodiment’. This ignores the ways in which we are not entirely separate beings. The practice of choreographic tactility takes place at the level of skin and alerts us to the interleaving of self and other within the construct we call ‘I’. Choreographic tactility cuts to the quick of our intercorporeal selfhood. That is, we progressively learn where our emotional and physical...
boundaries are at the very same time that we learn to be more pliably open to the other through touch.\textsuperscript{22}

I came to identify several interlacing phases during the period of developing my practice of choreographic tactility. We moved from a somewhat naïve phase where we were not yet aware of what was at stake in working with touch, to a phase where we had a clearer sense of the need to remain alert to our boundaries and negotiate the patterns of agency and passivity that permeated those boundaries. Then a phase emerged where sufficient trust was established such that we could intentionally blur the boundaries between self, other and world for our creative purposes. These shifts are traced in the remainder of this section.

2nd April 2005.

I will draw the back of my hand down Jo’s right waist, from the back of her armpit to her hip, behind her arm which is hanging loosely. I keep my touch here, where I initiate it behind her armpit for an instant, and then drag my hand lightly down to her hipbone, holding it there for an instant before I take my hand away. I’m drawing Jo’s attention to a part of herself. She responds with a slight lean of her waist away from the touch, a slow, slight recoil. Several things occur for me: my attention is sharpened by this reaction; my choreographic eye registers it as a possible image; I get interested in the rhythm of dragging a touch across a surface with contained and emphasized ‘in and out’ points; with this interest, I find myself moving towards the left behind Jo to give a similar touch vertically down her left calf with the back of my left hand; and lastly, despite myself, I feel a trifle

\textsuperscript{22}There are obvious relationships between my discussion of pliable boundaries experienced in the tactile interaction and Merleau-Ponty’s later work on touch and vision (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968), as well as Catherine Vasseleu’s study of touch and vision in Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Irigaray (Vasseleu, 1998). Some themes from this sphere, such as Irigaray’s notion of invisibility, were outlined in Part I of the dissertation. However, in Part II, I have deliberately chosen to examine tactility through the lenses of infant development, autism and the choreographic practices of others. These choices reflect the approaches that were useful in developing a practice of choreographic tactility. For example, Holler’s examination of the ethics of touch provided a very concrete means of unpacking the ethical implications of my emerging practice.
hurt by her movement away from me. Not to mention feeling a little foolish at the surfacing of this unexpected feeling.

This moment of tactile exchange came at a point when I was trying to establish a sense of shared agency in movement. Jo’s slight movement away from me was unfamiliar to both of us, although we had spoken about the possibility of responding in this way before we began this session. Prior to the episode above, I felt we had become too familiar with a pattern of response whereby the mover followed the direction of the touch. In a sense this early pattern was a response to absence: the mover cannot see the toucher, and moves towards the origin of the touch, almost feeling their way towards the toucher. Although the mover is ‘doing’ a lot, and is thus very active, she is also passive in that she is stuck in a certain mode of response. At a certain point both mover and toucher become hungry for something more. This is what Jo and I had spoken about before beginning the session described above.

On receiving a touch stimulus, one’s options are far wider than to move towards the touch. For example, one can remain still, storing up the sensation to use it later as a remembered intensity when moving. One can move away, in the sense of a recoil or refusal of what the touch seems to want. One can allow a different part of oneself to process or act upon the information received, such as transferring the impulse from knee to shoulder. The possibilities for response are multiple.

The conversation we had about this, and what emerged in the session that followed, marked a departure from a pattern that had been building up in earlier sessions. There had been a kind of unspoken contract at work, where Michaela and Jo were somehow obliged to provide movement in response to my touch. There had been a certain politeness or decorum to that pattern. I could sense a code of behaviour developing that I suspected might limit the creative possibilities of their movement. It was also limiting in that it placed me in a position of power that I had not planned, and with which I soon became uncomfortable. Shifting this led to a more dynamic exchange:
We are becoming differently aware of each other’s boundaries. I drag the back of my left hand vertically down Jo’s calf. She strides that leg forward in a strong movement away from me. I have a flicker of enjoyment at this strong reaction: I’m coming up against a sense of agency in Jo’s reactions to my touch that is new and lively. She strides the other leg, and then again, working her way strongly into the space. I scoot around to the front of her and touch a finger lightly to her forehead when she is approaching the wall.

I gained a better sense of Jo’s boundaries once we had, through speaking about it, given her permission to refuse what she receives in the way of stimulus, or to deal with it in a way other than what might be her immediate kinaesthetic reaction. This ‘immediate’ reaction remained the touchstone of what we were doing. The skin receives stimulus and this sets into play a multiplicity of organic reactions and in a healthy individual, this will always occur. However, emphasising the choice Jo had in her creative response to this multiplicity of organic reactions was vital. It meant we could retain a healthy and productive balance between us as co-creators of the movement material. Even though working with touch feels more ‘democratic’ than other choreographic methods, I nevertheless quickly discovered the need to guard against patterns of agency and passivity that so often shape the relationship between choreographer and dancer.

Working with touch honed our attention to the intercorporeality of movement. However, it was not enough just to touch one another while moving for an interestingly intercorporeal movement to arise. It was necessary to focus our attention more closely on the boundaries between selves and the patterns of activity and passivity that haunt those boundaries. I wanted to find creative alternatives to the bland opposites of activity and passivity. In attuning to our respective boundaries within this work, we were negotiating the terms of our reciprocity, and sharing or co-creating aesthetic frameworks. In this emerging practice of touch, I had to learn how to remain alert to another’s boundaries despite the pliability of
choreographic exchange. Even when working with touch, I had to learn how to not be ‘in charge’.

I will now turn to a contrasting experience from within my practice of choreographic tactility. The example above is concerned with my growing awareness as the one instigating touch that the skin marked the firm boundary of the self. However, the experience of being touched while moving can be quite different. As noted earlier, for Donna Williams, it was extremely difficult to maintain a sense of self and other at the same time and this difficulty is typical for sufferers of autism. Williams’ tactile/kinaesthetic activities were geared towards giving her a sense of her own corporeal boundaries and the secure feeling of dwelling in her body. In a curious inversion, choreographic tactility can have the opposite effect on the mover, calling to mind a surprising facet of moving while being touched by another. If we are able to enter the experience with sufficient trust, it is as though we can soften the boundaries between the self and other.

As we move with our eyes shut, being touched by another who is responding to our movement with tactile prompts, we can enter a state of awareness where the self and other are experienced differently. We can lose our awareness of being in relationship to a single unified other person and instead sense the other person as though they were a multiplicity. Moving with shut eyes in relationship to another’s tactile prompts can feel like inhabiting a multi-faceted evolving topography rather than a bi-directional relationship with one other person. In conversation with Jo and Michaela, both noted that at points in our improvisations, their sense of me as a bounded other disappeared. Of one phase of our touch work, Michaela said:

There were landscapes in there. The touches were little characters. It was like getting into a playful game with things of a certain nature…. you [Siobhan] disappeared completely! (Michaela Pegum, personal communication, 20th September 2006).

And Jo concurred. I would suggest that it was only because we had a robust sense of embodiment that we were able to work in a way that felt unbounded, such that the sense of the other as other disappeared. It was
possible for us to get into a state of multiplicity and experience it as delightful because we do not suffer from the indistinct boundaries that plague sufferers of autism. We have firm, prior knowledge of the boundaries between selves and others. From this firmness we can venture, for a short while, into a playful game where we allow the other’s information to ‘flood in’ to us until we no longer know they are there. This game played out at the boundary of the skin can be considered as a form of communication that developed from the idiosyncratic methods of my practice. In this, it is an instance of performance theorists Lockford and Pelias’ model of communication. They define communication as “the place where people constitute themselves through interaction with others in contexts” (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, p. 433). In improvisation, they consider this to be the negotiation of boundaries wherein “performers negotiate and coordinate the selves that they make present through interaction” (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, p. 433).

The selves that we made present through the interaction of choreographic tactility had several features. Choreographic tactility brought to the fore the ongoing interleaving of self and other in the formation of the ‘I’. Further, a quality of responsive agency came to be a key means of avoiding the limiting patterns of agency and passivity that can characterise the dancer-choreographer relationship. And finally, the entry into unboundedness as a fruitful site for improvisation emerged through the playful exchange of touch. Potent movement states can arise from playing at the boundaries of self and other that constitute balanced embodiment. Some of these movement states will be explored in Chapter Five. There, I will suggest that softening the edges between the self and other has important ontological implications.

iv) Towards a relational ontology

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that it is no co-incidence that for Karczag and myself, the choice to use tactility arose from reticence about having power over those with whom we collaborated. As a choice, choreographic tactility indicates a deep-seated preference for a style of
being-in-the-world that is premised on power-with rather than power-over others. This is the ‘condition of possibility’ that makes choreographic tactility a compelling forum for a relational ontology.

Holler’s call for a relational ontology grounded in touch springs from the conviction that new ethical frameworks need to be developed.\(^\text{23}\) In brief, relational ontology is an attempt to think beyond dualism and to understand phenomena as a web of interrelated substances rather than self-contained entities. Many of our current political and social structures are premised on entities, particularly the autonomous human subject, which exist first and then interact. The ontological precedence given to the individual in this model can give rise to self-interest and a tendency for power-over rather than power-with. A relational ontology, as its name suggests, would shift the ontological primacy from entities to relations. Each entity, including each person, is primarily an ongoing nexus of relationships. On this understanding, we do not exist first and then come into relationship with others, but rather, through relating we come fully into being.

A practice that fosters a relational ontology would be one that enables us to create a balance between our necessary defences and our openness to others. Holler suggests the practice of mindfulness meditation is a means to come into being in a relational context. In the concluding chapter of her study of the interrelatedness of eros and morality, she explores mindfulness meditation and some other spiritual practices which she understands to be “…the physiological and psychological equivalents of embodied, tactile love” (Holler, 2002, p. 168). There are two aspects of mindfulness meditation that Holler emphasises. She considers these aspects to be pivotal to generating a relational ontology. Firstly, mindfulness meditation draws attention to embodied existence and secondly, it engenders a sense of self that is interdependent with other beings. Mindfulness meditation trains one to recognise sensory information and emotions as they surface in the body.

\(^{23}\) The notion of a relational ontology is currently being evoked by scholars and activists from a variety of fields, including feminism, ecology and philosophy (see for example Castree, 2003).
One of its central tenets is a concept of self that is very different from the autonomous subject mentioned earlier:

Buddhism has the further advantage of asserting a fully relational or nonessentialist ontology consistent with erotic intimacy in its notion of the self as “empty” or composed of relations (Holler, 2002, p. 170).

The Buddhist concept of ‘interbeing’ – the self as composed of relations – is a potent site for practising a relational ontology and for initiating social change at a grassroots level. Holler draws attention to what she regards as the tactility at work in mindfulness meditation. She cites Vipassana meditation teacher Ruth Denison’s formulation of meditation as ‘tactile consciousness’:

Denison is known for her ability to help the practitioner bring the flesh of the world to life by investigating the sensations of one’s own body bit by bit – the neck, throat, tongue, nostrils, lungs, shoulders, hands, buttocks, thighs, feet. Tactile consciousness is the visceral experience of what Buddhists call emptiness, a burst of light so profoundly in touch with the dynamics of our existence that one’s own cells reverberate with the sentient truth of impermanent and interrelational being (Holler, 2002, p. 171).

However, it must be remembered that mindfulness meditation is not a concretely tactile or intercorporeal practice. While it works towards a sense of selfhood that is composed of relations, it does so from a practice that is inherently ‘solo’. In this, Holler could be said to fall short of the path mapped out by her earlier chapters. In those chapters, she examines the interpersonal ramifications of touch on the very concrete level of skin and sensation. In the final chapter, she retrets to a solo practice that does not involve actual touch. In her analysis of mindfulness meditation, touch is a metaphor rather than an actuality. The notion of ‘tactile consciousness’ extrapolates from the lived experience of touch. It uses the metaphor of touch to describe a state of consciousness that foregrounds intercorporeality, but which is experienced through the solo practice of meditation.

In pointing out the disparity between lived and metaphoric touch in Holler’s account, I am not arguing that only concrete practices of touch have value.
Holler’s evocation of touch as a metaphor for a style of consciousness has similarities to my evocation of touch in Part III of the dissertation. There, I extrapolate from actual to remembered touch. I suggest that in multiple ways, the dynamics gleaned through my practice of touch remain in me as a solo performer. I also evoke tactility as a means of describing the intercorporeal space of performance I have sought in my work. These extrapolations are not entirely dissimilar to Denison’s notion of ‘tactile consciousness’. The difference lies in the fact that my articulation of remembered touch, and of the tactile space of performance, are a direct result of the very concrete practice of touch with Jo and Michaela.

Thus, when I describe my solo practice as a ‘remembering’ of touch, I am remembering specific acts of touch and tactile relationships that developed over time. When I ascribe tactility to the space of performance, I am referencing the intercorporeal dynamics that built up in my practice of touch over time. In this way, the practice of choreographic tactility remains the ground from which I extrapolate. In contrast to the solo practice of meditation, choreographic tactility offers an arena where the dynamics of touch are explored in lived relationships with others. For this reason, I will return more exclusively to practices of choreographic tactility in the following chapter. There, I aim to show how choreographic tactility can foster nuanced understandings of intercorporeal selfhood: a selfhood that arises when touch is practised as a relational ontology.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have suggested, with Holler, ways in which touch coupled with movement enables us to be and dwell comfortably in our bodies. I have indicated how this paves the way for the possibility of empathetic relationships with others. In my work with Jo and Michaela, I sought ways of choreographing that could draw out their unique qualities, and chose to do this through a medium that necessitated a deep engagement with one another. As noted in Chapter Three, touch and movement, in contrast to vision and sound, draw the individual into engagement with a world of
others. This intrinsic relationality makes choreographic touch a fruitful modality for establishing a relational ontology. It can answer Holler’s call for a mode of relating to one another ethically through the flesh rather than through a disembodied rationality.

Holler’s call for an embodied ethics has been the primary motivation in this chapter. I have examined her analysis of how touch enabled Grandin and Williams to reconfigure their response to others. This emphasis on the ethics of touch has inflected my understanding and practice of tactility. I have commented on the differences between concrete practices of touch and metaphoric evocations of touch as a style of consciousness. I have drawn attention to what I consider to be the limitation of Holler’s focus on meditation as a site for embodied ethics. That is, mindfulness meditation is a solo and non-tactile practice. In this, it does not follow through on the close attention to concrete tactility that Holler shows in the earlier chapters of her book. This limitation opens up space for considering choreographic tactility as a tactile site for embodied ethics.

In the next chapter, I hone in on tactility in the active arena of choreographic practices. Close attention to tactility in the context of movement practices can further our understanding of the relational ontology that Holler calls for. In working with touch while moving, we access depths of ourselves that can make us vulnerable in the presence of others. This vulnerability is immensely instructive for thinking about broader relationships with others. It is also the basis for a style of performing that I will elaborate in Chapter Eight.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE QUALITIES OF TACTILE PRACTICES

…meet me with your hand (Alice Cummins, personal communication, October 2006).

Introduction

In Chapter Three, I established the connectivity of touch within infant development and within my practice of choreographic tactility. I described the quality of touch within my practice as one of ‘tactile echolocation’. In Chapter Four, I explored the response to the other through touch, drawing out relationships between the use of touch in autism and in choreographic practice. My focus in doing so was to provide the ground for understanding the ethical implications of my practice. Here, in Chapter Five, I take this a step further. I frame choreographic tactility as an active arena for a relational ontology practised in and through touch. I work from the premise that choreographic tactility, in being an actual practice of touch, can extend the lived dimensions and implications of Holler’s work. As described in Chapter Four, Holler moves from a concrete focus on touch to a poetic understanding of touch as a metaphor for a general embodied awareness. I move in the converse direction. That is, I move from the overarching ethical dimensions of touch in Chapter Four to specific examples of tactile intercorporeality in this chapter.

My aim in doing so is twofold. Firstly, I use specific examples of choreographic tactility to clarify the relational exigencies of working with touch. Secondly, I aim to clarify the qualities of selfhood that emerge through practising touch. I detail how a practice of touch can extend one’s awareness of the intrinsic intercorporeality of selfhood. Privileging intercorporeality through tactile practices is relational ontology in the flesh. Giving ontological priority to relations rather than entities gives rise to a different kind of selfhood. The focus is no longer on separate or essential selves. Rather, the selfhood that arises within a relational ontology, and
particularly within tactile practices, is characterised by a play across boundaries. It is a selfhood that arises interstitially.

I use Steve Paxton’s notion of mutuality in Contact Improvisation as the basis for articulating how movement arises in the space between two selves in movement. I name this quality of relational instigation ‘interstitiality’. The term is borrowed from anatomy: it refers to that which is situated in the spaces between tissues or parts of an organ. In more general terms, it is considered to be that which occupies intervening spaces, chinks or crevices. Movement that arises in the interstices between two people forms an instance of relational ontology. Through examining Paxton’s notion of mutuality and the experiences of other Contact improisers, I show that movement arising from the interstices gives rise to an experience of selfhood that is unlike quotidian selfhood.

Firstly though, I pave the way for the discussion of interstitiality by detailing two qualities of touch in the work of Eva Karczag. I begin by tracing the continuities and discontinuities between therapeutic and aesthetic touch in her practice. In both her practice and mine, touch inevitably becomes a means of accessing emotion in movement. I explore how emotion surfaces in the tactile interaction with the other. In my work with Jo and Michaela, we used the inextricability of touch and movement to ‘move through’ emotion. A further link between Karczag’s practice and mine lies in the tactile nature of the voice. Karczag’s observes that in a tactile practice, the voice functions like touch to invite multi-faceted awareness in the mover. In my practice, the voice can also be used to foster a collaborative tactile memory.

Finally, I note that the etymological relatedness of tact and touch is not incidental. Working with touch necessitates tact, a fact colourfully

24 Contact Improvisation is a dance form that involves moving with partners through a point of contact, exploring the possibilities of bodies moving together in kinaesthetic connection. Movement qualities can vary from soft and flowing to dynamic lifting and jumping, but these qualities are always underpinned by principles of co-operation and sensitivity. Steve Paxton was a founding member of the Judson Dance Theatre and the Grand Union in New York, and is often credited with ‘inventing’ Contact Improvisation in the 1970s (Albright & Gere, 2003; Novack, 1990).
expressed by Contact improviser Tom Truss. Tactile practices entail a marked sensitivity to the other. It is their condition of possibility: without tactful awareness, practices of touch cannot endure. Thus, I draw together the qualities of emotion, vocality, interstitiality and tact. Together, these qualities show how practices of choreographic tactility foster a relational ontology. This notion is poetically encapsulated by the phrase with which Alice Cummins instructs students on the intention underlying touch in her BMC® classes: “meet me with your hand” (Alice Cummins, personal communication, October 2006).

i) Moving the emotion

Developing my practice of choreographic tactility has entailed negotiating an appropriate pathway amongst established notions of choreographing, collaborating and directing. As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Four, I suspect similar negotiations were at work for Eva Karczag when she made a work based on tactile stimulus with students at the European Dance Development Centre, in Arnhem in the Netherlands. In this section and the next, I suggest that the gravitation towards the use of touch signals a directorial stance that privileges relatedness. It foregrounds the qualities of selfhood that arise in the interstices between toucher and mover. In this section, the privileging of interstitial movement is seen in the attention to emotion in the choreographic process. That is, emotion arises in the interaction between two tactile selves in movement. The ‘allowing’ of the emotional dimensions of the self through touch becomes formative of the general ethos of the choreographic relationship. I begin this exploration by tracing what residues remain of therapeutic touch in Karczag’s choreographic touch.

Karczag’s work is a particularly useful example for me because she is trained in the kind of Intricate Tactile Sensitivity outlined in Chapter Three, through her work as an Alexander teacher. Her work with the students in Arnhem thus provides an important instance of how somatic practices articulate into aesthetic endeavours. Dance scholar Elizabeth Dempster spoke with Karczag about the piece she made in Arnhem, noting that it is
unusual to develop a whole work using touch as the primary source. Karczag’s response is that working from touch makes the images you are working with quite literally tangible. Touch functions as a reality check:

People can make assumptions in their mind about what they’re doing when they’re alone, but if you have your hands on and your hands are trained enough to help guide them into the experience that you’re looking for, then they can’t kid themselves that something is happening when it isn’t (Karczag in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 45).

In conversation, both Jo and Michaela commented on the relationship between truth and touch, with Jo saying: “it [touch work] gets to the truth really quickly without the need to address it vocally”. The relationship between touch and truth is a fascinating one, and one that resonates down the history of Western thought. As cross-cultural historian Constance Classen notes in her study of the senses, even Aristotle, often credited with the classical exultation of vision above all other senses, at times hesitated in his estimations, and described touch as the primary sense and the basis of human intelligence (Classen, 1993, p. 3).

Karczag makes some important distinctions between the touch used when making a dance work and the kind of touch she uses as an Alexander teacher. These distinctions offer important extensions to the model of Intricate Tactile Sensitivity and tactile echolocation outlined in Chapter Three. When doing Alexander work, Karczag’s hands are listening but also sensing what the optimal direction for moving would be for the person being touched. The movement workshops she teaches are a melding of different mindful movement techniques and improvised dance. When I attended one of Karczag’s workshops, as participants we were asked to cradle our partner’s head in our hands as they lay on the ground and slowly edged into movement. ‘Cradling’ was a wonderful term for this touch, in that it recalls the primordial touch of infancy. It is not a static descriptor: to cradle is to hold but also to move with. The dovetailing of movement and touch was echoed by the coupling of tactile listening and prompting in the act of cradling.
Touch in this context is different to that used in making the new dance work with the Dutch students. These are important distinctions for me, as my initial learning about touch occurred in workshops that transposed knowledge from somatic healing modalities into dance improvisation contexts. Karczag emphasizes that touch is used in workshops to facilitate the ease and expansiveness of a dancer’s movement. Using touch for choreographic purposes has different aims. For Karczag, using touch to choreograph entails freeing up one’s creative movement possibilities in whatever direction happens to arise. When making a new dance work, the emphasis is not always on ease of movement:

It [making the dance work in Holland] became much more to do with where you, the person being touched, are as you, as yourself, on many different levels… You’re taking the information from your partner or the other people’s touch into any level of experience. It’s based in the body, so there’s a physicality to it, but a lot of other parts of yourself are being explored. So it doesn’t have a particular direction to it. When I work with a person in class [a touch-based workshop] what I’m looking for is to help them expand into their bodies and into their moving more. In this other work [making the work in Holland] it may be that someone will go into their contractions or their screwing up of themselves, their ugly unproductive stuff, whatever that is; it doesn’t really matter (Karczag in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 46).

Through choreographic tactility, very powerful emotions can come to the surface. We can indeed find ourselves moving through states that are ‘ugly’ or screwed up. I think it is useful to focus on the possible movement of the emotion, rather than focussing on ‘feeling’ it. This has certainly been my experience with Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis, where light touch to the spine instigates a constant web of emotion in me as I work my way through various spinal subluxations. The way through is not to sink into the emotion but to give it expression via a combination of breath, voice and spinal movement. Karczag’s focus is similarly on the continuum between emotion and kinaesthetic experience. Whatever arises in the moving tactile interaction with one’s partner can go straight back into movement:
[...] as soon as your body starts to open up you will start to open up the stuff that’s locked in there, all the joys and sorrows and whatever else [...] sometimes people get rather introverted and that’s where my interest in moving is. I always keep encouraging them to put it into movement (Karczag in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 47).

Choreographic tactility assists us to locate emotion in movement. This notion has etymological support. The word emotion derives from the Latin word emotionem (meaning ‘of action’) and the French root e (meaning ‘out’) and movere (meaning ‘to move’). Thus the initial meaning of the word was “a moving out, migration, transference from one place to another” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 183). However, it is not a matter of touch drawing out emotion that lies within. That would be to remain within a model of selves as separate entities. Rather, choreographic touch, in drawing our dermal and kinaesthetic attention to intercorporeality, prompts us to draw out the emotion that is always available in movement. In conversation, Michaela commented on the surfacing of emotion through touch:

It [touch work] used to unlock things, lots of little stories, lots of squiggles of stuff inside... It felt like I found residues of memories, emotions. You carry so much stuff with you... it felt like they unlocked, depending on what kind of touch occurred, latent reactions to things got a chance to come out again (Michaela Pegum, personal communication, 20th September 2006).

My emphasis, as the ‘director’ of the process whereby this surfacing occurred, was not to identify or name the ‘squiggles’, but to move them, to move with them. We were not aiming to grasp, name or communicate the autobiographical specificities that emerged, but to allow their richness to suffuse and energise the movement. Here, Karmen Mackendrick’s description of touch as an unfinished modality is useful. She notes that “grasp and touch are of course not substitutable” (Mackendrick, 2004, p. 65). This furthers my emphasis in Chapter Three on the interrelatedness of touch and movement. To touch is to invite movement, to move on, to move with and through the surfacing emotion, rather than to grasp it. In touch, we connect with old and deep aspects of ourselves. Dancing from touch generates a deep presencing of self in movement, as Jo puts it:
I think there isn’t any choice but to have a strong sense of self when you’re working this way. It’s like uncovering layers, it just gets deeper and deeper. It’s inherently connected to doing touch work, to moving from inner to outer via touch (Jo White, personal communication, 20th September 2006).

However, the practice of choreographic tactility is not only about uncovering layers, but about putting layers into action, into movement. Through the touch of another, we touch deep aspects of ourselves. Through the practice of choreographic tactility, we have been learning to ‘stay in touch’ with those aspects of ourselves while dancing. We remain in touch with multiple and shifting aspects of ourselves by holding those aspects with a touch that is light and mobile rather than grasping. We attend to our intercorporeality. These notions are explored in Part III, in my articulation of remembered touch in performance.

In a sense this represents a transition from the idea of an internal psyche inherited from classical psychology to an interstitial site of self-becoming. At the instigation of the touch of another, aspects of emotional selfhood come to awareness and are experienced directly in movement. In fact, for those whose primary realm is movement, these aspects of self are experienced in movement before having come to one’s conscious awareness. This movement of emotion has been allowed through tactile interaction rather than by focussing on ‘internal’ psychological states. In this way, the movement of emotion can be said to arise interstitially. In my practice, it is often in acts of tactile movement that we discover what we feel. In conversation, Michaela noted this:

I feel that often with movement… and really through our process, as I became more able to be articulate, I felt like I was finding what my real feelings were. In day-to-day life there is so much conversation in the mind, and that can build up a kind of guard, or feelings about what you should be doing or feeling. With the movement [in choreographic tactility], I felt like it was truthful, that it was coming from somewhere that is protected from your mind… we became better at expressing details of what we were feeling… subtleties (Michaela Pegum, personal communication, 20th September 2006).
The habits of language have us saying ‘expressing’ what is ‘inside’ where we might better say ‘experiencing’. The crucial point is that we do not experience something internally and then communicate it to another via the ‘external’ expression of ‘the body’. This understanding of communication is stuck within the old split between mind and body. It is also stuck within the model of autonomous subjects, a model critiqued with Holler in Chapter Four. Such autonomous subjects would feel first and express later. Instead, we experience as we move, and the more present we are to what we are experiencing, the more we communicate that to a witness. Thus, my focus on emotion arising interstitially supports my claim that choreographic tactility is a forum for experiencing a relational ontology.

In conversation, Jo also noticed a shift in her mode of attending to her movement. There was a clarification of her ability to harness a detailed self-awareness in her dancing: “through our work, my ability to physically articulate what’s going on has gotten clearer” (Jo White, personal communication, 20th September 2006). This shift arose in the midst of our work with touch and attests to the clarification of emotion through tactile movement in the presence of a witnessing other. In the case of both Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis and my studio work with Jo and Michaela, the surfacing, the experiencing of the self-in-movement occurs in the presence of the person who has touched us. It is a kind of presencing of self that is allowed by the presence of a tactile and witnessing other, as Jo noted:

Your body feels present from the first touch onwards. It brings a certain kind of energy to the front that makes you have a presence, makes your body have a presence where there isn’t any room for thinking (Jo White, personal communication, 20th September 2006).

Working in this way in the studio over time encourages a kind of dancing that is more deeply transparent and candid. It relies less on one’s dancerly expertise and more on a connectedness with who one is in this world at this moment. This is the kind of dancing that interests me. For some, this mode of working might seem to lie within the realm of therapy. For my part, making distinctions between art-making and therapy is neither interesting
nor productive. Work can be made within chosen aesthetic parameters that also incorporate personal or ethical values. I agree wholeheartedly with Karczag’s disarmingly simple answer to the supposed quandry:

Is this therapy or is this about making work? To me that’s never been an issue. I’m exploring myself and whatever I find there I put into my work and whatever I discover in my work I’ll put into my self, my life (Karczag in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 47).

ii) Vocal tactility

Karczag talks about the self-in-movement as a state of awareness. She describes her interest in improvisation as being part of a more general interest in being in-the-moment, a kind of “mindfulness or consciousness or an awareness of the moving self and of what it’s trying to convey” (Karczag in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 48). There is a sense in which movement is allowed rather than constructed, and, as Dempster comments, this allowing engenders a different surfacing of self:

[…] a very different relationship to oneself, a different organisation of self, as compared with the process of making work through the conscious direction and choreographing of material (Dempster in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 48).

The ‘allowing’ of the self-in-movement is partly brought about by the way Karczag uses her voice as she conducts a session. At this point in the interview, Dempster and Karczag are discussing a recent workshop which Karczag gave and which Dempster attended, rather than her work with students in Holland. While Karczag was careful to draw clear distinctions between the use of touch in a movement workshop and in the making of a new work, I think that the use of voice would be common to both situations. Dempster’s description of Karczag’s voice resonates with my own experience of ‘vocal tactility’ when attending Karczag’s workshops:

For this period of time you take us through a series of experiences and images pretty much through speech. You create a sound envelope… your voice is doing all kinds of things, sometimes it’s instructional and sometimes it seems to be reading us, our bodies and
our moving and giving feedback, telling us what you see; at other times you stimulate action, add dynamic. I am reminded of Bill Williams’ Alexander classes, of how he talks constantly, how he keeps up a constant, steady stream of words, how he envelops you in this discourse of your body. It repeats and it changes (Dempster in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 51).

‘It repeats and it changes’. This sentence echoes Mackendrick’s observations regarding the tactility of language, mentioned in Chapter Three. Language that approaches the body, that seeks to address the other in an intimate way, does so via the unfinished modality of touch. The intertwining of language and touch is saturated by developmental precedent. Ashley Montagu comments on the tactility of the voice, noting that after the tactile/kinaesthetic sense, the next sense to mature is not vision but hearing. Speaking from his anthropological observations of maternal tactile patterns amongst Aivilik Eskimos, he writes:

The mother hums and sings to the child, while she pats and hugs him, and holds him close to her body in her parka, and in time he learns to identify and respond to her voice as a surrogate for her touch. It is a reflexive form of conditioning, in which the sign of the original stimulus, the voice, replaces the touch, but the voice always retains its tactile quality, soothing, caressing, reassuring (Montagu, 1986, p. 304).

Developmentally, a tactile voice becomes the surrogate for touch. And the tactile language with which we approach infants is laced with soothing repetition. Indeed, touch is a modality that always invites repetition.

Through my close attention to touch over an extended period of time, I reactivated this development unity of touch and voice. The way I used my voice came to approximate the way I used my hands. Here, in ascribing tactility to my voice, I am ascribing the quality of interstitiality. The use of my voice morphed to approximate touch such that it could support the interstitial origins of the movement. It used my voice to draw our attention to the elastic space between us that had been created through touch. In response to Dempster’s observations on her use of voice, Karczag replies that her voice is like an exercise she gives where everyone stands in a circle and one person walks around the circle, being repeatedly touched by each of the others as they pass by. Those in the circle touch the walker wherever
they are drawn to touch, with the effect that the walking person’s attention is drawn there too:

As they move around they keep getting touched in different places so their attention is constantly shifting through their body. My words are like that; they’re constant touches that keep shifting your attention into new places so you’re constantly engaged, you’re constantly being stimulated… new ideas keep coming in so one’s constantly asked to, or challenged to try this, try that; if that didn’t work go here. That’s also, I think, to do with the articulateness that I’m looking for (Karczag in Karczag & Dempster, 1995/96, p. 52).

To speak of words as touches is not just a poetic device. It is a clear enunciation of the intertwining of voice, touch and movement. A voice that is tactically articulate invites a similar articulation in the mover, a mode of attending that is fluid, shifting and engaged. This gives rise to an articulate kind of dancing, which, to my choreographer’s eye, is alive with the mercurial and synthesising intelligence of multiple body systems. This is a crucial point of distinction between choreographic tactility and many other movement practices, where one is more likely to sense a ‘body’ directed by a ‘brain’.

As with Bainbridge Cohen’s analogy of echolocation, Karczag’s description of how her voice works like touch resonates with me in terms of the relationships between Jo, Michaela and myself. But additionally, I consider the voice to play a crucial role in creating a collaborative memory of touch. As Michaela and Jo continue to improvise after I cease touching them, the memory of the touch is sustained or held by my witnessing but also by what I draw attention to with my voice. Mackendrick’s notion that to touch is not to grasp is useful here. A tactile voice suggests but does not force. I give reminders, prompts, interruptions, both shifting and focusing our attention to help Michaela and Jo remain tactically engaged.

Voicing one’s observations of a moving other augments our understanding of what both parties are experiencing. It represents a somewhat different phase of consciousness to the initial, unworded touch. In Chapters Three and Four, I detailed some of the ways in which I directed our attention
through touch. Here, developing a voiced poetics of touch extends my
ability to shape the dance towards something that might be shared by others
in performance. Vocal tactility engenders a specific kind of remembering,
namely a relational tactile remembering, between myself and the women
with whom I work. We develop a common language with which to keep
alive the tactile origins of the movement as we shift from improvisation to
remembered choreography. It is not just about remembering movement, but
also remembering the tactile heart of the movement, as will be explored in
Part III of the dissertation.

Like the soothing tactile language with which we address infants, the
language of touch that I use in the studio is laced with repetition. I prompt,
and prompt again, imprinting words, as Karzcnag says, like ‘constant
touches’. My words continue the task of building layers of tactile memory. I
use my voice to evoke and sustain the memory of the tactile stimulus I have
given. I use different vocal tones to recall different qualities of our tactile
interaction, exploiting the tactility inherent in language to prolong the
kinaesthetic sensibilities engendered by touch. Even after there is no
physical touch, touch remains the bedrock of the work.

**iii) Interstitial movement**

Tactile echolocation is an unusual choreographic strategy, as Dempster
noted in conversation with Karzcnag. In my case, tactile echolocation makes
me alive to the intricacies of the other selves with whom I work. It is a more
pliable mode of relating to the dancers with whom I collaborate than the
more traditional choreographic model of demonstrating steps to dancers. It
is also more pliable than many other postmodern methods of
choreographing, where the choreographer elicits improvisations from the
dancers via a variety of tasks and strategies. There is something peculiarly
disarming about working with touch. It has the potential to strip us bare in
the presence of a witnessing other. Choreographic tactility brings forth a
vulnerable intercorporeality, where the boundaries between selves become
less fixed. It is this interstitial experience of self that I will detail in this section.

Using language as a ‘constant touch’ extends the kinaesthetic sensibilities of choreographic tactility. And as Dempster noted above, the use of voice in bodywork classes creates a kind of sound bubble, enveloping participants in a shared milieu. Both touch and vocal tactility have the capacity to engender a shared milieu of experience. A sense of ‘play across boundaries’ can come to characterise the experience of self within the milieu of touch. As mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter, I term this play across boundaries ‘interstitiality’. My notion of interstitiality builds on Steve Paxton’s notion of mutuality in Contact Improvisation (Paxton, 1996).

Contact Improvisation is an important example of a movement practice in which vulnerability and intercorporeality surface through touch. Paxton unearths some of the ethical aspects of touch in a discussion of the mutuality and responsibility necessary to touch in Contact Improvisation. Contact Improvisation entails a different tactile practice to that which I have been developing, but the ways Contact Improvisation practitioners describe tactility have points of intersection with my own use of touch. Mutuality describes the knowledge that one’s movement partner is focused on the point of contact: it is this mutual focus that allows the dance to occur. I extend this concept in my description of interstitiality.

In Contact Improvisation, touch is largely constant, and occurs with any part of the body. Partners are equal in the giving and receiving of touch, which is quite different to my practice where I was not receiving touch in the usual sense that we understand what it is to receive. Paxton describes the mutuality of touch in Contact Improvisation thus:

Knowing that one is touching and being touched is coupled with the awareness that the same process is happening inside the person one is dancing with (Paxton, 1996, p. 50).

In speaking of mutuality here, Paxton is not contending that the movement partners have an identical experience. Rather, mutuality means that their
attention is focussed on the movement occurring through their point of tactile contact, and on the collective nature of the process. It is not merely that one has one’s own experience of the improvisation and subsequently the awareness that it is a shared event. Rather, for Contact Improvisation to really take off, it is necessary to focus one’s attention on the point of contact, on the permeable boundary of the skin where kinaesthetic energy is transferred. This focus gives rise to mutuality.

There is something revealing about the way Paxton describes the act of teaching ‘head to head’, a preliminary exercise in Contact Improvisation. It usually follows an exercise called ‘standing’, in which what he calls the ‘small dance’ is noticed and clarified. The small dance is the movement that occurs when one is simply standing; the micro-movements involved in maintaining an upright stance. It is not movement we consciously undertake, but with focussed attention, we can consciously notice it at work in ourselves. Paxton regards it as reflexive movement which grounds “the generality we call standing” (Paxton, 1996, p. 50). When doing ‘head to head’, each dancer can feel the small dance of the other through the point of contact:

This is direct observation and experience of the unconscious movement-mind of the other. Each dancer is aware that their small dance is being sensed by the other. It is a complex connection, seeming to be multilevel (sensorial, mental and reflexive), arising from two heads touching. It is the introduction and the model for touch elsewhere on the body (Paxton, 1996, p. 50).

Paxton notes that his description of ‘head to head’ is partial and probably inadequate, because he cannot account for the personal experience of it, despite the exercise being so fundamental to Contact Improvisation. It exceeds what an exercise can describe, because one’s experience of it is idiosyncratic:

This material, while it is the whole point of the exercise, is too individualistic to predict, too variable to pinpoint, and too complex to present as an exercise…Experience is everything personal about touch. It includes the sensorial impressions, and feelings about those
impressions. It may include one’s personal history, feelings about that history, fantasies, etc (Paxton, 1996, p 50).

But the idiosyncrasy of tactile experience does not preclude mutuality. This is because mutuality is not about having the same experience. Instead, it entails what can be described as a displacement of consciousness. Rather than having consciousness reside in two individuals, Contact improvisers insert their awareness into the space between them: the point of contact. Mutuality describes the displacement of experience into this locus of the in-between. In this, it is a literal and powerful instance of the relational ontology Holler calls for. The experience of mutuality is what gives Contact Improvisation its power, both as an experience and as a perceived event. Performance scholar Mark Minchinton richly describes this experience from the ‘inside’, capturing a moment from within a Contact Improvisation dance:

As the improvisation develops I progressively lose the sense of a differentiated Self and respond ‘mindlessly’ to the imperatives of maintaining contact and giving and receiving weight, I feel as though I have entered a timeless and immeasurable space, similar in feeling to that of a dream, where I am able to move forever, tirelessly; I am aware of a feeling of depth going into and beyond my ‘own’ body (Minchinton, 1994, p. 51).

The experience of mutuality has ethical implications. It allows us a reprieve from the usual order of experience, which is that we can only ever experience the world from our own perspective. Movement partners are intently focussed on what is occurring between them. This means that relationality rather than solipsism marks the experience of the self. Paxton emphasizes the shift in perception that Contact Improvisation can generate:

It is like having access to another mind. It is not mind-reading as we imagine, in that we don’t know what that mind is feeling; only that it is feeling, focused on the common touch which is occurring. In other words, granted our sensorial experience derives from our point of view, by means of mutuality we have an experience of another order… In this mutuality, the speed of transmission and retransmission is swift enough to imprint directly on our intention and stimulate our reflexes. This affects the course of the dance without conscious decision on our part (Paxton, 1996, p. 50).
The rapid transmission and retransmission of information through tactile exchange is what can make Contact Improvisation exhilarating to witness. It is also part of what made choreographic tactility such an appealing and efficient mode in which to generate movement with Jo and Michaela. In Chapter Three, I discussed the intertwining of touch and movement. I outlined how, when using touch choreographically, at times I perceived Jo and Michaela’s movement almost as if it were my own. This experience was possible because of the rapid transmission and retransmission of corporeal information of which Paxton speaks.

My practice differs from Contact Improvisation in important ways, such as that I was not dancing, other than the ‘dance’ involved in giving tactile prompts in a swift and mobile manner. However, the rapid exchange of information through tactile contact is common to both Contact Improvisation and my work. The focus is on the point of exchange between selves in movement rather than on what those selves might experience as separate entities. This means that Contact Improvisation and my practice of choreographic tactility enact a relational ontology. The permeability of the self/other boundary in this exchange brings about an in-between-ness, a play between selves in movement. This is the experience of interstitiation, an experience, as Paxton notes, ‘of another order’. It is a potent site for experiencing the intercorporeality of existence.

My focus on interstitiality lies in a direct lineage from my emerging focus, outlined in Part I, on intercorporeality. It is reflected in the name given to that period of experimentation where intercorporeality first surfaced as a research interest, namely the space between us. Then, I was interested in a quality of intersubjective reverie, the orientation towards an absent other. I regard this interest as a precursor to interstitiation. It entails a displacement of awareness into the interstice or crack between the dancer and the ‘object’ of her remembrance or orientation. In my practice of choreographic tactility, this interest has found concrete expression in acts of touch and acts of remembering touch.
In Chapter Four, I detailed two instances from my practice of choreographic tactility that spoke to the negotiation of boundaries between selves. In the first, I spoke of the need for responsive agency. This is what Jo and I brought to the fore when we spoke about the possibility of responding to touch in ways other than a pliable move towards the stimulus. Allowing for the possibility of not responding, or responding in a very minimal way, or moving away rather than towards, were options that furthered Jo’s agency within the process. I was alerted to our different responsibilities: mine to offer tactile suggestions but not expect given responses; Jo and Michaela’s to be responsive but not passive. In the second instance, I spoke about touch’s capacity to dissolve the boundaries between toucher and mover, such that the touch was experienced as a multi-faceted topography rather than an interpersonal relationship. Interstitiality offers a third kind of negotiation of boundaries. Further to the negotiation of agency and the dissolution of self-boundedness, I add the notion of interstitiality – the experience of the in-between space of becoming – as an alternative site for a relational ontology.

Tactile practices in and of themselves reconfigure the contained and individualised human subject. They throw awareness out of two separate centres of movement and into the space between. But this experience of interstitiality brings with it the possibility of affecting one another on a deep level, and thus requires a degree of responsibility. In my practice of choreographic tactility, it was necessary to pay adequate attention to this responsibility. This responsibility is akin to the way skin provides a breathing boundary between self and world. In the midst of the interstitial exchange we sought, there was a need for firmness. This need can be described as tact.

iv) Tact

The exercise of tact is necessary to the proper functioning of tactile practices. In Contact Improvisation, attention is paid to the need for sensitivity. Discussions about boundaries often turn to the potential associations with sexuality inherent in this movement form. In speaking
specifically about the overlapping zones of erotic touch and Contact Improvisation, Paxton points towards the links between movement and personal history:

When dealing with sensitive areas of any sort, we should dance sensitively, and, as in other civilized discourse, if discord arises, change the subject or watch our steps. It is not just movement to which we are responding. The movement is a physical surface covering whole life-times and wholly unknowable experiences. Sex is there, someplace, everyplace. It is difficult to imagine that while grazing each other’s minds in touch and movement we would not bump into some of its manifestations (Paxton, 1996, p. 51).

This is articulated in a personal account of a particular dance by a Contact improviser, Tom Truss. He notes that touch in Contact Improvisation slips fluidly between many types of touch, not being bound to any one paradigm:

In a world of violent touch, medical touch, polite touch, sex touch, aggressive touch, caring touch, it can be confusing to encounter a touch that can be all of the above and more (Truss, 1996, p. 58).

The liminal zones between types of touch in contact improvisation can call up powerful and unbidden associations, attesting to the capacity of touch to stimulate memory. Truss recalls a dance where the boundaries became confused, and a powerful sense of sexuality was experienced, despite not being attracted to the person with whom he was dancing:

I remember, after one incredible dance, wanting to turn to my partner and say, “I love you”. We had visited a lot of terrain in that dance. Our improv was rich with story, time, truth; so, while lying on the floor next to each other, the phrase “I love you” was on my lips. But that didn’t make any sense. Yes, I loved our dance, and I loved that we went that far while dancing, but I didn’t even know her name. Besides, I’m queer! It was quite a confusing moment… That dance was like a marriage, a Hallmark card, and a prayer combined. It brought up memories, feelings, and history without any of the places, people and objects being there. And yet my emotions were totally present, and I wanted to relate with my current live dance partner the way I would have with the people who were involved in those past moments. So “I love you” was resting right on my tongue, and fortunately, there it stayed (Truss, 1996, pp. 58-59).

While sexuality has not surfaced in my work with Jo and Michaela, it is of interest to me in what it conveys about liminality in general. Truss speaks
about the liminal zone between intimacy and sex. In my practice, the focus is on the liminal zone between past and present: a zone that is activated through touch. As Paxton notes, when dancing with touch, movement becomes a surface covering whole life-times. The relationship between touch and memory is of particular interest to me and I will return to it in more depth in Part III. Here, my focus is on the sensitivity that is called for when dancing tactiley. Tact underpins the experience of a relational ontology. Interstitiality is desirable in that it takes us away from the solipsism of utterly separate selves, giving us an ‘experience of another order’, as Paxton put it. However, concomitant with interstitiality is responsibility, seen in the need for tactful awareness of the other and for maintaining the right amount of firmness with one’s own boundary.

Truss’ anecdote illustrates my discussion earlier in this chapter of how the touch of the other can instigate webs of emotion that are experienced as movement. Paxton’s emphasis on the need for tact in Contact Improvisation is interestingly underscored by etymology. It is no coincidence that there is an historical link between the word ‘touch’ and the word indicating sensitivity to the feelings of others, namely ‘tact’. Tact comes from the Latin word meaning touch, *tactus*, and the two words were used interchangeably in English until the early 1800s. Indeed as late as 1876, the word tact was used figuratively to describe “a keen faculty of perception or discrimination likened to the sense of touch” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 533). This underscores the relatedness of tactile experience and interpersonal sensitivity. Tact is essential to my work with Jo and Michaela, where touch becomes a form of companioning that invites sharing of personal worlds and experiences.

Tact is not an added extra, or merely an attitude of decorum within the practice of choreographic tactility. I want to make the stronger claim that without tact, tactile practices are bound to fail. Without the tactful negotiation of boundaries that I have outlined in this and the previous chapter, tactile practices would either reach creative dead-ends or become exploitative. In this sense, tact is the ground of their possibility. This fact
encapsulates the degree to which tactile practices embody a relational ontology: they are grounded in the capacity for sensitive relatedness. I repeat here Holler’s summation of the conditions needed for a relational ontology grounded in the flesh, mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter:

To be healthy morally and otherwise, we need protected yet porous relations that open and close as the membranes of cells do to create appropriate exchanges between inner and outer (Holler, 2002, p. 7).

In an eloquent summation of the interleaving of tact and tactility, BMC® practitioner Alice Cummins speaks of touch as an opportunity for meeting the other. When I place my hand on her in her workshop, she prompts: “meet me with your hand” (Alice Cummins, personal communication, October 2006). This notion has an enlivening effect on me. Something shifts in my tactile ability, even though this moment occurs a year after I finished the main working period with Jo and Michaela where we developed the practice of choreographic tactility. As I extend the idea of meeting Cummins into the palms of my hands, my responsiveness becomes more finely tuned. The knowledge of the intercorporeal dimensions of tactility comes alive in my hands. Through Alice’s prompt, I understand these dimensions more fully, in a synthetic mixture of intuitive, intellectual and corporeal knowing.

In my earlier work with Jo and Michaela, I used touch intuitively. I noticed keenly the surfacing of a corporeally articulate self, and then fed that knowledge back into my touch. But something further shifted in my sensibility when I consciously put the intention of ‘meeting’ the other into the palms of my hands. Cummins speaks of hands as being full of blood

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25 The importance of intention in the touch relationship is outlined in Hanlon Johnson’s discussion of Intricate Tactile Sensitivity (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, p. 488). They cite an anecdote from research on touch in infant development where anomalies in the research were attributed to the ‘inattentiveness’ of a nurse who was administering touch to infants. Attentiveness is not the same, however, as touching with a direct intention to change the other. Hanlon Johnson notes Rolfing practitioner Rod Salveson’s insistence that he must touch without intention to change anything if he is to be able to ‘listen’ effectively (Hanlon Johnson, 2000, pp. 482-483). Karczag also notes the need to still the desire to force particular change or movement. In an example of the kind of prompts she gives in her
and fat, fleshy sponges that can pliably meet the other in touch, as we tactiley support and prompt the dancer who is moving under and with our hands. She likens this firm pliability to certain qualities in human relationships, such as the way a parent might relate to their child, perhaps containing the child’s openendedness by meeting them with a flexible boundary. Hands used in these ways answer Linda Holler’s call for ‘protected yet porous relations’.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described several qualities of tactile practices: the experience of emotion in tactile movement; the use of voice to foster a collaborative memory of touch; the experience of interstitiality; and tact as the condition of possibility of tactile practices. These qualities have been described in my own practice and in the tactile practices of others. In choreographic tactility, there is a rapid play of information across the permeable boundaries of skins and selves. There is a deepened understanding of the skin, both physiologically and metaphorically, as a breathing boundary between selves, others and worlds. This sense of interstitial selfhood, tactiley and intercorporeally aware, is part of a deeply relational ontology of practice. The sense of self that emerges through the touch of the other is characterised by vulnerability and the ability to experience in movement the emotional states that arise through tactile interaction. In my practice the emotional presencing of self-in-movement is furthered by the tactile witnessing of the other. This witnessing relationship underscores the intercorporeal structure of emotion, movement, and touch.

When we allow space for the vulnerability of our own flesh to come to the fore, we become tender, both in the sense that we are soft and able to feel pain, and also in the sense of tenderness towards others. Working within a practice of tactility fosters this in us. Many healing modalities, such as massage or osteopathy, work with touch. Working with touch from within a workshops, she writes: “…this is a hand that doesn’t want, that doesn’t know what’s right or wrong” (Karczag, 1995/1996, p. 35).
movement practice offers different insights to these modalities. In my practice, what is called up from the depths of us via the touch of the other is experienced directly in/as movement, and this is experienced by the mover and by the tactile witness. We witness the other as she experiences the articulation of interstitial selfhood in movement. We are alert to the fine balance needed to maintain ‘protected yet porous relations’. We comprehend in movement the very concrete links between touch and tact. In these ways, choreographic tactility is a practice of negotiating relationships with others tenderly.
i) Preamble

In the Introduction, I described the dissertation as a whole as a critical and reflective narrative of my practice. Here, I provide a further narrative layering. I offer a meta-commentary that illuminates the very personal motivations, failures and revelations that have sustained the inquiry. In doing so, I map the interconnectivity of the modes of knowledge that the inquiry contains.

I also noted in the Introduction that writing a chronology of creative emergence presents anomalies. Narratives of origin combine retrospection and prediction. They attribute causal and chronological links to processes that may in fact be much messier. Such is the cleanliness of language. However, the roughly chronological narrative I sketch here is not peripheral but instead central to the themes of the research.

The narrative is also an important way of introducing the remainder of the dissertation. The focus of the remaining section, Part III, has been a constant, if somewhat latent concern, namely remembering. Here I aim to chart the shift from understanding memory through the visual paradigm of photography to understanding remembering as incarnate and corporeally embedded.

One important aim of the narrative is to provide clarity regarding the nature of practice-led research in my inquiry. This incorporates both the varied processes of such research and its outcomes, namely the written and performed components of the thesis. Before I begin the narrative per se, I would like to outline three epistemological modes within my research. I have come to know what I know in this PhD project through three

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26 This Intermezzo is currently being drafted into an essay for a book on practice-led research, to be published by QUT Press in 2009.
epistemological modes: somatic/performative, discursive and methodological.

Firstly, there is what I have come to know somatically and performatively. I link these two modes of knowledge because in a dance practice they are inseparable. The somatic and performative knowledge I have acquired now resides in me as embodied knowledge that I call on as a performer, choreographer and collaborator. Some of this somatic and performative knowledge resides in the performance works that comprise the PhD folio. Other aspects of it will no doubt surface in future works.

Secondly, there is what I have come to know discursively. I have drawn out some of the tacit knowledge of my practice and explored its implications through engaging with discursive writing from a variety of disciplines. This ‘engagement’ has occurred in writing. Thirdly, there is what I have come to know meta-methodologically, about the nature of practice-led research. During the course of the inquiry, I have come to understand the interconnectedness of these three epistemes.

Phases of research have been identified and labelled in various ways in earlier parts of the dissertation. The shifts I will attempt to draw out in A Narrative of Practice are somewhat different because they trace the latent linchpin of the whole inquiry, namely remembering. Part of what the narrative reveals is that my early attempts to work with memory within a corporeal studio practice were bound to fail because they were both logocentric and occularcentric in origin. Importantly, the shifts I underwent in order to get the studio practice onto a more fruitful footing are also found in the realignment of the philosophical stance of the inquiry, and in the realignment of the inquiry as a whole so that it was more honestly led by the practice. It is the intersections of these shifts that I try to trace in this narrative.
In both my studio and discursive approach, I shifted from vision to tactility as a way into remembering. To trace these shifts exposes the very personal heart of the research. Rendering the personal underpinnings of the research transparent is part of a conscious effort to resist the elision of the personal as commonly occurs in the ‘writing up’ of research. Such an elision would be dishonest in the face of the thoroughly personal motivations that have sustained the various stages of my development as an artist-scholar through the course of this project.

ii) Narrative

I began the PhD with a focus on memory and photography. This emerged at the turn of the millennium, amidst a general zeitgeist of retrospection. I was particularly drawn to the sparsely nostalgic films of Jem Cohen and Alexander Sukarov. My interest in memory also grew, albeit indirectly, out of the work I made directly prior to the PhD, namely *Ink* (2002/2003). In Part I of the dissertation, I detail how part of my impetus for making *Ink* came from an engagement with the photography of Bill Henson. I discuss shifting the parameters of our seeing so that we might dance differently.

However, this is not the only way in which I engaged with Henson’s photography. I also worked with images and memories of being in the dark that were sparked by the photographs. My conscious focus was not on memory. But, in meditating on Henson’s images, I called on my own memories. The photos sparked associations to do with textures, qualities of light and dark, of place and of emotional vulnerability and guardedness. These associations provided a gateway to memories that then became the concrete impetus for the movement phrases that I taught to the dancers. While this was not consciously identified as an interest in memory at the time, it was through the nexus of image and memory that the PhD inquiry grew.

During the first year of research (2003), I began to develop a solo studio practice. In this first phase of solo work, the seeds for what was to become
here, now were sown. There were two main strands of interest that coalesced at this point: a semi-autobiographical text, and 16mm footage of my father as a young boy in the 1930s. The experience of seeing the footage for the first time was quite profound.

While staying with my mother, I walked into the living room where she was watching what appeared to be a television program. A small boy in old-fashioned bathers came onto the screen, grinning and tossing a ball of sand from one hand to another. He looked remarkably like my brother did at that age, although clearly from another era. There was something about his body rhythm and proportion that was achingly familiar, riveting me to the screen. The dawning realisation that I was looking at recently surfaced footage of my father as a child brought a confounding feeling of simultaneous proximity and distance.

A draft of the text for here, now already existed. It had been written on returning to the family home some years after my father’s death. Being marked by someone’s death invites reflection on the passage of time. In improvising with the text sitting lightly in the background, I had the sense that I was slipping in and out of skins that I had inhabited at earlier points in my life. However, despite this emerging experience of corporeal remembering in the studio, my reading focussed firmly on visual conceptions of memory. I began to inquire discursively into the way photographic and filmic images construct the way we remember.

During early 2004 this interest ran aground: it was as though the blood had drained out of the inquiry. What I was reading was no longer feeding what I was making, and vice versa. The discursive inquiry into memory and photographic images was strangling the embodied studio investigation. At this point, I put here, now aside. I decided to make a fresh start through an improvisation practice with others, to try and re-invigorate the inquiry. I began to work with Jo and Michaela.
In Chapter Two, I describe shifting the visual field of our dancing through various ‘eye practices’. I locate this focus as a natural continuation of the dimmed dancing space of *Ink*. The ‘eye practices’ of this period certainly form an integral part of the ‘archaeology of practice’ that I weave in Part I. However, *the space between us* also contains the first shift away from my focus on photographic or filmic images as constitutive of our memories. Finding ways to work with embodied memory entailed shifting the perceptual paradigms of my practice.

The change in the way I approached memory sprang directly from what manifested in the studio between the dancers and myself. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the improvisations from this period did not result directly in any performed work. However, an important research focus emerged at the end of this phase. I became able to pinpoint the quality that underlay the movement that interested me amidst the plethora of improvisations from this period. I was drawn to, and still remember clearly, that material which activated the remembering of the performer. It was evidenced in a style of kinaesthetic reverie that I named ‘orientation towards an absent other’. The ‘criteria’ of kinaesthetic reverie emerged as the defining quality of the material I gravitated towards.

I say ‘gravitated’ because it would be dishonest to say I deliberately chose and named this material as being ‘about’ remembering at the time. My selection process was intuitive rather than conscious. I was drawn to a self-in-movement who appeared to be accompanied. The notion of an absent other brought a focus on intercorporeality, as mentioned at the end of Chapter Two. I became interested in the interstices and intertwinnings between selves and how corporeal interactions with others layer to constitute the self. Our studio practice seemed to be a microcosm of the corporeal embedding of selfhood that occurs over the course of a lifetime. Thus, as I came to focus on intercorporeality, it was always underpinned by an interest in history, in the interleaving of selves over time. This paved the
way for touch to enter the practice, as a means to foster both intercorporeality and remembering.

At the beginning of 2005, I began to try and marry the criterion of ‘orientation towards an absent other’, or kinaesthetic reverie, with my previous inquiry into the photographic qualities of memory. The relationship between image and memory is briefly explored in Chapter Six. What I want to explore here is how I exhausted the use of photographic images as a stimulus to memory. I was forced to find other ways ‘in’.

I started the year’s work with Jo and Michaela by using photographic images as a stimulus for associations and memories with which to improvise. In 2003, when I had worked with the Henson images for Ink, I had intuitively broken very free of the images. I used them as a starting point to establish a mood or tenor from which memories of my own would quickly spring. This created tones and dynamics of movement with which I created phrases. This method was productive when creating phrases on my own and subsequently demonstrating them to the dancers, which was my working method at the time.

However, there was something intuitive in that process that I could not communicate to others. There was something productive in the transition from photograph to memory to kinaesthetic state that I was unable to impart to Jo and Michaela. The duo improvisations that came from using photographs as stimuli were dry and flat, and lacked the dynamism of the ‘orientation to an absent other’ that had become so rich at the end of the previous year. Moreover, the movement did not seem to ‘stick’: the movement states were not particular enough to be re-inhabitable. It was as though we were trying to insert memory into the body.

I recognised that the method that had been fruitful for Ink was not going to be fruitful for this new work. I set aside the external stimuli of photographs and tried to simply pay more attention to what was occurring in the studio
already. The failure of the strategy I had planned to use turned out to be fortuitous. It marked a crucial turning point in the research, and led to important realisations about practice-led research. I had to let go of preconceived ideas, built up through my reading and prior practice. Instead, I had to work intuitively to see what the current practice had to ‘say’ about the matter at hand.

Most of the reading about memory that I had done prior to the space between us could be described as occularcentric in origin. That is to say, many accounts of memory focus on recalling visual images in the mind. In doing so, they reveal an epistemological stance that has historically linked knowledge with vision to the exclusion, or at least the diminution, of the remainder of the human sensorium. This is outlined in Part III.

The occularcentrism of many accounts of memory is not incidental to the narrative sketched here. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this epistemological bias entered my practice also. It delimited what I was able to find and do in the studio. It took me a considerable time to give intuition the weight it deserved in order to get out of this bind. This is perhaps evidence of obtuseness on my part, but it is perhaps also evidence of the difficulty, within current epistemological frameworks, of according intuition the kind of epistemological status it needs if a practice-led project is to retain its liveliness.

To shift from the flat, one-dimensional rendering of memory that was occurring via the photographic stimuli, I intuitively started to use my hands. I had been working with touch at the beginning of our sessions to shift our awareness quickly into the interoceptive realm, as elaborated in Chapter Three. I started to extend this use of touch to the whole session. I began to pay attention to how tactile memories build up over time, and how touch calls up memories. Touch, in being the ‘touchstone’ of embodiment, provided a rich way to start to work with embodied memory. Choreographic tactility became a very concrete means of building up a shared
intercorporeal world that had a history. This occurred in two ways: in the
ongoing and accumulating history of our studio sessions; and in accessing
the personal history of embedded selfhood that touch inevitably stirs up.

What followed was a concentration on the phenomenology of choreographic
tactility. In outlining the connectivity of touch in Part II, I suggest that touch
opens onto a less individualistic understanding of ethical relationships. I
note that dancing tactiley can foster an understanding of the intercorporeal
nature of selfhood. But it must be remembered that it was the desire to
explore memory differently that led me into this extended exploration of
tactility in the first place. Memory remained the latent linchpin of my
investigation of touch. Choreographic tactility helped me understand, in a
thoroughly ‘hands on’ way, how selves are built up in layers over time. I
explored how touch can uncover some of these past layers. This illuminated
a different kind of selfhood, namely a relational and intercorporeal selfhood.

The exploration of choreographic tactility culminated in the work I made
with Jo and Michaela, the backs of things. However, the influence of the
emergent practice of choreographic tactility has extended over most aspects
of my work. Further to those articulated in Part II, a central finding of my
inquiry into tactility is the following. Given that styles of perception
influence styles of being, touch is a style of perception that opens onto a
style of being flooded by both intercorporeality and remembering.

Subsequently, my work on here, now was influenced by remembering
several kinds of touch. During the years 2005 and 2006 I was unable to
dance due to several torn discs in my neck. One of the ways I worked
through this incapacitation was Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis. As
mentioned in Part II, this consists of light touches to the spine that instigate
ripples of movement. Often these ripples are accompanied by emotional
intensities and inchoate memories.
During the years when I was unable to dance, the semi-involuntary spinal ‘improvisations’ of Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis were a surrogate for my truncated movement practice. My intensive treatment in this modality trained me to recognise patterns of energy arising in my body and to follow through on the movement pathways of that energy. When I began to improvise again, this tactile patterning was at the fore of my corporeal remembering. This meant I could not do other than act on the emotional intensities that arose through movement. This is described in Part III.

In addition, I was influenced by my memories of working with Jo and Michaela. I remembered the lines of force my touch had instigated in their bodies. Their movement had become one of the many intercorporeal layers that constituted my self-in-movement. But beyond the rememberings of their movement and our tactile interaction, there is another way in which I remembered choreographic tactility. At times while improvising, I had the sense that I was accompanied by a second self who touched surfaces and joints. This is explored in Part III. It meant that although it was a solo, I was never dancing alone. This finding can be seen as lying in a direct trajectory stemming from my early hunch that the movement that interested me was oriented towards an absent other.

This was a crucial outcome of the long-term practice of choreographic tactility with Jo and Michaela. It opened onto a particular style of solo performance. This ‘style’ is grounded in two recognitions. Firstly, that the kind of performance presence that interests me is characterized by a sense of ‘being accompanied’. Secondly, to achieve this, I activate intercorporeal remembering in performance. This style brings up emotional intensities that I experience in the act of performing. In doing so, I integrate my somatic history with the future potentialities of the movement.
iii) Practice-led rememberings

The narrative sketched above maps the evolution of the epistemological triad of the inquiry. To put it in the briefest of terms, we could say that the movement from photographic to tactile remembering *is also* the movement from separative seeing to the relational ontology of touch, and *is also* the movement away from ‘putting theory into practice’ and towards a fully practice-led model of research. Thus, the somatic/performative, the discursive and the meta-methodological are interconnected.

The different phases outlined in the narrative indicate changes in how I thought research ‘ideas’ could function. While I hesitate to make distinctions between form and content, as I consider them to be ultimately inseparable, there were some distinctions in this regard in the early stages of my research that came to be resolved in the later stages. A brief exploration of these distinctions is informative for thinking about the nature of practice-led research within the project.

In the early stages of working on *here, now* for the showing in 2003, I dealt with remembering in a roughly ‘content’ based way. That is, I was researching memory through a) the paradigm of photography, and b) the ‘spine’ of the work, namely a narrative text dealing explicitly with remembrances of things past. The text charts a woman’s return to a place of personal significance that she has not inhabited for many years. It details the cascading memories and sensations that swamp her on her return, experienced through the prism of a long-held grief. The 2003 showing of the work contained the text and the film footage of my father, interspersed with contemporary footage of the woman (me). It could be said that the work attempted to communicate something of the incarnate nature of memory through the content of the work.
The duet the backs of things had a different orientation, which could be described as ‘formal’. It exploited the fleshly nature of remembering, which we had explored through choreographic tactility. I used corporeal remembering, which we had accessed through touch, to generate a particular style of movement and a particular performance quality. It is possible that the resulting movement did in fact convey a sense of history. Jo and Michaela certainly had to negotiate their memories of the tactile stimulus of the movement even in the present act of performing it. This lent a quality of dynamic reverie to their movement. As mentioned earlier, the state of kinaesthetic reverie was a criterion that I carried from the space between us into the backs of things. But the backs of things did not need the audience to identify ‘memory’ as the ‘meaning’ of the work. It was more a case of using intercorporeal remembering to generate a dense performance state.

For the final iteration of here, now in 2007, I combined the formal and thematic concern with remembering. This could be seen as a synthesis of the different phases of the studio research. As outlined above, I used the kinds of states I had learnt to generate with Jo and Michaela and married them with the mnemonic content of the work. My hope is that here, now resonated with remembering both in its overt content and in the performance qualities that I brought to it. I aimed to activate a broad spectrum of the human sensorium such that the capacity for remembering in a multi-sensory way was foregrounded through the template of the performance. Some of the ways I tried to do this are detailed in the next part of the dissertation: Part III.
PART III: INTERCORPOREAL REMEMBERING
CHAPTER SIX: IMAGINATION AND THE REMEMBERER

They flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude 
(Wordsworth in Quiller-Couch, 1974, p. 622).

Introduction

William Wordsworth’s poem *Daffodils* has been so often quoted that I hesitate to mention it. And yet, it is hard to find a more succinct phrasing of the long-held link between memory and visual images. When thinking about remembering we often refer by default to visual images, occurring in a kind of ‘theatre’ in the mind’s eye. In more recent centuries, the Cartesian inheritance of the theatre in the mind has morphed into a cinema, where remembering requires “something like the focussing of a camera” (Bergson, 1988, p. 171).

The notion of memory as a theatre or cinema in the mind has profound implications for performance practices. In this chapter, I chart the shift from the Cartesian theatre to accessing memory through practices of ‘perceptual polyphony.’ I clarify the assumptions that underpin the metaphor of seeing images in the mind’s eye, namely that such images are a property of the brain, and that memory is a linear conglomeration of visual images. I draw links between the occularcentrism prevalent in accounts of memory and the splitting up of the ‘body’ and visual images. I show how this splitting haunts processes of visualisation in performance practices, limiting the possibilities for working with remembering. I offer alternative conceptual frameworks for understanding images, through the work of Shannon Rose Riley and Antonio Damasio. These alternative conceptual frameworks gesture towards a gestalt of corporeal imagining that I will use as a basis for articulating the workings of remembering in performance practices in subsequent chapters.
i) In the mind’s eye

As recounted in the section titled A Narrative of Practice, my early research on memory hinged on the nexus between photographic images and temporality. The cultural pervasiveness of photography creates a paradigm for perception, and this paradigm yields a particular way of thinking about time. The still and the moving image are temporally distinct, in that the still image extracts a moment from within the flux of time whilst the moving image attempts the opposite, namely the illusion of flux via the rapid juxtaposition of stills. However, the still and the moving image have a crucial point in common, namely their cultural prevalence, and through that prevalence, a capacity to shape and delimit perceptual possibilities. In On Photography, Susan Sontag describes the extent to which photographs have shaped concepts of memory:

The photographs being taken now transform what is present into a mental image, like the past. Cameras establish an inferential relation to the present (reality is known by its traces), and provide an instantly retroactive view of experience. Photographs give a mock form of possession: of the past, the present, even the future (Sontag, 2002, p. 167).

In this way, the present is transformed through the act of photography. The present moment is photographed and thus memorialised before it has even been experienced. This anticipatory retrospection means that photographs come to describe memories of un-lived experiences. Film theorist Gertrud Koch points this out in her discussion of the curious retrospective stance of photography:

Photographs have long since become signs of a nostalgic remembrance of that which has not been experienced: part of a narrative design that encompasses far more than the present, out of which issues the narrative projection backwards (Koch, 2000, p. 276).

This notion of ‘memories’ that have not been lived but are encapsulated in photographic images relates to my discussion in Chapter One of separative perception. There, I articulated how quotidian vision entails a mode of perception in which the perceiver is always at a distance from the object of
their perception. The perceptual paradigm yielded by photography entails a similar distancing. The memorialising action of taking a photograph takes precedence over the present moment of experience. This creates a distance between the self and the experience, making it ‘unlived’.

By linking the distancing effect of photography with the distance inherent in separative perception, I am not suggesting that the one is caused by the other. Separative perception and the ‘photographisation’ of memory exist in a relationship, but it is not a teleological one. The distance inherent in separative perception and the epistemological stance accompanying that distance have been thoroughly critiqued under the rubric of occularcentrism (see for example Jay & Brennan, 1996; Levin, 1993, 1997). My reason for linking photography and occularcentrism is that they share a similar structure. They both entail a distancing of the self from the object of perception. In photography, this means that the present moment becomes memorialised before it is even experienced, and that memory is construed as a snapshot. In occularcentrism, the distance between the self and the object is esteemed because it supposedly yields clear and true knowledge. These two structures combine to imply that true memories are those that can be seen clearly in the mind’s eye – in the cinema of the mind.

This understanding of memory has not gone unchallenged. Philosophers and psychologists of memory alike have sought to disrupt the association of visual images with the ‘truth’ of memory. Memory psychologist Daniel Schacter cites studies showing that strong visual information is often a crucial factor in feeling that we actually remember an event, as opposed to having the suspicion we ‘know’ it, but cannot bring it to full awareness (Schacter, 1996, p. 23). Being able to re-experience an event visually leads

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27 The conception that photography is purely visual and that it represents a true account of the past has, of course, been extensively challenged from within the realms of photography and the moving image. The history of moving image culture is replete with examples of makers who seek to re-insert corporeal experience into the moving image, taking it into a poly-sensory realm. The advent of immersive video installation works, handheld camera work, the vertiginous effect of various forms of ‘mobile camera’ and the complication of temporal flow are a few examples common to the last fifty years of cinematic practice (See for example McQuire, 1999; McQuire, 2008; Morse, 1998; Wooster, 1991).
to greater confidence in the rememberer. This might at first seem to validate our tendency to associate knowledge with vision and to regard memory as a cinema in the mind. But as Schacter notes, part of the reason that recalling visual images might persuade us that we are remembering a real event is that some of the same brain regions are utilised for both visual imagery and visual perception. Given the overlapping of perception and recollection, there is ample scope for imagined and remembered images to intermesh. I would suggest that this explains why memories from childhood are sometimes inextricable from the photographs that ‘encapsulate’ the memory. The continued visual reinforcement of the photograph supports the memory itself because they both activate the same brain area. Further, this same phenomenon can lead to ‘memories’ of events that did not occur:

Since we usually rely on these areas to perceive the external world, it should not be surprising that when we use them to create visual images, the images may feel like the mental residue of actual events. These observations have an important implication: creating visual images may lead us to believe that we are remembering an event even when the incident never happened (Schacter, 1996, p. 23).

Questioning the role of vision in my work was part of my motivation in making *Ink*, as outlined in Part I. It is interesting to note, now that I am starting to deal more explicitly with memory here in Part III, that the centrality and veracity of the remembrances encapsulated in visual images are questioned by recent research by memory psychologists such as Schacter. The centrality and veracity of visual images in relationship to memory has also been extensively critiqued by philosophers, perhaps most prominently by Bergson and Deleuze’s writing on Bergson (Bergson, 1988; Deleuze, 1991). And of course, by that other thinker of temporality who provides the touchstone for so many treatises on memory, namely Marcel Proust (Proust, 1983). For these major thinkers, occularcentric understandings of time force the rememberer to remain outside of time, as an observer of their past. In different ways, Bergson, Proust and Deleuze want to find ways to rethink remembering as the activation of the past in the present, rather than an activity of the intellect characterised by the kind of separative perception I outlined in Part I.
It is outside the aims of this dissertation to examine their philosophies. I mention the general thrust of their critiques simply to emphasise that the particular ‘problems’ of thought that instigated Bergson’s project are also ‘problems’ within performance practices. Occularcentrism is a perceptual bias that delimits what can be called knowledge and hence memory. It is a perceptual bias that I have attempted to work through in the terms of my embodied performance practice, as outlined in A Narrative of Practice. For Bergson and Proust, as well as practitioners seeking to work with memory in an embodied context, the rub, the provocation to further thought, is that an exclusively visual understanding of memory forces the rememberer to remain outside the experience of remembering. In my practice, and through my experience of injury, it has been necessary to remain inside the experience of remembering in very palpable ways.

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My experience of remembering at the moment is not related to images: my body is in extreme pain, and this carries memory with it on a level much deeper than images. In remembering the accident that first caused this pain, vision trails behind the other senses. I simply remember a web of emotion and an intensity of physical sensation, and now, in experiencing a shadow of that pain again, I plunge straight into the emotional state that accompanied it, remembering it, unwillingly, by means of current sensation.

The idea of the rememberer observing his or her past as an onward progression of images was Bergson’s object of critique. The notion of observing one’s past visually is linked to a form of mind-body dualism. To some extent, a thesis that trades in both embodied performance practices and writing engenders its own critique of mind-body dualism. I have attempted throughout the dissertation to avoid getting bound up in a writerly examination of this dichotomy as it relates to my practice. I have chosen instead to address this problem in the performance practice itself and let the thoroughly embodied nature of the performance research shape the writing. For example, as outlined in A Narrative of Practice, the practice of
choreographic tactility emerged at least in part from the intuition that touch would help me access memory corporeally, in contrast to the ‘failure’ of earlier approaches that used visual images as stimuli. My choice then, in writing, was to explore the implications of my practice of touch rather than try to ‘explain’ the shift from an occularcentric to an embodied approach. However, at this point, a very brief foray into this particular manifestation of dichotomous thought as it pertains to working with imagery is necessary. It is important to piece together how the received notion of memory as a theatre of visual images can undermine attempts to work with memory in performance practices.

My thinking in this regard has been informed by the work of Shannon Rose Riley who has articulated a model of embodied perceptual practices for use in actor training (Riley, 2004). Her model draws on the work of neurobiologist Antonio Damasio. For my purposes, one important insight that her model offers is an understanding of imagining that is not based on images in the mind. Riley begins by noting that the very terminology through which we try to talk about the use of images in performance-making is couched in the language of the mind-body split. In the model of the cinema in the mind, the images in the ‘mind’s eye’ affect the body, but the body cannot affect the images. In an effort to redress this problem and give priority to the viscerality of experience, contemporary performance practices often fall into the trap of exalting the body in a way that simply reinstates the problem of dualism from the opposite perspective:

Said again, the metaphors that describe either an imagining mind – which translates images into a receptive body – or a bodily depth that gives up images as if by floating them to the surface, to be retrieved by the knowing mind, are equally problematic. Each maintains mind/body dualism (Riley, 2004, p. 451).

To simply say that images ‘arise in’ or ‘move through’ the body as though this were somehow more natural or organic than speaking of images seen in the eye of the mind is not very helpful for developing performance practices. It is hard to get specific about this kind of romanticised ‘body knowledge.’ With this in mind, Riley began to work with two embodied
performance practices, Butoh and Authentic Movement, placing these practices in dialogue with Damasio’s work. The aim was to give the actor the ability to generate material with his or her whole organism.

The provocation that instigated Riley’s inquiry was similar to my own. She found it hard, when working with actors, to give instructions for visualisation that did not imply a splitting of mind from body. Directors and choreographers often give instructions to actors and dancers that unwittingly reinscribe dualistic patterns. Dancers and actors are commonly asked to either ‘embody’ a visual image, or to make the mind passive and let it receive images from the body. A telling example of this in the work of David Zinder is explored in the final section of this chapter. This was precisely the problem I encountered when trying to work with memory with Jo and Michaela, where I asked them to improvise from photographic images. As I mentioned in A Narrative of Practice, it was as though I was trying to insert memory into the body, and it did not work. In the next section, I will outline the model of images that Riley developed through Damasio, pointing towards ways in which this can be productive for performance practices (Riley, 2004).

ii) From images to patterns

Damasio’s model of images can fruitfully replace the Cartesian split that undermines attempts to work with imagery in performance practices. In this section, I use Damasio’s formulation of mind as a corporeally dispersed process to build towards a model of remembering that is not based on the cinema in the mind. Firstly, in order to reformulate established models of visualisation for performers, it is important to redefine some of the key terms with which we attempt to describe processes of visualisation. ‘Mind’ and ‘image’ are intricately related but need no longer be understood in Cartesian terms. Damasio reminds us that what has long been regarded as the mind is not in fact an object found in the skull (Damasio, 1995, p. 88). Rather, it is a reciprocal and relational process between brain, body and environment.
According to Damasio, there are two ways in which information is exchanged between brain and body (Damasio, 1995, p. 87). These are the nervous system and the bloodstream, where information is exchanged as neural and chemical signals at various sites. The bloodstream is the older system in the evolutionary scale, responsible for delivering hormonal and other chemical information. The bloodstream intertwines with the more modern and plastic nervous system through a system of feedback loops. In this context, rather than as an object, the mind is better thought of as a process, one in which converging streams of information become coded as images. Damasio describes these images as the currency of our minds, requiring that mind be understood as a responsive and corporeally dispersed process rather than the grey matter in which ‘thought’ resides. He notes that an organism as complex as the human synthesis of body and brain will do more than merely respond to its environment:

> complex organisms such as ours do more than just interact, more than merely generate the spontaneous or reactive external responses known collectively as behavior. They also generate internal responses, some of which constitute images (visual, auditory, somatosensory, and so on), which I postulate as the basis for mind (Damasio, 1995, pp. 88-89).

This subtle interplay between environmental interaction and internal response can be honed for performance practices, as will be explored later. For Damasio, an image is not purely a visual representation in the brain. Importantly for performance practices, images can instead be regarded as a mental pattern in any of the sensory modalities, such as a tactile image, an aural image etc. The signals arising from the senses are received in separate ‘harbours’ or early sensory cortices. Knowledge is kept discrete in these early sensory cortices. But cortices then intermesh to form a cohesive ‘representation,’ such that a sound image is associated with a visual image, for example. This gives the impression that the sound-vision representation is occurring in one place in the brain, but the sound and visual images are in fact bound together by time rather than space. That is to say, they are located separately in the brain, in their respective sensory cortices. They
relate to one another by being experienced at the same time, rather than in
the same place. To say that they do not occur in the same place in the brain
destabilises the Cartesian model:

Although we have the illusion that everything comes together in a
single anatomical theater, recent evidence suggests that it does not.
Probably the relative simultaneity of activity at different sites binds
the separate parts of the mind together (Damasio, 1995, p. 84).

Damasio reminds us that Daniel Dennet has argued persuasively on
cognitive grounds that the Cartesian theatre cannot exist, and notes that on
neurobiological grounds it is also found to be a false intuition (Damasio,
1995, p. 94). That is to say, we may strongly believe that we hold our
memories together on a single theatrical ‘stage’, but this belief is negated by
Damasio’s finding that images in different sensory modalities may mesh
together temporally but are not located in the same place in the brain.

The early sensory cortices are essential to the formation of images. In
patients where the sensory cortex of a given sensory modality is destroyed,
there is a correlative inability to form images in that sensory modality.
While the cortices harbour sensory input separately, they do interrelate.
Here the word ‘harbour’ is instructive. It supports the notion that the
cortices are hubs of activity in a given sensory modality rather than
repositories of information that can be retrieved intact at a late date. It also
supports an understanding of the fluid exchange of information streaming
into and out of the cortices. This streaming facilitates the formation of
representations: “cortices form a dynamic coalition, and the topographically
organized representations they generate change with the type and amount of
input” (Damasio, 1995, p. 98). To say that the cortices generate
topographically organised representations means that there is a structural
similarity between the pattern apparent in the stimulus and the pattern that is
‘imprinted’ on the sensory cortex. Images are patterns, derived in turn from
patterns arising in the early sensory cortices in response to sensory stimuli.
In the case of vision for example, an image is generated by a retinotopic
pattern that reflects aspects of the geometry of what the eye sees.
Within Damasio’s model of images, there are two distinct kinds. The first is ‘perceptual images’, which arise through acts of perception in the moment. The second kind is ‘recalled images’ (Damasio, 1995, pp. 96-97).

Interestingly, this latter category includes memories in any sensory modality, and images we invent. In her discussion of visualisation and Damasio’s definition of images, Riley provides the following neat summary, noting that images arise from a variety of different sources:

Perceptual images are formed from three sources – these include the perception of touch and the movement of muscles and joints, called proprioception; the perception of the state of the organs and viscera, or interoception; and the perception of one’s relationship to their environment, or exteroception. Recalled images are formed from stored neural patterns, or memory, and can be formed intentionally or triggered in response to other perceptual or recalled images (Riley, 2004, p. 453).

It is interesting to note that both the cortices and the patterns generated in them are necessary for images to occur in consciousness but they are not sufficient. This raises the question of the role of subjectivity in the formation of images. Damasio suggests that images need to correlate to some notion of subjectivity, in order for us to claim them as our images. For Damasio, the self is a “perpetually recreated neurobiological state”, and incoming neural representations are correlated against this state from moment to moment (Damasio, 1995, pp. 99-100). I would suggest that this is particularly true of recalled images. The relationship between the subjectivity of the rememberer and the formation of remembered images will be explored in the next chapter. Damasio notes that there is no discernable difference in kind regarding the images formed by remembering or imagining:

Images of something that has not yet happened and that may in fact never come to pass are no different in nature from the images you hold of something that has already happened. They constitute the memory of a possible future rather than of the past that was (Damasio, 1995, p. 97).

Damasio reminds us that memories are not permanently stored pictures in the brain. Yet we nevertheless have the sensation that we can summon to
our ‘mind’s eye’ the approximation of an image experienced in the past. Damasio provides a tentative answer to this seeming contradiction by suggesting that the mental images that are experienced in memory are transitory. There is an emphasis on the subjective and circumstantial nature both of the initial image-making process and the subsequent attempt at remembering it. Such memories are:

momentary constructions, attempts at replication of patterns that were once experienced, in which the probability of exact replication is low but the probability of substantial replication can be higher or lower, depending on the circumstances in which the images were learned and are being recalled (Damasio, 1995, p. 101).

To summarise, for the purposes of visualisation strategies in performance making, there are three features of Damasio’s notion of images that are particularly relevant. Firstly, images are not exclusively visual representations but rather patterns within any sensory modality. Secondly, images are no longer to be considered static and complete mental representations located in the brain. Instead, they are always emerging and always embodied. Images are patternings developed in responsive relationship to data from any of the senses or internal organs. Thirdly, images can be either perceptual, being acts of current perception, or recalled, being acts of memory and imagination. As mentioned above, acts of imagination are so closely aligned with acts of remembering that Damasio calls them ‘the memory of a possible future’.

iii) Perceptual Polyphony

Damasio’s reworking of the Cartesian split can be usefully applied to performance practices. In this section, I discuss Riley’s notion of ‘perceptual polyphony.’ With this notion, she develops a model for using imagery in performance practices that avoids the Cartesian structure that hampers many existing ideo-kinetic practices. There are several features of Damasio’s formulation of images that are particularly apt for performance practices. Regarding images as emergent rather than fixed resonates strongly with my studio work. In here, now, imagination and remembering
accumulated and melded over time in the creation of re-inhabitable movement states, as will be further explored in the next chapter. Also of note is the ease with which Damasio’s model of images can account for the dynamic triggering of rememberings. His observation that memories can be stimulated by current perception in any sensory modality rings true in my practice but is rarely found in accounts of memory. That images arise through corporeally dispersed information exchanges helps account for the dynamism of the imagery that accompanies dancing, where different body systems become stimulated. As Riley notes, Damasio’s expanded model of images can be put to immediate work in the studio:

For example, instead of speaking about locating an image in a particular part of the body, we can speak of working with recalled and perceptual imagery, being sure to focus attention on all three kinds of perceptual imagery – proprioceptive, interceptive and exteroceptive – and the polyphonic relationships between them (Riley, 2004, p. 453).

It might be argued that this merely lays bare what is already going on in the dancer: in order to dance at all, she or he effects an integration of recalled and perceptual images. We ask why, given the inherent interrelatedness of embodiment, images and environment as articulated by Damasio, is it necessary to develop specific practices to exploit these interrelationships? The answer comes in several parts. Working with visualisation in the context of Damasio’s expanded model of images brings into more conscious awareness the layering of recalled imagery, perceptual imagery and associated emotional states.

Riley draws on the work of linguist Mikhail Bakhtin, from whom she borrows the term ‘polyphonic’ to describe information exchanges that are in many voices and often incomplete. In her description of performance practices, she terms this expanded awareness “perceptual polyphony” (Riley, 2004, p. 453). She argues that it is necessary to develop specific practices that harness this expanded perceptual sphere because otherwise it is not fully available to us as performance-makers. Riley attributes this to the fact that, within Western cultures, we have regarded images as visual
representations in the brain for so long that we have forgotten how to visualise in a poly-sensory manner. With Riley, I would argue that to give up dualistic formulations of visualisation is to recognise recent research in neurobiology. But I would also suggest that it is a conceptual shift that implies looking at the concepts embedded in the language with which we articulate processes of visualisation in the studio.

To illuminate how the split between the body and visual images can haunt performance practices, I turn to the work of David Zinder (Zinder, 2007). He has an extensive background of working with visualisation in an embodied practice, and there is much that is rich in his account. However, he positions the moving body as a site that can be mined for the production of visual images for use in acting. Zinder goes so far as to contend that stimuli from all the different senses give rise to visual images, and that this fact can be honed into a conscious technique within creative practice. For Zinder, the moving body catalyses visual imagination and this is the substrate of performance. He begins by observing a phenomenon prevalent within his own performance-making practice:

> the moving body creates and excites up into consciousness an endless series of images, and these images in turn reverberate into the actor’s body creating new movement which excites further images, and so on ad infinitum (Zinder, 2007, p. 8).

The troubling splitting that Riley warned against is most certainly present here. But if we can re-cast the dualistic thinking that is present in Zinder’s account, some interesting points arise in the rehearsal strategies he describes. He cites an instance from actor training where the student actor is asked to raise an arm and subsequently give a reason for that action, or make a sad face and subsequently find the reason for that expression. Zinder postulates that since there was no present reason for the action, the actor had to resort to the logic of the imagination and find a remembered image that corresponded with the present action. Zinder describes the relationship between imagination and ‘body’ thus:
the raising of the arm excited into the actor’s mind’s eye, however briefly, the imagined or remembered image of herself in a subway train raising an arm to the strap […] it was a physical movement that sparked a visual image, either totally imaginary, or based on a memory that provided the answer (Zinder, 2007, p. 9).

Zinder describes this act of remembering in the manner typical of ocularcentrism, namely as a visual image flashing into the mind’s eye, as in the Wordsworth quotation at the beginning of this chapter. While vision no doubt played a role in the student actor’s remembering, it may not have played quite the role Zinder attributes to it. In the next chapter, I will discuss Daniel Schacter’s description of field and observer memories. Here, we can briefly say that it is likely that the subway memory would be a recent episodic memory. It would therefore be likely to manifest as a field rather than an observer memory. This means that the actor’s memory of raising an arm in the tram would be experienced from the point-of-view of the actor performing that action. Given the actor’s experience of the arm movement, the ‘image’ excited by the memory of performing that action would be more likely to be a tactile/kinaesthetic image, where ‘image’ is understood in Damasio’s sense of a patterning in any sensory modality. In this case, the image would be in the modality of kinaesthesa in reaching with the arm, and haptic/tactile in holding the strap. There is of course also the potential emotional connection with the action, such as the physical surge of the train being accompanied by the emotion of instability or insecurity. Rather than trying to establish that movement gives rise to visual images as Zinder does, we can shift the parameters. We can say that movement was one point in the gathering of a recalled or imagined perceptual gestalt, that is to say, one point in what Damasio would term the generation of a neural representation.

A second example from Zinder’s visualisation process yields further insights into how ocularcentric language can be fruitfully shifted to enhance performance practices. He begins visualisations by focussing on aural stimuli and the visual images they stir up. But this is a prelude to working with movement, which he accesses by working with touch. There are several tactile exercises that lead up to the sculptor/sculpture exercise where one person moves the other’s body. The person being moved reports
on the imaginary characters that are excited in their mind’s eye in response to the passive movement of their body. Zinder’s focus here is on what the person being sculpted sees in their mind’s eye: what their character is dressed in, what they see in their environment, etc. While this exercise is obviously extremely productive, it perhaps could be even more so if the visual bias were shifted. The sculpted person, whose stimulus has come from touch and movement, might then be able to report on their shifting character using a fuller sensorium. Their character could be described in the perceptual forms of interoception, proprioception and exteroception, and in the interleaving of these with recalled and fantasised images.

At present, Zinder’s strategies show a tendency to regard the body as a storehouse of subconscious imagery that can be called up to conscious awareness in the cinema of the mind. The possibility remains that a different kind of movement, of performance, might result if we resisted the urge to ‘translate’ touch into visual images. To provide an example of an embodied perceptual practice where the visualist bias is well and truly shifted, I will briefly outline an exercise from Lisa Nelson’s practice. It provides an instance of synthesising the different kinds of images outlined by Damasio. That is, Nelson combines perceptual images, derived from interoception, proprioception and exteroception, with recalled images derived from both past experiences and future imaginings. The exercise requires a dancer to learn a movement phrase with their eyes shut. She or he touches another dancer who is moving and learns the movement through synthesising multiple tactile images:

With eyes closed, it takes a long time to learn a movement sequence from someone. The imagination inserts itself into the flow of time. Relying on touch and hearing, odd physical predicaments arise, calling up memories of interactions with the animate and inanimate worlds as I flip through the whole of my experience to make sense out of what’s in my hands (Nelson, 2004, p. 25).

To use Riley’s phrase, this exercise provides an instance of perceptual polyphony, where perception, recollection and imagination are brought into conscious play with one another through attention to specific sensory
information. Riley considers it essential to develop practices that foster this perceptual polyphony. While this is certainly necessary, I would argue that an important first step is to examine the language with which we attempt to articulate such practices. This articulation occurs on the studio floor, in the spoken interaction between dancers and choreographers. The need for shifting our language was borne out by the examples from Zinder’s process. Dualistic concepts embedded in language can hamper attempts to change one’s awareness and one’s practice. Language that attempts to speak to the dancer non-dualistically takes us halfway towards experiencing an expanded perceptual field.

This brings to mind, for example, Alice Cummin’s instruction in class to ‘meet me with your hand’ or Eva Karzcag’s instruction that ‘this is a hand that does not want,’ both of which were discussed in Part II. This style of instructive language acknowledges the degree to which embodiment knits together images from different perceptual and affective sources. Used in embodied practices, such language is already generating what Riley calls for, namely a “fine-tuning of attention to various psychophysical processes, to perception of one’s being-in-relationship with others and the environment” (Riley, 2004, p. 448). ‘Laying bare’ and articulating the interrelatedness of embodiment, images and environment means that the spoken communication between choreographers and dancers can be clarified. For those working solo, it clarifies the strategies with which one self-directs. Riley gives an example of this kind of clarification on the floor:

I can suggest that you begin with a recalled image, then bring attention to the three levels of perceptual imagery – in other words, check on your interoceptive sensations (breath, heartbeat, organs), your physical sensations of movement (muscles, joints bones) and your sensation of your environment (other people, location, warmth, etc)… [the student can begin by] tracking the three kinds of perceptual imagery, then adding attention to fully sensual recalled images as they occur, following or releasing them by choice (Riley, 2004, p. 454).

The tracking between perceptual and recalled images draws the dancer’s or actor’s attention to the dialogical relationship between the two. The
perceived and the recalled can strengthen one another, leading to movement states that are more clearly known and thus re-inhabitable. In this sense, Riley’s perceptual polyphony, in suggesting a means of attending to both current and remembered sensations, answers to the vision of reality that Proust poeticised in the third volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*:

> An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase full of scents and sounds and projects and climates, and what we call reality is a certain connection between these immediate sensations and the memories which envelop us simultaneously with them – a connexion that is suppressed in a simple cinematographic vision, which just because it professes to confine itself to the truth in fact departs widely from it (Proust, 1983, p. 924).

**Conclusion**

As mentioned in *A Narrative of Practice*, when I began to work with memory with Jo and Michaela I tried to use visual images as a stimulus for remembering. While this had been fruitful when working alone in creating *Ink*, it was unsuccessful in a group situation. I noted that it was as though we tried to insert memory into the body via visual images. The ‘failure’ of this early strategy has been clarified by my engagement with Riley and Damasio in this chapter, who together provide a way out of the ‘dead end’ of divorcing ‘mental’ visual images from corporeal experience. With Riley, I have suggested ways in which performance practices can be hampered by the legacies of Cartesianism. Zinder’s articulation of his performance practice has been cited as an example of this. With Riley and Damasio, I have worked towards a broader conceptualisation of ‘images’. Images need no longer be thought of as static, visual, mental representations, but rather exist as corporeally dispersed patterns in any sensory modality. In taking Damasio’s model of images into performance practices, Riley provides a tripartite structure of perception, combining interoception, proprioception and exteroception.

The importance of Riley’s model of perceptual polyphony is not simply that it is ‘true’, but rather that it is eminently useful for those seeking to work
with imagery in performance practices. It is thus offered in this chapter as a heuristic device rather than a statement of fact. Importantly for my work with memory, Riley’s tripartite structure functions in an active relationship with memory and imagination, or ‘recalled images’, to use Damasio’s term. Indeed, as I will suggest in the following chapter, her tripartite structure of perception can be applied to the recalled images themselves, allowing such images to be experienced in a richly sensuous manner. In this chapter, I have sought to establish a model for working with images that takes contemporary neurobiology at its word and thus does not rely on the outdated metaphor of a cinema in the mind. I have done so in order to clear the ground for a discussion in the next chapter of how I have crafted remembering in my practice.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE CRAFT OF REMEMBERING

Introduction

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The trail of things is keenly felt and comes into the present moment. Do we get stopped by recollection even in the moment of touch or the kinaesthetic act? In ‘here, now’ I was working to make memory more voluntary, deliberately working so as to re-inhabit remembered states. When does a movement resonate? When I recognise myself fully in it. When do I know I am actively remembering? When I slip into a movement that carries a whole image world with it, like ‘child story.’

Powerful memories are often those that assail us unawares. They can be provoked by the simplest of acts, such as a familiar gesture or, famously, the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea (Proust, 1983). Simple acts like these can be experienced as keys that unlock a realm of memory that had been hitherto unavailable. In my practice of corporeal remembering, I have sought to make such memory keys more voluntary. In this chapter, I articulate this endeavour. I outline four principle ways in which memory can be crafted in performance practices: as mnemonic space, as emplaced remembering, as gestures of gathering and as sedimentation. These four approaches are put forward as heuristic devices within a practice of remembering. That is to say, they describe strategies for crafting remembering for the performer. In creating both the backs of things and here now, I developed a number of strategies ‘on the run.’ Now, in writing, my aim is to clarify the implications and effectiveness of these strategies by placing them in the context of contemporary research on memory. For example, while making here, now I was cognisant of the distinction between field and observer memories, but the degree to which this distinction allowed different performance states to emerge has been clarified through engaging with Schacter’s work in that area.
I begin, then, with an examination of how mnemonic spaces can be crafted through exploiting the distinction between observer and field memories. This correlates with a shift from visceral reluctance to a more willing engagement with remembering. I then look at how kinaesthetic experience can be deliberately ‘emplaced’ within a remembered environment. I use the word ‘emplaced’ because it suggests finding the appropriate location to place an entity. My discussion of remembered environments draws on James Krasner’s study of the relationships between identity, memory and the home. Using Krasner, I expand the ancient mnemonic strategy of the palace to clarify the creation of remembered environments for performance. This leads to a distinction between the narrative function of navigating a remembered environment and the symbolic function of objects that ‘cut to the chase’ of a memory. Certain gestures and kernels of kinaesthetic sensibility can be thought to function with the atemporality of the object. I articulate the process of finding nubs of movement that can act as ‘gestures of gathering,’ assembling memory into the present act of performing.

Lastly, Lockford and Pelias’ notion of sedimentation helps describe how memory becomes embedded within a performance practice both as remembered content and as an ensemble of somatic procedures. In this chapter, my emphasis is on building up a series of heuristic devices that constitute a gestalt of remembering for use in performance practices. In Chapter Eight, I take this gestalt and place it in the presence of others, drawing out the intercorporeal structures of remembering.

i) Mnemonic spaces

The spatial dynamics of remembering offer useful tools for working with remembering in performance practices. In this section, I outline the distinctions between field and observer memories, and describe how these distinctions can be activated in the studio and in performance. Daniel Schacter notes that there are several memory systems in action at any one time (Schacter, 1996, p. 17). To hold onto the memory of facts and concepts, we engage our semantic memory. To learn skills and acquire habits, we engage procedural memory. Both semantic and procedural
memories are at work when performing, at times to a heightened degree. But beyond these systems lies a third kind – one that I explicitly evoked in both making and performing here, now – namely, episodic memory. Schacter describes this memory system as that which allows us to deliberately recall the personal events that have shaped our lives (Schacter, 1996, p. 17).

Episodic memory, in contrast to the other two memory systems, places the onus on the rememberer as much as the memory itself. That is to say, the rememberer can take on different roles that change the nature of the memory. In episodic memory, there are two ways in which the rememberer can be the protagonist, namely via ‘field’ or ‘observer’ memories. A field memory is one where the rememberer sees the scene through his or her own eyes, as if she or he were directly experiencing it. An observer memory is one where the rememberer observes herself or himself as an actor in the episode. Schacter describes several factors that come into play to determine whether one is likely to remember an episode from a field or observer perspective. There is a tendency for the rememberer to be an observer for early memories and to experience more recent memories from the original perspective. As Schacter notes, this pattern supports Freud’s belief that our earliest memories are largely reconstructed, in that our point-of-view within the scene of the memory shifts over time (Schacter, 1996, p. 21).

Further to these temporal distinctions is a distinction based on emotion. Cognitive psychologists have found differences in the tendency towards field or observer memories based on whether the rememberer focussed on emotion or on ‘objective’ circumstances surrounding the memory. Focussing on emotion is more likely to give rise to field memories whereas objective circumstances tend to yield observer memories. Shifting from a field to an observer perspective in a given episode lessens the rememberer’s degree of emotional engagement. The implications of these findings are immense. As Schacter observes:

This means that an important part of your recollective experience – whether or not you see yourself as a participant in a remembered
event – is, to a large extent, constructed or invented at the time of attempted recall. The way you remember an event depends on your purposes and goals at the time that you attempt to recall it. You help to paint its picture during the act of remembering (Schacter, 1996, p. 22).

Developmental psychologist Susan Engel similarly emphasises the role of the rememberer in creating the memory (Engel, 1999). She notes that memories are affected by repetition. Each time we recall an event, the neural pathways for that memory become stronger. This is known as ‘rehearsal.’ However, it is not the rehearsal of an intact event, pulled wholesale out of a memory bank. As mentioned in Chapter Six, Damasio contends that there is no discernable difference in kind between recalled and imagined images (Damasio, 1995, p. 97). Engel too notes that there is emerging physiological evidence “for the complex interweaving of fact and fiction in people’s personal recall” (Engel, 1999, p. 5). Both the interweaving of fact and fiction and the reinforcement of neural pathways through memory ‘rehearsal’ were essential devices for working with memory in my performance practice, as will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

To return to Schacter, the perspective from which we remember an episode influences our emotional engagement, opening up interesting possibilities for working with memory in performance practices. Field and observer memories bear different emotional densities, and so by shifting from the field to the observer perspective or vice versa, different performance states can be accessed. The improvisation strategies used to access a given memory can determine the kind of emotion that memory will carry in the present. In here, now, there was a particular movement section that sprang from memories of being a small child in autumn, kicking leaves around while my father built the wall of my bedroom. Being a memory from the distant past, it initially took the form of an observer memory: I saw myself in the scene, a small figure in blue dwarfed by trees and by my father’s tall figure. Over time, I ‘worked’ this memory, refining it through imagining and remembering. I focused, for instance, on the precise textures of the
fallen leaves from the liquid amber tree and the perspective I had from being close to the ground.

Through this closer phenomenological and imaginative engagement with the memory, my stance within the memory changed. I shifted from observing the child to being the child. This was accompanied by a fuller activation of emotional states, accumulated over many improvisations. This shift intersects interestingly with Deleuze and Guattarri’s ‘complaint’ against memory. They suggest that “memory summons forth only old sensations” (Deleuze & Guattarri, 1994, p. 167). It was certainly true in my case that memory required an admixture of fiction or ‘fabulation’, to use Deleuze and Guattarri’s term, if it were to take life in the present. For Deleuze and Guattarri, only through fabulation can memory shift from nostalgia to an active becoming, such that “[w]e write not with childhood memories but through blocs of childhood that are the becoming-child of the present” (Deleuze & Guattarri, 1994, p. 168).

In another movement section, I descended a ramp with a sense of both trepidation and inexorability. Both in creating this section and subsequently performing it, the distinction between field and observer perspectives was a useful if nascent component of my awareness. The vacillation between embodied action and a more distanced self-viewing (autoscopy) was redolent of the sensation of dislocation that can arise when returning to an environment that was once intimately familiar but which has been long abandoned. As the ramp section occurred early in the piece, this early vacillation was linked to a visceral resistance to enter fully into remembering, as though intuiting that the depth of it would take me under. By the time of the ‘child score’ section of here, now, the vacillation and resistance had shifted and a fully embodied remembering could take over. This shift from visceral reluctance to embodied engagement correlates to the shift from the observer to the field perspective within an episodic memory. I traversed this mnemonic shift each time I performed.
The observer perspective can be linked to the distance inherent in quotidian vision, as explored in Chapter One through Behnke’s notion of separative perception. In my practice, field memories gave rise to movement improvisation more readily than observer memories. My perspective in field memories was active and exploratory, whereas my perspective in observer memories was more distant, as though I was somewhat removed from the memory’s emotion. In field memories, we do not stand at one remove from the memory. Instead, we re-experience it. Earlier in the dissertation in A Narrative of Practice, I noted the difficulty I encountered trying to access corporeal memory with Jo and Michaela through using photographic images. I found that the problem of visual images not yielding embodied engagement could be resolved by working to shift from the observer to the field perspective with a given visual image or memory.

However, my decision to foreground field memories does not mean that observer memories are not useful for performance. The performance quality generated by observer memories can provide a useful counterpoint to the quality generated by field memories. Observer memories, as suggested by the ramp section outlined above, can communicate a distance within the self, or a sense of unease or reluctance. Field memories, by contrast, create a sense of immersion that is engaging but needs a counterpoint. In 2004, following an early rendition of some of the movement material for here, now, I watched the video document with Don Asker. Some of material from this phase did not survive into the 2007 performances. But certain qualities of remembering in performance emerged in my discussion with Don, and these qualities were formative of the later rendition of the work. As we watched the video, Don asked me questions about my performance:

*In the foot score, what about the face? A detached face? Is there a way of giving more clues? Is it a face that remembers or that is surprised by remembering? Voluntary or involuntary memory…*

*In the fold/embrace score, it’s like she’s decentred and unstable, trying to stop, arrest herself from something involuntary.*
The gesture of showing wrists… how is she? She shows her wrists, she stands simply, she tilts her head, she sees with her cheeks, she smells her way.

She is the reference point from which things depart, she animates an assemblage. She is palpable, alive, alert in the space, she is there with an imagined past. The earnestness of this, her task, gets in the way of the work a bit. Tends to be too momentous – what about the warm sand?

Is it the act of remembering – which would tend to be melancholic. Or is it a matter of being the remembered thing – which would be a deeper embodied state? Is there the possibility for a to and fro between the two states? Can she go from remembering, to being the remembered thing?

When you start laughing, in the child score, the shift in performative mode accompanied the shift from the act of remembering to being the remembered thing. A shift in presence from veiled to actual? Distant and proximate remembering.

(Don Asker, personal communication, 4th September 2004)

The vacillation between distant and proximate remembering that Asker noticed echoes one of Proust’s optical analogies for understanding memory, outlined by Schacter (Schacter, 1996). Just as in vision two eyes take in slightly different views but combine them into one experience, so too in remembering we combine the past and present into one experience. Schacter states it thus:

[…] a feeling of remembering emerges from the comparison of two images: one in the present and one in the past […] feelings of remembering result from a subtle interplay between past and present (Schacter, 1996, p. 28).

As noted earlier, memories from the distant past tend to be experienced from the observer perspective while memories more proximate to the present tend to be experienced as field memories. In actively working and combining these two ‘views’ in performance-making, it is possible to activate the subtle interplay between past and present of which Schacter
speaks. We can move around within the ‘space’ of the memory, comparing the two experiences to be gleaned from the field and observer perspectives. This vacillation or interplay is held together in the present moment of performing in ways that are not dissimilar to how the two eyes take in different views and coalesce them into one experience.

In this section I have outlined the distinction between, and ultimately the coalescence of, distant and proximate, or observer and field memories. This refines one way in which feelings of remembering can be crafted spatially. But there are also other ways in which the spatial dynamics of remembering can be developed for performance making. I turn now to literary theorist James Krasner’s study of the intertwining of domestic space, memory and personal identity.

ii) Emplaced remembering

Krasner explores the relationships between the elderly and their home environments, as portrayed in literary works and as understood by gerontologists (Krasner, 2005). He examines how the home becomes an imaginative structure through which the self is defined. In this section, I use Krasner’s study to build towards the notion of emplaced remembering, which occurs on both a narrative and a symbolic level in my performance-making. By emplaced remembering, I refer to the ways in which perception, movement and remembered environments become entwined. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I use the word ‘emplaced’ rather than ‘placed’ because it bears connotations of finding the right site for an entity within a given environment. This notion has particular relevance to here, now. Here, now addresses the minutiae of kinaesthetic experience provoked by returning to a place of deep emotional significance. Much of my early improvisation revolved around remembering the specificities of the house in which I grew up.
Beginning of score for inside house:

*Sense of history and space colliding. Improvise as though folding my limbs, my hands, my feet, along the insides of the house at Beecroft. Sense of open arms, open palms, sensing and offering. Here is the wall, the wood.*

Krasner notes that there are two principal ways in which the self comes to be embodied in the home: via navigation and via amalgamation (Krasner, 2005, p. 210). He suggests that the elderly home collects two memory metaphors that have traditionally been kept separate: the memory palace and the memory mirror. In the first instance, the domestic environment is seen to support identity because it is like a landscape through which the person can navigate effortlessly. This is a relationship to environment characterised by movement, where habitual, even ritualistic movements reinforce a sense of security. Regular pathways through the home are established over time. Worn steps and patches of threadbare carpet are testament to the regularity of movement in ordained orbits of comfort. The house sets physical boundaries to which the individual has become accommodated over time.

The memory palace was a trope used by the ancients as a strategy for remembering lengthy texts. It is a useful metaphor in that it recognises the corporeality of memory, and in this also lies its usefulness for performance practices. Krasner draws a relationship between the ways in which the elderly navigate through their homes and the mnemonic device of the palace (Krasner, 2005, p. 213). Oral historian Richard Cándida Smith similarly evokes the palace metaphor, using it to emphasise the interrelatedness of spoken word and corporeality. This is as seen in his discussion of speech, emotion and gesture in the recollection of personal memories (Cándida Smith, 2002, p. 2).

The rooms of the palace are decorated ‘in the mind’s eye’ in ways that offer prompts to sequential parts of the text in question. For example, the orator

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28 Krasner attributes the memory palace to Cicero (Krasner, 2005, p. 213), whereas Cándida Smith attributes it to Simonides of Ceos (Cándida Smith, 2002, p. 2).
will endow a statue or a vase with qualities that encapsulate and thus prompt a passage of text. As Cándida Smith describes it, the rhetorician puts their body into motion in the imagined house such that the words “flood into the speaker’s body” (Cándida Smith, 2002, p. 2). This is a synesthetic conception of memory, where visual images are considered the most precise trigger to memory, but do not arise unless the body is in motion:

A search for visual clues served as a prelude to an effective performance making the recalled word present in every part of the body. Tongue, eye, feet, hands, hips, chest were all equally engaged in and equally necessary to the machinery of memory (Cándida Smith, 2002, p. 3)

Cándida Smith goes further to suggest that not only is memory corporeal, it is intercorporeal – existing in an ongoing matrix of performance and response. This ongoing matrix is an aspect of memory highlighted by Cándida Smith’s work with oral history interviews, an example of which will be discussed in Chapter Eight. The palace metaphor is essentially a mnemonic strategy, and the way it was used for orators differs to the way I am reconfiguring it for use in performance practices. For the orator, the rooms of the house provided a prompt for accurately remembering an already defined text.

In performance practices, the notion of the house or known environment can be used as way of containing the improvised performance. The specificities of a remembered location can provide markers for remembering the important qualities of an improvisation score, be they kinaesthetic, structural, or emotional. But the palace metaphor can also be used as a powerful technique for uncovering memories that are not yet defined. Improvising within a remembered environment can thus provide both the initial seed and the subsequent anchors for improvised performance. It can be a place in which to find material and subsequently structure that material. In both instances, I am calling on an understanding of emplaced remembering.
An important feature of the palace metaphor is that it gives rise to a sequence of experiences, however fragmentary, that can be understood as a form of narrative. In his description of the palace, Cândida Smith speaks of putting the body into motion so as to give rise to words. And indeed, the fragmented narrative text for here, now originally emerged from putting my body in motion within the image world of a remembered house. The text initially arose when developing a group-devised work with Sydney director Nikki Heywood in 1998. We worked with memories of the spaces in which we grew up, mapping out remembered architectures on the studio floor. I did not use any text in the 1998 performance, but put it aside for later use. In its original form, the text was entirely autobiographical and I did not anticipate it would see the light of day in a performance context.

After visiting French Island in 2003, I picked up the text and began to re-locate and re-imagine it. French Island became a new location for the text, and I visited the island seven times in the years leading up to the performances. Different visits had distinct purposes: shooting video, recording sound, or walking through the environment developing the seeds of movement scores. Over this series of visits, the autobiographical material grafted into its new location. Allowing myself to treat memory imaginatively in this way was an important step for both the re-development of the text and the movement scores. After all, to ‘fictionalise’ one’s memories is not such a radical step. The blurring of fact and fiction in personal recall was touched on earlier in this chapter with reference to Schacter, Engel and Deleuze and Guattarri (Deleuze & Guattarri, 1994; Engel, 1999; Schacter, 1996). As Schacter suggested, we paint the picture anew each time we remember an episode. And further, painting a picture for others through recounting a memory transforms it irrevocably, as will be mentioned in the final section of this chapter.

In writing a fragmentary narrative about grief, remembrance and return, the main literary device I used was to meld, reverse, and invert tenses, ages, seasons. All these temporal markings came to the fore. Much of the text is written in the future tense or the subjunctive mood. It suggests a kind of
prediction written in retrospect, a simultaneity of hindsight and foresight. This paradoxical temporal stance was also sought in my performance state, as I will detail in the final chapter. The aim was to make my temporal location ambiguous so that it sat like an aporia or ellipsis in the middle of the work. I attempted to convey the kaleidoscopic barrage of poly-sensory imagery that occurs when returning, after a long absence, to a place of great significance in one’s life. In contrast to that barrage, the character of the island came to the fore as a place of stillness and silence, like the eye of a storm.

Narrative has long been recognised as a response to the fragmentation inherent in temporal experience. In particular, narratives often arise in response to the emotion of grief, which can make one so keenly aware of the passage of time, as philosopher Genevieve Lloyd traces in her moving study of temporal experience (Lloyd, 1993). The interrelationship of narrative and memory is an immense topic, largely beyond the aims of this dissertation. The aspects of narrative that interest me here are those that relate to emplaced remembering. Krasner notes that the elderly person’s repeated navigation of their home, with its well-worn paths and habits, becomes a map analogous to one’s life-story. In this lies its narrative function. In performance-making, memory fragments can arise from and become anchored to the mapping of space in a remembered environment. The ‘narrative’ for here, now can be found both in the text and in the sequencing of movement segments. It arose from and remained tied to putting my body in motion within a remembered environment. That is to say, it surfaced from an initial recalling of the grooves, rhythms and events of the family home and later found anchorage within the accumulating memories of the French Island environment. In these ways, here, now can be understood as a practice of emplaced remembering.

Jeff Friedman, an oral historian of dancers’ lives and works, has commented on the process of spatial placement within a memory. He notes that narrators in oral history interviews use a variety of strategies to ‘place’ themselves within the reminiscence that they are describing, and asks: “why
not begin to articulate the efficacy of kinesthetic embodiment as a tool for reminiscence?” (Friedman, 2002, p. 169). Dancers, as holders of specialised embodied knowledge, are well placed to begin such an articulation. Of his own performance of memory in the work *Muscle Memory*, Friedman notes: “This ability to kinaesthetically “place” oneself strengthens the link between the remembering self and the prior selves that are reviewed for memory recovery” (Friedman, 2002, p. 169). Strengthening such links is a cumulative process, as will be explored later in this chapter in the section on sedimentation.

The anchoring of memory fragments within a remembered environment is akin to the narrative drive to create meaning amid the temporal experience of flux. In her discussion of the autobiographical writings of St Augustine from around 396 AD, Lloyd suggests that the immediate experience of life is one of fragmentation, and this fact can become painfully apparent in times of grief. Lloyd notes that for Augustine, acts of autobiographical narration were a means to hold past, present and future together, in “a unifying act of attention”(Lloyd, 1993, p. 16). If fragmentation is at times a distressing part of temporal experience, then creating an assemblage of fragments can be seen as curative in certain circumstances. This was certainly part of my drive to make here, now.

Regarding fragments, Nadia Seremetakis writes about an exhibition she curated in the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated the city of Kalamata in 1986 (Seremetakis, 2000). The people of Kalamata were invited to contribute objects that held personal significance for them regarding the earthquake itself or the city it had destroyed. For many inhabitants, a single broken object might be all they had to remind them of life before the earthquake. What the exhibition revealed was the extent to which these objects had become precious and endowed with very particular meanings. Of the process of assembling these fragments into an exhibition curated with the intent of regaining meaning out of the rubble, Seremetakis notes:
The assemblage of these fragments was not their aestheticisation, but it re-enacted the process by which the people of Kalamata reassembled their lives and their city from the fragments made by the earthquake – a process we could term the “poetics of fragments” because it focused on how the people restored meaning, order, pattern, and aesthetics to their lives in the aftermath of the disaster (Seremetakis, 2000, p. 322).

To assemble mnemonic fragments in this way is a narrative act, in that it involves a sequencing of fragments into a meaningful experience that has a distinct temporal dimension. But objects can also function symbolically, as shortcuts to dense forms of experience. Krasner’s second trope for exploring the spatial dynamics of remembering, the mirror, is useful here (Krasner, 2005, p. 211). Where the palace model is linked to navigation through the home, the mirror model of memory is linked to the amalgamation of the elderly with their homes. Amalgamation implies a blurring of boundaries. The elderly person experiences an intense identification with their environment, so much so that the space is an embodiment of the aspects of the person. Krasner notes: “[t]he bodily awareness of the home’s spatial dynamics results in a loss of boundary between self and environment; the words “intimacy” and “insideness” suggest a near-physiological union” (Krasner, 2005, p. 211).

The mirror model suggests that objects hold a peculiar power in relation to memory and identity, where the individual recognises herself or himself in the object as though in a mirror. Such objects are not just nostalgic mementos of the past, but rather bring to present attention what the self has been and still is, ameliorating the loss of self that can occur with the amnesia of old age. As Krasner notes, there is an amalgamation of the self with the object as a means of holding onto the different temporalities within the self: “[t]he self as present body and as past history exist side by side, with possessions yoking them together” (Krasner, 2005, p. 214). Where the palace model functions via narrative, the mirror model functions via symbol. That is to say, mirror objects provide access to the past not through the labour of retracing a temporal sequence, but by provoking a spontaneous response:
…objects allow a quick, instantaneous access to a significant experience. The atemporality of this operation is apparent in Rubinstein and Parmalee’s description of objects as “lightning rods for memory.” We see our past suddenly illuminated as a dazzlingly bright image, rather than an extended story (Krasner, 2005, p. 214).

While Krasner is speaking here of a dazzling visual image, mirror objects can equally be thought of as lightning rods to images of all kinds. In fact, he notes that a key function of objects is to be literally ‘at hand’, because with the increasing frailty of old age, there is often a shift from visual to tangible memory (Krasner, 2005, p. 214). The notion that an object can encapsulate and thus provoke a remembered poly-sensory image is useful for performance practices. Both the tracing of temporal sequences and the provocation of spontaneous responses are useful strategies within a performance practice that focuses on remembering. In this section, I have used Krasner’s study of the accumulation of embodied identity within the home to articulate a practice of emplaced remembering. I have described emplaced remembering as both the seeding and the anchoring of memory fragments within a remembered environment. It is thus a tool for both finding and structuring remembered materials. The navigation of the remembered environment is a narrative activity: in the next section, I suggest how the honing of memory fragments can be thought of as an ‘atemporal’ or symbolic activity. I focus on the identification of kernels of kinaesthetic sensibility that can function like objects in performance.

iii) Gestures of gathering

In this section, I explore how certain gestures and kernels of movement sensibility can be understood as a gathering of memory into the present act of doing. The memory fragments that I came to anchor within the remembered environment of the home and subsequently of the island were arranged into a temporal sequence for performance. But to re-inhabit this sequence, I sought out gestures and stances that could function with the atemporality of the object. I identified certain kernels of kinaesthetic sensibility that could provoke a spontaneous response for me and act as a lightning rod for memory in performance. In this section, I will develop an
account of these kernels through combining elements of Jeff Friedman’s notion of indexical gestures, Antonio Damasio’s somatic marker hypothesis and David Levin’s notion of gestures of gathering.

Within the larger remembered environment through which I structured the performance of here, now, there were specific instants or gestures of corporeal remembering which informed given improvisation sections. These instants are somewhat different to improvisation ‘scores.’ Rather than an instruction for improvisation, they were more like Krasner’s mirror objects. They served as a shortcut provocation to memory, and my relationship to them was one of amalgamation rather than navigation or narrative. In these gestures, specific emotions, movements and rememberings ‘amalgamated.’ By amalgamation, I mean that the kinds of perceptual and recalled images that I outlined in Chapter Seven coalesced with an emotional state and a remembered environment. This involved something of the blurred boundary between self and environment that Krasner noted in the amalgamation of the elderly with their homes. The coalescence of perception, memory and emotion came to be encapsulated in certain kernels of movement that functioned with the atemporality of the object. They were instants of emplaced corporeality that provided direct threads to rememberings such as the precise moment of my father’s passing or the labour of treading through mangrove swamps on French Island.

I begin with Jeff Friedman’s notion of indexical gestures. The notion of ‘indexical gestures’ encapsulates how a particular and known gesture can be considered as a key or catalogue for a larger body of information. Speaking of the relationship of body movement to oral history, Friedman states:

Subjective memories can be stimulated by referencing an indexical gesture that represents a larger and more complex movement sequence, a physical prop that evokes bodily experiences of the description of the space in which the event took place (Friedman, 2002, p. 161).

Friedman is speaking of iconic gestures, such the gesture of the dying swan, which function as a kind of thumbnail sketch of a broader kinaesthetic realm.
with concomitant sensibilities and values. I am not working with iconic gestures of this kind. However, the concept of indexical gestures can be reworked for my purposes, and understood as kernels of dense kinaesthetic information that open onto worlds of emotional meaning and intensity in performance. It is striking that Friedman likens these indexical gestures to physical props. A gesture in this context is understood as a kind of embodied stage prop, a corporeal version of an object that supports a character’s identity on stage. Just as stage props function as symbols that serve to contextualise the action, indexical gestures come to symbolise a larger movement context.

However, my interest in indexical gestures is not that they represent a larger body of movement to the audience, but that performing such gestures forces a coalescence or summary of the vital qualities of a memory, providing an anchor for me as a performer. To clarify this notion, I divert briefly into my experience of Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis. In response to light touches, the spine initiates ‘breath waves’ or rippling movements which activate stiff areas through breath and voice, as discussed in Chapter Five. As I ‘found’ the stuck point that would then become the focus of that session’s work, it was as though many levels of focus coalesced into one. These foci included the emotion and/or memory associated with that stuck point, the physical ‘gesture’ of curving the spine to stretch into or fill out that area, and the gathering of breath to that area to then release it in sound. The effectiveness of the ‘release’ depended on the intensity with which these three levels of experience could be collected into a single gesture encapsulating the breath/movement/emotion gestalt. Over the period of two years, this practice closed the gap between interoceptive sensation, emotion, memory and movement: while I was aware of these layers as discrete, they cleaved into one experience. When I came to dance again, I found that this cleaving had become a corporeally embedded blueprint for improvising.

To further articulate what occurs in the coalescence I have mentioned, I turn briefly to Antonio Damasio’s notion of somatic markers (Damasio, 1995). While the principle purpose of the somatic marker hypothesis is to
understand how emotion comes to bear on decision-making, it is also a useful model for understanding aspects of corporeal remembering. The hypothesis builds on Damasio’s model of images, outlined in the previous chapter. There, I emphasised that images are a pattern in any sensory modality. Somatic markers build on this basic premise and attempt to account for the connectedness between a bodily state, a feeling and an image. The mode in which these three facets of experience become connected creates a kind of embodied memory imprint.

Damasio’s hypothesis holds that emotions are necessary to decision making in ways that are biologically complex. When faced with making a decision, we generally have bodily feelings associated with our sense of the anticipated outcomes of the different options available to us. That is to say, feelings from past situations mark the way we respond to options in future decision-making situations. Our selection of options is, in effect, sped up by the residue of past experiences, because that emotional residue has created a somatic imprint that operates automatically in future decisions (Damasio, 1995, p. 185). Shannon Rose Riley has noted the significance of this for performers working with recalled and perceptual images:

[s]omatic markers are neurological patterns which link a particular recalled image(s) with particular perceptual images, and a particular body feeling […] Significantly, somatic markers are not static but become re-marked, re-imagined with every recollection (Riley, 2004, p. 453).

Somatic markers reach deep into the body’s accumulated experience, bringing into the present moment of decision-making the emotional and imagistic information from past experience. Because images are understood as a pattern in any sensory modality, the information that we gather into the decisive moment is corporeally dispersed. This embodied memory imprint can be combined with the notion of indexical gestures. In creating and performing here, now, I deliberately re-inhabited selected kernels of kinaesthetic information which were indexes for larger states. In doing so, I sought a coalescence of bodily feeling, perceptual images and recalled images. If any of these facets of the experience were not present, I tried to
approach the movement kernel from a different perspective in preparation for performances. I intensified my focus on one of the aspects – recalled, perceptual or emotional – waiting for the others to slip into place or condense. When all three facets were working synergistically, I had the sense that the desired performance state had ‘arrived.’ It meant that I was experiencing rather than representing the remembered thing.

Somatic markers have much in common with philosopher David Michael Levin’s notion of gathering (Levin, 1985). It is fitting that Levin finds the notion of gathering most aptly expressed in a gesture of touch. In an exploration of how traces of corporeal remembering are carried unconsciously, Levin notes that such traces can be re-gathered into the present by attending to corporeality, feeling and sense perception. He cites an example from Cocteau’s diary. Through the indexical gesture of trailing his finger along a wall that was familiar to him as a child, Cocteau is able to re-inhabit a poly-sensory image world from his past:

Just as the needle picks up the melody of the record, I obtained the melody of the past with my hand. I found everything: my cape, the leather of my satchel, the names of my friends and my teachers, certain expressions I had used, the sound of my grandfather’s voice, the smell of his beard, the smell of my sister’s dresses, and my mother’s gown (Cocteau in Levin, 1985, p. 155).

Levin notes that it is the indexical gesture of the poet’s finger that ‘gathers’ the memory to him.

The finger retrieves the trace of his memory by retracing its original gesture, its original articulation, in a touching of the wall. Now memory, understood as recollection, is always (i.e. essentially) a gathering and collecting. For Cocteau, an entire childhood past is gathered, intact, into the centeredness of a living present; and it is gathered in the deeply felt contact of a gesture of gathering. There is love in the repeating gesture, and the gathering in this love extends itself to embrace the gathering and recollecting of the trace. Thanks to the gesture of his finger, gathering a deeply felt experience, he is able to remain in touch with his distant past (Levin, 1985, p. 155).

For Levin, the notion of remembering through gestures of gathering can be found in all the movements that constitute a life. The possibility to
experience gestures of recollection opens when we attend to poly-sensory corporeal experience and emotion: “[t]hus, with every gesture we make, and not only with the gesture of our most memorable moments, we can experience the gathering of a recollection like Cocteau’s” (Levin, 1985, p. 157). Gestures of gathering were deliberately evoked in here, now, as outlined. But there were other ways in which gestures of gathering have been one of the undercurrents of my practice. For example, understanding physical pain as a gesture of gathering has been useful when working alone and when working with others. The experience of pain can take us swiftly into remembering, but it is often initially a tacit remembering, which only becomes articulable through working with it. Pain can serve as a provocation to attend to corporeal experience and recognise the gestures of gathering in our movements.

2nd November 2005

It is several months after our performances of the backs of things. Michaela has a neck injury. She has just told me the story of how, a month ago when visiting Rio de Janeiro, she was mugged by street kids who threatened her by holding a broken bottle to her neck. This incident and the injury do not seem unrelated.

I can sense the fear in her and hear its echoes in my own corporeal memory: muscles, tendons, fascia, nightmarish dreams of paralysis. Her injury is a very different one to mine, but I feel I know something of it from the inside, something that could not be gleaned from a bald description of anatomical function. We need to re-visit the choreography of the backs of things in preparation for the documentation shoot. Despite the choreography being known, we need to do touch work to remember the sensibilitites that ground the choreography.

As Michaela is somewhat fragile and her sense of self seems a little shaken from the spinal injury, our use of touch is different to when we were working intensively together. She stands gently upright with her eyes shut. I don’t touch her neck or shoulders much, leaving them to their own organization. I
touch the top of her head lightly, imagining my own head floating like a helium balloon as I touch her head. I touch the hair at the nape of her neck, ruffling it upwards as I do to myself to remind myself to keep lightness and length at the back of my neck. Memory comes to bear on each touch. Images come to me, ones that assist me when I am in pain.

I place my palm across Michaela’s forehead, as if to steady the energy. As I see my hand there, the image comes to me of a mother, not necessarily my own, touching a child’s forehead to test for a fever.

Where did the impulse to place my hand on Michaela’s forehead come from? Perhaps it is an embedded memory of a gesture once administered to me, or it might be the invocation of an almost iconic gesture of tending to another via touch that I would have seen in films or other images. A clichéd movement, so to speak, which nevertheless has powerful resonances when dispensed, evoking both the vulnerability of childhood and the security of being cared for.

In this tactile interaction between Michaela and myself, many somatic markers, gestures of gathering, or indexical gestures can be traced. Each opens onto further gestures of recollection. There is the gesture of the glass held aggressively to the neck, gathered and remembered in Michaela’s current injury. There is my own gesture of gathering in cupping my hand to Michaela’s forehead, through which I remember my own injuries. Of the many gestures available to me, the ones I chose were a result of specific somatic markers. The experience of pain can also be understood as a gesture of gathering in that it carries with it embedded matrices of enmeshed emotion, sensation and image. Gestures open onto image worlds, in the way the hand on the forehead opened onto remembered and imagined gestures from films, photos, or childhood memories. In the evolution of a practice of remembering over time, it is possible to notice an intercorporeal mapping of such gestures. In the example above, gestures of gathering are seen at work in the practice of choreographic tactility.
In the examples below, gestures of gathering are at work in subtly different ways. I describe here the movement section for here, now where I recalled through gesture the moment of my father’s passing. In my life, this moment was devoid of emotion. In some senses, it could be said that the origin of here, now lay in this absence of emotion. I made a work about something that was absent which I could make present in the act of performance. I developed a practice of remembering so as to feel what was not felt. Thus, the gestures of gathering with which I ‘recalled’ the moment of his passing could perhaps best be understood as an intervention into memory rather than a memory per se. By intervention, I mean that this gesture enabled me to access through movement the emotion that was absent at the time of the event, when I experienced emotional numbness. Gestures of gathering, here a certain tremor in the fingers or the kindling of skin lit up from beneath, enabled me to retrospectively give this moment the weight it deserved. I could call up emotion that was dormant at the time, and live it in the present via the active remembering of a gathering gesture. The following journal excerpts, five years apart, track this evolution.

14th May, 2002

Memory – event, reconstruction, reconstruction of the reconstruction – the act of remembering shifts the event.

30th September 2002

Improvising alone. The admittance that that lump of unassimilated experience still haunts me. Cacophony of memory while moving. I was in Beecroft – staring at the old gum at night. The rattling of a train. Rounding the spent wisteria to find dad so wobbling, so spent, and so falsely jubilant. The exultant energy of crisis before the long sadness sets in. Dancing with these things, with the people there – to live what wasn’t lived, to re-live it and arrive at a different ending. To be with my past.

10th March 2007

In remembering, she feels an intensity she could not feel at the time.
Susan Engel notes that when a memory is shared, it is changed forever (Engel, 1999, p. 22). This was certainly true for *here, now*. At least part of my motivation for working with personal memory was to change it. I needed to dislodge a bulk of unassimilated experience. Through my practice of intercorporeal remembering, I re-worked this ‘bulk’ into an active remembering so that it could become pliable, open to newness, fictionalised, and thus release me from its ossified grip. Engel’s description of the way in which shaping a memory for public presentation can make the memory more substantial is fitting here:

When a memory takes on a public form it doesn’t necessarily lose its internal psychological intensity, but it may subtly transform it. In fact, sometimes the public use of a memory gives it a definition and substance it didn’t have when it lived only in one’s mind as a fleeting and infrequent visitor (Engel, 1999, p. 16).

Transforming memory and giving it substance was one aspect of the craft of remembering I developed. In my practice, to craft remembering means to become practised at recognising and invoking the gestures of gathering I have mentioned in this section. Damasio and Levin both speak of the coalescence of emotion, present sensation and memory as something that occurs in ways that we are not ordinarily aware of. For Damasio, the coalescence occurs as the neurological substrate of decision-making. For Levin, it occurs as a subconscious recollection held in the body. Levin calls on ethical grounds for us to attend to the gestures of gathering that accompany all the movements of a life. Crafting remembering in performance practices is one arena in which this ‘call’ can be addressed. The craft of remembering privileges a particular style of attention that provides space for what is absent or lost to be made present. In the next section, I will outline how attending to gestures of gathering builds up in a practice over time. This accumulates in a process of active sedimentation.

**iv) Sedimentation**

In sections i) to iii), I have primarily addressed rememberings that were autobiographical in content. In this section, I address the accumulation of rememberings within the performance practice itself. This is articulated as a
process of sedimentation. In discussing the palace, I noted that the palace can be regarded as a metaphor for the performance environment. As with the orator’s rehearsal of a speech through repeatedly imagining movement through a house, the performance environment becomes cumulatively endowed with meaning through progressive improvisations. In creating the improvisational parameters for here, now, I remembered myself into (I emplaced myself within) a variety of built and natural environments, using textural, aural, visual, olfactory and kinaesthetic images. From one improvisation to the next, these environments became more palpable. The boundary between imagining and remembering became malleable, because the nuances I carried from one improvisation to another became, in effect, a remembering. The accrual of rememberings can be thought of as the garnering of active sediment.

Over the course of the short season of here, now, my attention became increasingly tuned to the accumulation of rememberings from one performance to the next. It was a rich means of gathering emotional intensity in performance. If I did not access the intensity I wanted in one performance, I tried to shift things for the subsequent performance. I grazed over a field of poly-sensory images until I found something pungent, something that could help me sink into a deeper shaft of engaged remembering. As noted in the previous section, I was seeking somatic markers, matrices of sensation, emotion and remembering that could yield a dense performance state for that particular performance. The somatic marker, the gateway for accessing a state of active remembering in preparation for performance, shifted. Within the performance itself, many of the somatic markers were ‘set’, in that they had been crafted into a structure or story.

However, around these set points there was both the room and the necessity for movement. Fresh rememberings were needed, and were to be found within the field of poly-sensory images that had accrued over the years of making the work. The field of images came from gathering materials of various kinds from various locations for here, now: sculptural forms, sound,
video, movement, text. The materials had been gathered according to their alliance with the imaginings and rememberings that constituted the backbone of the work, glimpsed perhaps most explicitly in the performance text. However, the field of ‘active sediment’ through which I passed in seeking out effective somatic markers encompassed other kinds of rememberings too. Most prominently, I remembered the touch work with Michaela and Jo during the period where I etched out a practice of choreographic tactility. I will detail this remembering more fully in the next chapter where I discuss intercorporeal remembering.

Lesa Lockford and Ronald Pelias articulate ways in which sedimented materials become activated in improvised performances (Lockford & Pelias, 2004). They set out a typology of performative knowing that comprises five epistemological stances: communication, playfulness, sedimentation, sensuality, and vulnerability. Of particular interest to me is their notion of sedimentation. They use this term to describe how over a long period of time of working together, an improvisation ensemble’s knowledge comes to be habituated and corporeally grounded. The intuitive sedimentation that builds up in a group over time means that performers can call upon past situations to inform their performance choices. This takes Damasio’s model of somatic markers into an interpersonal performative context. A lexicon of somatic markers builds up within a group, coming to bear on spontaneous decision-making. Indeed, Lockford and Pelias liken this kind of knowing to linguistic competence, to the tacit knowledge of grammar, where we know the rules without necessarily being able to explain them. They regard this tacit knowledge as the essential bedrock for improvisation:

Tacit knowledge operates from an implicit system of logic, a learned and imprinted grammar of practice […] In this sense, it is much like linguistic competence, a structure that supports each performance but typically remains hidden. These “everyday practices” engaged in by actors are what sociologist Michel de Certeau might call an “ensemble of procedures” (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, pp. 436-437).

This remembered, sedimented knowledge gives performers the necessary acumen for improvised performance, allowing them to rely on sensibilities
that have incubated incrementally over time. Sedimentation nourishes the spontaneous decision-making of performance. Lockford and Pelias liken this to a felt map:

When tapped, sedimentation functions as a sentient map. With an embodied set of buried rules for navigation, improvisational moments ask actors to seek somatic signs, follow hunches, and trust impulses. They maneuver down a path of intuitive speculation and apprehension. Their judgements do not answer to concrete laws. Instead, their assessments are felt deeply within the body and are based upon a richly layered sedimentation of artistic practices constituting a particular way of knowing (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, p. 437).

An example of the sentient mapping provided by sedimentation is found in the following instance from my practice of choreographic tactility. I have mentioned elsewhere that the practice of choreographic tactility was a cumulative endeavour, with particular sensibilities emerging over an extended period of time. The following example focuses on departing touch. The way one stops touching someone, the way one leaves a touch, gives information to the mover that is as important as the touch itself.

19th May, 2005

My hand moves down and across Jo’s arm in a sweeping, brushing movement. My elbow glances off hers and my arm slides off into space in an arc as I move past her. This all happens within a few seconds, amidst a myriad of other touches as Jo dances.

That I depart with movement that continues the shape and dynamic of the touch is sensed by Jo, even though her eyes are shut. That is, I sense it is sensed by her. I sense that she knows, and we know this through a reciprocal accumulation of experiences. This is part of what allows us to work without colliding. This particular glancing gesture is both known and not known: there have been many like it before, but each touch is in itself non-iterable. The differing densities of touch are sensed as movement: light and localised in the fingers, firmer and broader in the hand, broader and firmer still in the sweep of the forearm, then the glancing, swift departure.
These shifting densities of pressure, surface and speed, absorbed through touch, are later recalled or echoed in Jo’s improvised movement, where I am no longer touching her, but where the trace of my touch informs her movement.

In my practice, the notion of sedimentation refers to both an ensemble of procedures and an ensemble of remembered content. Both are practices of remembering. The ensemble of procedures comprises acts of remembering in that it draws on somatic markers that enmesh memory with the current act of making performative decisions. The ensemble of remembered content draws together diverse threads from autobiographical origins to material that remains as residue from one improvisation to the next, or indeed from one performance to the next.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have detailed the salient aspects of the craft of remembering within my practice. I have suggested that these ‘crafts’ be thought of as heuristic devices in that they describe strategies that have been formative in my work. Working with remembering implies paying attention to the forgotten aspects of a life and reinvigorating them in imagination and improvisation. In doing so, it is possible to access memories in a richer way than is often available in daily life. The distinction and/or coalescence of observer and field memories is one way to engender an engagement with memories that can give rise to rich performance states. The spatial dynamics of remembering can also be explored through anchoring remembered fragments of material within a given environment. Tracing temporal sequences of material within a remembered environment is a narrative exercise that can be contrasted with the atemporality of the memory object. A précis of memory can be found in certain gestures of gathering, which involve a coalescence of sense perception, memory and emotion. I have argued that such gestures can be deliberately found and refined, to enable access to rich states of remembering in performance. The crafts of
remembering I have detailed in this chapter come to reside in a practice over time as active sediment. Such a practice evokes David Levin’s call to attend to the gestures of gathering that are present in all the movements of a life.
CHAPTER EIGHT: INTERCORPOREAL REMEMBERING

The task of memory – that double ReMembering – is divided among those moving and those watching the movement. And this process thus always becomes a journey of remembering through the phantasms of one’s own body history. And is this landscape not also marked by deformity? By misunderstanding and misreading, which – in the limbo of subjective memory – rebuilds the rules of language and allows a world of spirits to arise out of it? (Brandstetter, 2000, p. 130).

Introduction

12th April 2005

Jo’s shoulder is out of alignment and she is in pain. There is the recollection of a car accident quite some time ago. Her breath is high and arrested in her chest. I notice because, in watching her dance, my own breath gets caught there too. That’s how I know to suggest that she drop her breath down to her belly.

In talking about intercorporeality, we are already talking about remembering. Intercorporeality is a term I have used throughout the dissertation to denote the ways in which embodied selfhood arises from interactions with other embodied selves. I have described it as a process of accumulation or embedding of layers over time. In this chapter, I flesh out a fuller definition of intercorporeality, emphasising its temporal dimension. In emphasising the relationship between remembering and intercorporeality, it becomes evident that intercorporeality is not just about interactions between embodied selves, but also the interplay of embedded corporealities within the self.

The metaphor of residue is productive for understanding how intercorporeal information accumulates in the individual over time – prompting the questions: of all our corporeal interactions, what sticks? What traces of others continue to reside within us? The brief moment of studio interaction recounted above encapsulates two central features of corporeal residue: that a corporeal pattern as subtle as where the breath is located can bleed
imperceptibly from one person to another; and that by ‘paying attention to residue’, the imperceptible can become perceptible and thus malleable, seen in the shift of breath from chest to belly.

In this final chapter of the dissertation, I take the gestalt of remembering that has been developed in Chapters Six and Seven and place it in the presence of others. Initially, this entails unpacking the strands of others that constitute the self. This is described as a lively corporeal dialogue that can be harnessed for performance. In the latter part of the chapter, I describe the qualities of a performance context in which remembering is at the fore. In my practice, I have worked towards a model of performance as a site of intercorporeal remembering. My account of choreographic tactility in Part II foregrounded the intercorporeal dimensions and ethical implications of working with touch. Here, I interleave the focus on intercorporeality with Part III’s focus on remembering.

i) Corporeal dialogues

In this section, I detail the performance of the self in corporeal dialogue with others. At times, the way we have ‘picked up’ aspects of the corporealities of others is quite unconscious. The imperceptible bleeding of corporeal patterns can seem like a contagion. This infectiousness is particularly apparent to those who work constantly with movement. Speaking of how we inherit the movement of others, choreographer Lisa Nelson describes as both a blessing and a curse our genetic propensity for absorbing the movement of others (Nelson, 2004, p. 23). Our propensity is wonderful in that it renders the world full of interesting models to imitate. Indeed, it is what allows us to learn to dance in the first place. Nelson notes that dance training hones the innate trait by which we are wired to imitate the movements we see from birth onwards. She adds, however, that this propensity is also a curse because it is indiscriminate: “we are as helpless not to duplicate the dance models on our stages and classrooms as we are to avoid picking up mannerisms from people we know” (Nelson, 2004, p. 23).
But is it entirely indiscriminate, and are we entirely helpless? Nelson goes on to observe that there is an element of choice, albeit not necessarily a conscious one: “[w]hy does one child embody the limp of her father and her brother the perpetual smile of his mother? Somehow we choose” (Nelson, 2004, p. 23). Identifying the ‘how’ of our choices is an important task for choreography. Dance-making is often concerned with finding ways to generate new movement pathways, as will be addressed later in this chapter. We seek to unsettle the sediment of the movement we have inherited.

When discussing the potential to change intercorporeal inheritances, it is important to note that intercorporeal residue is not necessarily negative. In fact, such residue is often a source of delight. It can enable a sense of continuum between present corporeality and the strands of other corporealities that have been at the fore at earlier times of one’s life. This is seen in the work of Cándida Smith, who has paid particular attention to intercorporeality and the spoken word. He details the somatic animation that accompanies spontaneous autobiographical narration in oral history interviews with artists. In the following anecdote, he details how intercorporeality comes into play in the act of recollecting and recounting one’s memories to another:

During an interview I conducted with the noted African American artist John Outterbridge, I noticed that John, in recalling his childhood in North Carolina, accompanied his vivid recollections of his mother making soap with a flurry of alternately subdued and expansive mime movements. [...] For a few seconds, his fingers traced her steps in the old house where they had lived, then they merged back into his upper torso as his arms and shoulders expanded to imitate his mother’s body going from task to task in a long and arduous process. The gestures became even broader as he described the smells and the emotions they stirred within him. A counterpoint emerged. His words centered on himself, once again in his mind’s eye, a small boy watching, occasionally lending a hand when asked, but his body continued to recall the diligent craft of his mother. Intermittently, he evoked the aromatic experience with deep inhalations that relocated the boy onto the body of a 57-year-old man (Cándida Smith, 2002, p. 1).

In this account, gesture and breath are used to place the narrator within the remembered environment. This is an instance of deeply emplaced
remembering, a concept I articulated in the previous chapter. In the context of intercorporeal remembering, what is notable in Cándida Smith’s anecdote is the kinaesthetic vacillation between different corporeal strands within the self: the small boy, the 57-year-old man, and his mother. This corporeal dialogue echoes my focus in Chapter Seven on the vacillation between distant and proximate memories in _here, now._

It would seem that this vacillation is particularly apparent when recounting an anecdote to a listener. In his interviews with dancers as part of his oral history project within dance communities, Jeff Friedman has noted the interplay between current and remembered strands of intercorporeality. He comments on the ways in which interviewees shift between different characters in an anecdote. They might begin as the ‘reporter’ of an event, but then shift into the voice of themselves as a character in the anecdote, or to other characters within the anecdote:

Sometimes the narrator also impersonates the facial gesture, vocal intonations, bodily gestures, and posture of each voice. For example, while interviewing former Twyla Tharp company member Sara Rudner, I observed Sara “become” Twyla by changing her posture to a vertical “wall”, binding her flow, and speaking in a higher volume, rapid, monotonic vocal style. During this performance of “an other,” Sara also performed herself as “Sara” in a dialog with “Twyla” (Friedman, 2002, p. 163).

This account foregrounds the subtle postural microforces that underlie personality. Being a dancer, Sara is highly skilled at imitating the movements of others, and can thus ‘become’ Twyla, accessing aspects of another’s personality through shifts in postural alignment and voice tone. Friedman’s account also foregrounds the sharpness of his own kinaesthetic eye: he is highly attuned to the performance of intercorporeality in his interviewee. The performance of the self in dialogue with another was something I wanted to draw out in _the backs of things._ The work-in-progress showing of _the backs of things_ at Dancehouse in July 2005 consisted of solos for Jo and Michaela that intersected but remained discrete. For the final performance work in September 2005, I sought ways to further integrate the idiosyncratic movement territories that had emerged for each
of them through the practice of choreographic tactility. Their movement territories had arisen from touch and were sustained by the memory of touch: now I wanted to see what material could emerge through remembering each other’s territories.

15th August 2005

It was the first day of working together since the work-in-progress showing of ‘the backs of things’ at Dancehouse a month ago. I asked Michaela and Jo to work with the impression of each other’s material from July. They each watched each other do their material so many times back then, in performance and in the lead-up. I wanted to see what remained in them of that experience. What mark it had made, how it was remembered, what was retained. We tried it in various forms. Just floating with what’s remembered of the other’s physical state. Or fishtailing off the other, who is offering snippets of their solo material. Or working with what you know were the other’s scores, slipping between scoring yourself and remembering them inhabiting those same scores. Vacillating between the self and the other, between current physicalities and kinaesthetic rememberings.

Afterwards, Michaela commented: “I was just getting the cusp of states I was remembering. I’d find myself in something that was reminding me of the movement, although it wasn’t quite it” (Michaela Pegum, personal communication, 15th August 2005).

In asking Michaela and Jo to work with each other’s material, I was not interested in establishing dramatic or narrative relationships. I focussed instead on how foregrounding their rememberings of each other’s territory could shift their movement into a new kinaesthetic realm where their relatedness was apparent. I envisaged this as a phase that could build on the dense intercorporeal relationships we had established in the period of working intensively with touch. In Part II of the dissertation, I indicated that the intensive use of touch had renegotiated the sense of self that we brought to our performance practice. By honing our attention on the intercorporeality that always already constitutes our moving selves, we
developed a keener understanding of the self-in-movement. In asking Jo and Michaela to improvise using the residual strands of one another’s movement, I was asking them to perform a corporeal dialogue. In Part II, I emphasised the ethical implications of our practice of touch. In the next section, I emphasise the ethical dimensions of corporeal dialogues. I look at the need to attend to corporeal dialogues that have slipped below the level of conscious awareness and become ossified.

ii) Attending to residue

I mentioned above Nelson’s observation that ‘somehow we choose’ and acquire certain habits out of the myriad of corporeal offerings that surround us. In this section, I examine the way some corporeal patterns contribute to our subjectivity through remaining in the body as residue, long after the initial stimulus has gone. This residue can be considered a remembering in the flesh. In regarding corporeal residue as a facet of remembering, I define a particular context for discussing memory within my practice. Sidestepping the usual psychological understanding of memory, I focus instead on the notion of memory as the persistence of corporeal patterns over time. I first discuss Elizabeth Behnke’s notion of dilated kinaesthetic consciousness as a basis for understanding how residue accrues. I then discuss Behnke’s notion of ‘ghost gestures’ and Gail Weiss’ focus on the multiplicity of body images. Their analyses serve to underscore how residue is characterised by a subtle interplay between intra- and intercorporeality.

Behnke writes on the relationship between movement and intercorporeality in a paper entitled *Ghost Gestures: Phenomenological Investigations of Bodily Micromovements and their Intercorporeal Implications* (Behnke, 1997). She examines how bodily postures and habits are intercorporeally acquired. Habits can become sedimented in an individual such that they are rarely noticed or attended to. In order to discuss how this occurs, Behnke first describes a style of embodied consciousness. She does so in the context of transformative somatic practices. Her aim is to address how potentially limiting habits can be changed through attending closely to corporeal
Behnke begins by suggesting that a body is not something that we ‘have’ or even that we ‘are’, but rather, it is something that we do. She asks who performs the ‘doing’ that might constitute this corporeal self, and answers “not a punctiformal ego with its body over-against it, but rather a dilated kinaesthetic consciousness” (Behnke, 1997, p. 198). By dilated she means not directed from a single point. That is, there is not a brain directing a foot to move, but rather the kinaesthetic consciousness of the foot’s gesture sensed from within.

The concept of a dilated kinaesthetic consciousness is akin to Damasio’s notion of the mind as mentioned in Chapter Six. There, I outlined his conception of mind as a corporeally dispersed and responsive process, rather than a single organ in which thought resides. Behnke’s paper expands on this conception of mind by describing how it feels to experience this dispersal. It is not experienced from a distance. She posits that kinaesthetic consciousness is not merely the perception of bodily sensation ‘by’ the self. Rather, we “inhabit the “dilated” mineness of a total kinaesthetic act, inhabiting it from within rather than being a spectator of it” (Behnke, 1997, p. 184). The style of selfhood that Behnke posits is experienced in the sensations of corporeal acts. The capacity to experience movements, qualities of muscular tone, or postural patterns from within is an acquired skill. It can be gleaned through transformative somatic practices. This mode of perception stands in direct contrast to the distancing effect of separative perception, which I critiqued with Behnke in Part I.

The perception of bodily acts from within is a pre-requisite for a second stage of corporeal awareness. Behnke suggests that in addition to the corporeally dispersed or dilated nature of consciousness, there is a further dispersal. That is, our actions occur within the realm of other’s actions. She calls this an “interkinaesthetic field”, noting that it includes “not only the movements and micromovements of those around me, but also the sedimented traces of such movements and micromovements in the artefacts

29 Behnke notes that her paper on ghost gestures is part of a larger project “using Husserlian phenomenological methods to elucidate transformative somatic practice” (Behnke, 1997, p. 198).
around me” (Behnke, 1997, p. 198). Thus the movements through which we endlessly constitute and reconstitute our corporeal selves do not occur in isolation. There is a constant interplay between intra- and interkinaesthesia. Dilated kinaesthetic consciousness may well be a model of self-perception from within, but the inner patternings that are sensed are continually informed by the corporealities of others. This is the essence of intercorporeality in Behnke’s model.

Gail Weiss’s model of intercorporeality is subtly different. She pays more attention to the cultural formation of intercorporeal selfhood than the kinaesthetic sensing found in Behnke’s approach. However, Weiss similarly stresses that intercorporeality involves interplay within and not just between bodies (Weiss, 1999, p. 169). For Weiss, intercorporeality is the very foundation of a self understood as corporeal: “[t]o be embodied is to be capable of being affected by the bodies of others” (Weiss, 1999, p. 162). Weiss, building on Schilder and Merleau-Ponty, develops a notion of body images that syntheseses physiological, psychological and social inputs. Her point is that at any one time, we possess multiple rather than a single body image. We unite impulses from different domains in complex ways. She argues that the array of body images at work in an individual is not a sign of chaos but of necessary synthesis:

the multiplicity of body images that we possess, rather than signifying a fragmented or dispersed identity, is, paradoxically, precisely what helps us to develop a coherent sense of self (Weiss, 1999, p. 167).

Weiss’ mode of attending to residue has a different tenor to Behnke’s. Her analysis lies within a lineage of feminist philosophy drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. She pays explicit attention to the concrete circumstances within which we draw an array of body images into a temporary unity that constitutes subjectivity. Racial, sexual, social and cultural differences enable some body images to come to the fore and force others to be denied. She notes that contemporary feminism has paid attention to the social interactions that underpin subjectivity, but has not paid sufficient attention to the intercorporeal dimensions of that interaction
(Weiss, 1999, p. 168). With Schilder, she argues that it is impossible to neatly separate the different strands of body images that constitute the self. These include both the body images acquired through interactions with others and those acquired through the body’s changes over time.

However, the interrelatedness of body images does not mean that all of one’s body images clamour for equal attention all of the time. Certain body images rise to prominence at certain times according to circumstance. Weiss cites the example of early childhood experiences (Weiss, 1999, p. 167). In early childhood, most people would have encountered situations in which their age was the most salient aspect of their identity, rather than race or religion, for example. Further, circumstances in adulthood can bring about a rush of memory in which we re-experience something of our childhood corporeality. Weiss uses this example of childhood body images to indicate how circumstances can draw out particular body images from the multiplicity that constitutes any given subjectivity. She notes: “it is our projects themselves and the concrete interactions we sustain with others, that provide the ongoing context in which a particular body image becomes more significant than another” (Weiss, 1999, p. 167).

The example of childhood body images also draws attention to the interplay between intra- and intercorporeality in Weiss’ model. The childhood body image would initially be formed in relationship to the corporeal subjectivities of those surrounding the child. For the adult, that intersubjectively shaped body image remains as remembered residue. The act of remembering corporeal sensations from childhood is an instance of the interplay of body images within the self. Weiss focuses on those instants when this interplay comes into conscious awareness. Behnke is more focussed on sensing the interplay of corporeal patterning from within, through her model of dilated kinaesthetic consciousness. Though Weiss and Behnke’s models of intercorporeality differ subtly in their emphases, both are marked by their attention to the simultaneity of impulses arising within and between bodies.
iii) Legacy and change

In this section, I discuss intercorporeal legacies in relation to change. This draws out both the ethics and the aesthetics of attending to residue. I first outline the ethical imperative underlying Behnke and Weiss’ work. I then articulate the intersection of ethics and aesthetics in my practice of intercorporeal remembering. For both Behnke and Weiss, the drive to understand intercorporeality is fuelled by ethical considerations. Paying attention to residue is a prerequisite for finding an embodied basis for ethical action. By virtue of the degree to which we are intercorporeally embodied beings, they posit that social change can occur through close attention to the legacies of intercorporeality. For Weiss, this is possible through harnessing the creativity inherent in the ways we assemble our subjectivity out of the myriad of available body images. For Behnke, it is possible through attending to the micro-movements that enable and constrain subjectivities.

Behnke notes that the social realm is marked through and through by the dormant choreography of intercorporeal movement: “[t]he socially situated body is a body woven of movement, articulated by movement, shaped and sustained by movement” (Behnke, 1997, p. 198). If movement is the milieu in which corporeal subjectivities are shaped, it is not surprising, then, that change can occur through movement. Behnke names the postural tendencies and small movements that accompany one’s attitudes, ‘ghost gestures.’ Through attending to the ghost gestures that both support and constrict us, cycles of intercorporeal inheritance can be broken: “I become as it were a puzzle piece that no longer fits easily and neatly into the current picture, but begins to imply a new one – a different order, an alternative interkinaesthetic style” (Behnke, 1997, p. 198).

Behnke’s strategy for attending to ghost gestures is to employ transformative somatic practices. Thus, an ethical implication of her work is that bodywork is one of the vectors by which social change becomes possible. Being adept in both the movement practice of Sensory Awareness
and in Husserlian phenomenology, Behnke is particularly alert to the ethical implications of bodywork. She encourages a focus on how we are constantly “living out the legacy of our “communal body”” (Behnke, 1997, p. 181). By ‘communal,’ she is referring to the ways that everyday movement patterns and postural stances accrue within a community of others. However, in a move evocative of Foucault, her focus remains on how the communal resides in the individual: “[m]y focus… is on how such “social shaping” is ongoingly and concretely lived out – performed, executed, maintained, perpetuated (and perhaps in some cases, shifted) by individual moving bodies” (Behnke, 1997, p. 182).

In this and the previous section, I have used the word ‘attention’ rather than ‘awareness’ to describe the attitude through which change is made possible. This harks back to Behnke’s suggestion that in order to think through the notion of intercorporeality, it is necessary to first establish a different model of consciousness. As mentioned in the previous section, she stresses that ‘dilated kinaesthetic consciousness’ refers to sensing movements and micro-movements from within, rather than from a removed ego that drives the body. To speak of bringing intercorporeality into one’s ‘awareness’ might suggest bringing it to the awareness of a removed ego where it can be experienced as thought. Instead, transformative somatic practices often work with modes of attending that are more kinaesthetically intuitive. For example, the work of Joan Skinner uses poetic images to shift entrenched holding patterns, leading to a more released dance technique. Body-Mind Centering® uses poetic renderings of anatomical imagery to a similar effect. Imagery of this kind provides a potent intervention into inherited movement patterns. It does so without the need to ‘name’ that inheritance as a conscious thought or awareness. For this reason, I refer to this change-enabling attitude as ‘attention’ rather than ‘awareness.’

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30 Sensory Awareness developed from the practice of Elsa Gindler, who worked in Berlin during the early 1900s and subsequently in the USA as a refugee from Nazism (see for example Hanlon Johnson, 1995).
31 See for example “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom” in The Final Foucault (Bernauer & Rasmussen, 1988).
Weiss, on the other hand, with her focus on the lived cultural dimensions of intercorporeality, does seem to consider conscious awareness to be an essential precursor to the possibility of change. Conscious awareness is, importantly, linked to creativity in her account:

[b]ecoming more aware of the creative as well as the destructive potential of our body images, is a first and extremely necessary (but often overlooked) step in the arduous process of inventing new meanings, (re)significations which are required to enact lasting social and political change. These new meanings can only take hold if we realize that changing our relations to others and to society as a whole is always an embodied process (Weiss, 1999, p. 170).

The notion of creativity in the formation of corporeal identity is important to choreographic practice. I use aspects of both Behnke’s and Weiss’s strategies for engendering change. That is, I use both the conscious awareness of corporeal inheritances, and the sensing from within that can engender change in transformative somatic practices. Weiss’ notion of multiplicity is useful to my practice of intercorporeal remembering. It clarifies how we can draw multiple images from the past into present acts of performing. The cultural context of remembering-in-performance enables certain body images to crystallise into the foreground of conscious awareness. As in Weiss’ analysis, this is experienced not as chaos but as a necessary synthesis. I consider this crystallisation to be a microcosmic example of a process that is continually occurring in daily life.

One focus of my performance practice is the legacy of intercorporeality and the possibility of change. For Weiss and Behnke, paying attention to intercorporeal residue has emancipatory potential. In my practice, I am interested in the possibility of change from the perspective of both ethics and aesthetics. That is, I am motivated by both the ethical dimensions of reactivating the sediment of intercorporeality and my desire as an artist for new corporeal pathways. In the context of many choreographic practices, improvisational strategies are often geared towards ‘shifting’ sedimented

32 Weiss’ discussion of the multiplicity of body images bears interesting relationships to Nietzsche’s discussion of the multiple masks of the self. In both cases, creativity in choosing between corporeal options is the key attribute that allows for a healthy subjectivity (see for example Nietzsche & Faber, 1998).
movement patterns and vocabularies. This is provoked by the artist’s desire for what is new instead of the endless repetition of what is already known.\footnote{The strategies by which choreographers seek new movement pathways are too numerous to detail here. Briefly, they can include improvisational strategies such as scores and imagery, novel collaborative relationships and engagement with transformative somatic practices.}

The ethical opening of the self to alternative interkinaesthetic possibilities might not be an explicit aim of the dancer’s quest for new movement. However, it is often a consequence of that quest. Rosalind Crisp’s practice is one of rigorous openness to change. She articulates her practice as creating a “sensorial response network in our bodies” or “perceptual responses in the sensing body” (Crisp, 2002). Her description of the acceptance this practice requires provides insight into the crafting of the self that occurs in this style of choreographic endeavour:

This practice is fundamentally one of accepting the reality of the body as it is experienced in that moment. It involves embracing the self, loving the self as it is known and can be known in and with the body by not denying where it is, not forcing it to be elsewhere, not wanting it to be elsewhere (a personal and political challenge in a social and cultural environment that encourages us to be anywhere but in the present and everywhere but in our bodies) (Crisp, 2002).

The ethical dimensions of intercorporeality in my own practice were outlined in Chapters Four and Five through the analysis of touch. In fact, the practice of choreographic tactility could be regarded as a transformative somatic practice in Behnke’s sense, in that it provides the concrete means to stage alternative interkinaesthetic possibilities. As in the example from Crisp’s practice above, these alternative possibilities occur at the meeting point of ethics and aesthetics.

While my aesthetic interest in the legacies of intercorporeality is informed by a desire for ‘newness,’ it is not newness for newness’ sake. Neither is it a newness that is exclusively future-focussed. That is to say, my aesthetic interest in intercorporeal legacies is informed by my preoccupation with memory. It is seen in the way I deliberately harness intercorporeal remembering to create a dense performative present. Earlier in this chapter,
I discussed my suggestion to Jo and Michaela that they work with memories of each other’s movement territories. I wanted to see the activating force of Michaela and Jo’s rememberings of each other, in the form of a kinaesthetic dialogue within the self.

In this, my focus was akin to Lisa Nelson’s. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, she describes being dissatisfied with only seeing the dancer’s interaction with other dancers or with the architecture of the space. Instead, she wanted to see “something of the dancer’s interaction with herself – the internal dialogue that shapes the surface” (Nelson, 2004, p. 22). Jo and Michaela’s active remembering of each other’s territories was just such an investigation of the strands of internal dialogue that shape the surface. In this investigation, we deliberately played with intercorporeal legacies. I staged an intercorporeal task that involved a cross-perception of residue. Sometimes the residual strands of others’ corporealities are not immediately available to conscious awareness. Michaela’s sensation of standing at the brink or ‘cusp’ of a movement state she could not fully remember echoes Behnke’s description of the ghostliness of inherited gestures and postures:

The types of movements I am calling “ghost gestures” are not necessarily overt or visible movements (though they are occasionally detectible to an outside observer), but are as it were the ghost of a gesture – a kind of inner “quasi-gesture,” a schematic inner vector or tendency-toward movement that can persist in the body even when the large-scale gesture that the ghost gesture schematically implies is not actually being performed. Ghost gestures are thus one example of bodily “sedimentation” as the effective presence of the past (Behnke, 1997, p. 188).

The notion of ghosting is particularly relevant to my solo practice, as will be explored in the next section. Behnke and Weiss are both concerned with the history of the body. As dancers engaged in the kinds of improvisational practices detailed in this dissertation, we were able to make our histories available for performance. Attending to the residue of ghostly gestures brings the past into the present. Indeed, corporeal remembering becomes an activity of the present moment through this kind of attention. This is an implication of working with memory in a somatic practice. Somatic
practices such as my practice of choreographic tactility make the presence of the past in the present body undeniable.

Support for this stance is found in accounts of the impact of violent acts upon the self. In a moving paper on the deeply embodied nature of the memory of trauma, Roberta Culbertson articulates how such memory defies linearity. She notes that violence done to the body remains in the body, playing out in actions rather than words. It is to be found in patterns of consciousness that are not part of ordinary awareness and that are not found in the constructions of language:

Trapped there, the violation seems to continue in a reverberating present that belies the supposed linearity of time and the possibility of endings. It at once has a certain pastness, is a sort of “memory-knowledge” as Mary Warnock would call it, and is not past, not “memory” – that is, a personal, narrated account of something completed, locatable in time – at all. Perhaps it is not even remembered, but only felt as a presence, or perhaps it shapes current events according to its template, itself unrecognised (Culbertson, 1995, p. 170).

The notion of corporeal remembering as a ‘reverberating present’ is extended in the Coda that closes the dissertation. Culbertson’s account provides an example of how ossified intercorporeal information limits future actions, shaping them ‘according to its template.’ I use the word ‘ossified’ here because it resonates with my own corporeal history. Emotional and attitudinal stances correspond to qualities of muscular holding and release. Feelings can become lodged in muscle tissue, such that the emotion is perpetuated long after the stimulus has passed. In my own case, this has felt like a process of ossification, whereby muscle becomes rigid like bone. This rigidity curtails what the body can do and what emotions can be felt. The curtailment often persists on a level deeper than conscious thought.

It is telling that in Culbertson’s account of trauma, memory is identified by its persistence as a corporeal presence rather than conscious thought. In a similar vein, the intercorporeal exchange between Jo and myself mentioned
at the beginning of this chapter can be understood as an instance of softening corporeal information that had become ossified. This exchange also provides a further instance of the intersection of ethics and aesthetics in choreographic practice.

To speak of inner tendencies towards movement, the dancer’s interaction with herself or the internal dialogue that shapes the surface might seem, in its interoceptive focus, to depart from the concept of intercorporeality. But what must be remembered is that intercorporeality is always already a remembering: it is not (or not only) about current embodied interactions, but about the residue of the gestures and postural attitudes we have acquired over a lifetime and which form part of our kinaesthetic memory. Paying interoceptive attention to this “tacit choreography” (Behnke, 1997, p. 181) is the first step towards shifting it. In the case of my solo practice, paying attention to the richness of the intercorporeal residues I had acquired through my work with Jo and Michaela was one of the first steps towards developing a style of solo performance based in remembering. This process is explored in the next section.

iv) Intercorporeality and Solo Performance

An important implication of the intersubjective nature of residue is that one is never performing solo. In this section, I look at intercorporeal residue through the trace of touch. When working solo in the development of here, now, attending to intercorporeal residue served multiple purposes. There was of course the desire for new movement pathways. There was also the need to draw on different kinds of intercorporeal information for distinct movement sections, as outlined in the previous chapter. But what I focus on here in relation to here, now is the way attending to intercorporeal remembering yielded a heightened sense of the multiplicity of selves in the act of performing.

In Part II of the dissertation, I made the point in several ways that tactility persists. In returning to dancing after two years of injury, I became aware of
the persistence of choreographic tactility, as remembered, imagined or potential intensities informing my movement. The particular knowledge I had of intercorporeality had arisen tactilely, in interactions with others. Indeed, it could be argued that intercorporeality is a facet of human existence most palpably expressed in acts of touch. What I found was that the tactilely intercorporeal self is carried into performance via the imaginative functioning of memory. In line with Weiss’ point that intercorporeality describes the multiple strands within the self, I found that awareness of this multiplicity could be constructively used to develop solo performance.

There were several ways in which tactility persisted in the absence of actual touch. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Network Chiropractic Spinal Analysis had marked the way I initiated movement and linked it with emotional states. My movement at this point was also marked by my prior work with Jo and Michaela, in which touch had become the template for remembering. When developing the practice of choreographic tactility, my dancing was vicarious, moving around Michaela and Jo, touching surfaces and joints, sensing the lines of force and impulse that the touch initiated. When I came to dance solo, I remembered these lines of force that had developed in their movement in response to touch. Those rememberings played themselves out in my dancing, and some of my movements recalled the idiosyncracies of their movement styles, which I had helped shape through touch. In these ways, touch continued to function as residue. This recalls Weiss’ notion of multiple body images forming a synthesis in which certain images rise to prominence according to circumstance.

But in addition to these residues, I had the sense that as I danced I was accompanied by the ghost of myself. For so long, my relationship to movement had been one of moving around the dancer, touching feet, shoulders, ankle, head and spine. Now as I danced myself, it was as though there were a ghostly second self, moving around me, touching surfaces and joints, drawing attention to three-dimensionality. The practice of instigating movement through touch had become internalised, and persisted despite the
absence of concrete touch. My perception of my body in movement had become a perception of myself accompanied by a tactile other, in relation to whom the movement occurred. The dilated kinaesthetic consciousness with which I danced allowed me to attend to successive parts of my self as though in response to the mobile touch I had used with Jo and Michaela. This is not to say that I danced in a way that passively responded to my rememberings or internalisation of choreographic tactility. As I outlined when analysing my work with Jo and Michaela in Chapter Four, there is a constant negotiation between responsiveness and agency when working with touch, a negotiation that forms the basis of an embodied ethics.

Understanding intercorporeality and its temporal dimension makes us more capable of generating change by adapting, refusing or incorporating the embodied offerings around us. These factors are at work in both my practice of choreographic tactility and my solo practice, in the ways indicated above. I consider my solo practice to be an extension rather than a departure from choreographic tactility. Intercorporeal remembering is always at play in the ways we move, allow ourselves to move, and allow ourselves to be moved. To develop a choreographic practice that revolves around this principle is not about adding a new dimension to our kinaesthetic existence. Rather, it is a recognition of the extent to which we are always already intercorporeally and temporally shaped. It is a process of intensifying a dynamic that is already at play in everyday life, however unconsciously. In then choosing to work at the level of these latent dimensions of self, we ground ourselves differently, open ourselves to others and to ourselves differently, know differently, and dance differently.

Choreographic tactility is one site for practising embodied ethics, as argued in the previous section and in Chapter Four. Here, I would add that the intercorporeal knowledge gained from tactile practices can be honed into a solo practice that remains oriented towards the other. In both instances, attending to intercorporeal residue paves the way for deep and open engagement. It is my hope that this engagement can transmit into the performance arena and be experienced by those who witness the work. In all
three instances then – the practice of touch with others, the residues of that in solo practice, and the witnessing relationship with an audience – it is my hope that intercorporeal remembering can be at the fore.

In the next section, I explore the third part of this triad of intercorporeal remembering. That is, I describe a performance domain in which intercorporeal remembering can be opened out into a community of others. Writing about such a performance domain is necessarily speculative: it is an expression of the perceptual climate I hope I created for *the backs of things* and *here, now*. As a performance maker, my practice involves making representational choices that condition, at least to a degree, what an audience can experience. It would therefore be disingenuous not to address some of these representational choices in the dissertation.

However, I have deliberately limited my discussion of this aspect of my practice. This is for two reasons. Firstly, to do so would take me into the territory of elucidating what the artwork was or what it ‘did.’ This would shift my writing into the realm of exegesis rather than dissertation, something I resist in the writing that accompanies my practice. As outlined in the Introduction, the dissertation provides a narrative of my practice rather than an exegesis of my performance folio. The second reason I have limited the discussion of the final artwork is that ultimately I cannot know what the audience experienced. Thus my statements in the following section are necessarily speculative: they are of the ‘I hope that’ rather than the ‘I know that’ variety.

v) In the presence of others

Jeff Friedman makes the succinct statement that “dance performances make conscious the underlying embodied habitus that permeates any culture’s complex social agreements” (Friedman, 2002, p. 161). In the case of both

34 The differences between an exegesis and dissertation are discussed at length in two chapters I am currently writing for a book on practice-led research in performance, to be published in 2009 by QUT Press.

35 I did of course, elicit responses from some audience members, and their words are found in the Coda. However, my aim in seeking their responses was to gather rememberings into a collective poetics rather than use their words to make claims about what the work ‘was’.
the backs of things and here, now, I hoped to challenge the complex social agreement of separative perception, a concept I critiqued with Behnke in Chapter One. My hope was that this could occur through foregrounding the sensibilities that arose through choreographic tactility, namely a deep engagement with intercorporeal remembering. In this section, I chart how I hoped that these sensibilities might be available to an audience.

In taking my developmental work with Jo and Michaela into performance, I was not interested in showing touch. Rather, I hoped that our practice had built towards an aesthetics of tactility that would be perceptible through the density of Michaela and Jo’s corporeal engagement. At this point it is worth recalling my comments at the start of Part II. There, I emphasised that my use of the word ‘tactility’ rather than ‘touch’ was designed to evoke a realm wider than only acts of touch. I wanted to include the quality or state of being tactile, and importantly for performance, the notion of tangibility. In bringing the backs of things to an audience, I wanted our practice of choreographic tactility to be tangible. This is not to say that I wanted it to be apparent that I had created the work through touch. Rather more simply, I hoped that the prior practice of touch could give rise to a charged performance domain where intercorporeal remembering was at the fore.

Jennifer Fisher is an art historian and curator with a specialisation in the aesthetics of the non-visual senses. She writes about actual gestures of touch enacted between performers and audience members. It could be said that these are performances of touch whereas mine are performances of tactility. However, I would venture to say that the performance of both touch and tactility yields similar performance domains. Fisher notes that touch performances give rise to a specific kind of performance domain characterised by a spatial density that she calls ‘volumetric’:

The corporealities of touch performances are complex. Touch is both visible as an actual gesture and invisible, sensed as corporeal positionality. While I have focussed on tactile enactments, these touch performances do not terminate at the skin […] I would like to suggest that such a synesthetic system is perceived by the tactile
modality of proprioception in discerning the performative context as a volumetric or “charged” space (Fisher, 2007, p. 176).

These then, are the features of the performance domain Fisher outlines. Firstly, that touch can mark a space despite being invisible, in that touch exists as a ‘corporeal positionality.’ By this I take her to mean that touch exists as a sensed potentiality or embodied intensity. In the case of my performances, I hope that this was apparent in the corporeal engagement of Michaela and Jo and later of myself. Secondly, Fisher suggests that this tactile potentiality is sensed by a viewer engaged in proprioceptive awareness of their own body. It is my hope that the corporeal engagement of the performer encourages corporeal experience in the audience, even if only on a very subtle level. Finally, Fisher indicates that sensing this tactile potentiality creates a space that is dense and three-dimensional.

Fisher’s formulation of the volumetric space created by touch stands in contrast to the rather flat dimensionality given by quotidian vision. New media theorist Mark Hansen makes a similar case for what he calls ‘haptic space’ (Hansen, 2004). In his formulation of space, the haptic can be understood as that which issues from the sense of touch. He analyses affectivity in the perception of digital art, suggesting that heightened affect can create a shift from visual space to haptic space. He characterizes the tactile modality of the haptic as being a seeing with the whole body:

[...] what is at stake in the tactile modality of the haptic is an affective apprehension of space in which vision has, as it were, been assimilated into the body. The affective body does not so much see as feel the space of the film; it feels it, moreover, as an energized, haptic spatiality within itself (Hansen, 2004, p. 232).

The assimilation of vision into the body so that the performance is felt rather than simply seen was certainly something I tried to foster. I sought to privilege tactile/kinaesthetic sensibilities rather than providing only a visual spectacle. The practice of choreographic tactility, both with Jo and Michaela and its residues in my solo work, generated a ‘seeing with the whole body’ in us as performers. We developed a corporeally dispersed and intercorporeally aware kinaesthetic consciousness that we carried into
performance. I hope that this invited a shift in perception for the audience, so that they did not see so much as feel the intercorporeal dialogues being played out in the volumetric space between them and us. This was fostered both in the manner of our engagement as performers and in the intimate way in which the two performance environments were configured. Alice Cummins articulates this in her response to here, now, quoted in full in the dissertation’s Coda:

I select my seat carefully – a round stool positioned without a determined direction. It is an invitation to a three-dimensional performance space. And it keeps me dynamic – I cannot collapse into a seat with sides and a back and a two-dimensional point-of-view. (Alice)

As Fisher notes in relation to the touch performances she discusses in her paper, the point is not to posit tactility as a superior mode for perceiving performance, but rather to enrich the mode in which we perceive performances through attending to tactile potentialities. Again, while she refers in the main to performances containing actual touch between performers and audience, her articulation has much in common with my aspirations for a performance domain characterised by tactile potentiality:

[…] positing touch as an alternative sense hierarchy is not the point. Rather, the conjunctions of tactility and visuality in the performances discussed here present a relational aesthetics of touch that can elaborate the energies and volitions inherent in contiguity and conjecture. Tactile affect and haptic sensorial mediation necessitate a more synesthetic conception of the senses. As contiguous touch occurs between performer and audience, detached perception dissolves, and possibilities materialize for mutually dynamic encounters in time and space. In contrast to the visualist legacy, which carries a logic separating subject and artwork, a haptic aesthetic engages knowledge emergent in proximity, undereffed presence, and in the in-between spaces of becoming (Fisher, 2007, p. 176).

It is clear, then, that the performance domain I sought was one in which there was an interaction between corporealities, even if this interaction was as subtle as Behnke’s ghost gestures. Performance is ultimately a domain of interaction and negotiation between people. In their typology of performative knowledge, Lockford and Pelias emphasise negotiation. They define communication as “the place where people constitute themselves
through interaction with others in contexts” (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, p. 433). In improvisation, this is seen as the negotiation of boundaries wherein “performers negotiate and coordinate the selves that they make present through interaction” (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, p. 433).

In their introduction to *The Senses in Performance*, performance theorists Lepecki and Banes start with the premise that the embodied self is not a stable phenomenon but rather exists in constant negotiation with a similarly inconstant world (Banes & Lepecki, 2007). They then describe the particular role of performance practices within that constant negotiation: “[n]o wonder then that performance practices become privileged means to investigate processes where history and body create unsuspected sensorial-perceptual realms, alternative modes for life to be lived” (Banes & Lepecki, 2007, p. 1). In the case of *here, now* and *the backs of things*, the unsuspected sensorial-perceptual realm that I hoped to foster both in the studio and in performance was one of attention to intercorporeal remembering.

The performance of intercorporeal remembering is a negotiation in itself. This was particularly so in the case of *here, now* because of its autobiographical origins. Development psychologist Susan Engel writes on the cultural role of memory that while private reverie may well be the most intense experience of remembering, it is not our most common way of remembering (Engel, 1999). More commonly, remembering occurs in a relational context, such as regaling friends with a tale, testifying in court, or reminiscing with family members. Her description of what this relational context does to memories is useful for understanding the performance of memory:

> Much of our remembering involves public transactions of one kind or another. […] By public transaction, I mean all the ways in which we share, negotiate, and present our memories to other people, including collaborating with others in the construction of a past event. The moment that an internal image, sound, smell or scene is told to another person, it becomes a new phenomenon, emerging from, but not confined to an internal image or scene. Once we remember with or for others, the process of remembering depends as
much on motivation and social context as it does on any neural network (Engel, 1999, p. 9).

This recalls my need to treat memory with the looseness of fiction in order to maintain its liveliness as a provocation for performance. As Engels notes, many a memoirist has commented on the need to “sift through the facts to get to the real story” (Engel, 1999, p. 12). However, it can also work in the opposite direction. That is to say when taking a memory from the realm of private reverie into the realm of artistic media, the memory can take on a firmness it did not have in the initial private reverie. This firming-up of the memory can take the guise of conferring narrative or shape, or even identifying the memory as a memory:

What may have been inchoate becomes sequential. What was fleeting takes on substance. What might not even have been clearly marked as a memory now becomes embedded in grammar that marks it as something remembered, something from the past (Engel, 1999, pp. 10-11).

The grammar of memory is related to the general structure of language, which is characterised by conditions of exchange. Cândida Smith discusses the way meaning arises in language, through conditions of exchange surrounding the statement or proposition (Cândida Smith, 2002). He notes that meaning does not reside in the proposition or statement itself, but rather in the potential for further exchange. Indeed, one can only claim to have created a meaningful situation if what has been said generates a response that has the potential for further responses. These conditions of exchange extend from words to gestures, which only have meaning if they invite respondents into a common space. This ‘common space’ is useful for thinking about the space of performance:

The magic of the artist is an ability to reproduce a sense of shared space outside of immediate face-to-face encounters. Creative power to stimulate reactions brings to the surface patterns of habituated responses articulating rules needed for the given communication to occur successfully. Our bodies must be inseparable from the rules governing communicative exchange, or artists would lack the power to make something absent feel as if it were present. Conversely, the always present rules normally feel as if they were not there until work with particular power collages concept into a sensible pattern.
of gesture extending physically from one mind to others (Cándida Smith, 2002, p. 4).

In the space of communication, gestures extend from one corporeally dispersed mind to another. Nowhere is the notion of ‘corporeal dialogue’ more pertinent than in the communicative exchange of performance. When witnessing intercorporeal remembering, we are always engaged in a double movement. As Merleau-Ponty articulates in *The Visible and the Invisible*, every act of perception involves opening oneself to the world while simultaneously delving into one’s own memories and imagination so as to make sense of experience. In perceiving, we draw up fossils from the depths of prior experience (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1968, p. 132). Or as Riley formulated it, we attend more fully if we combine perceptual and recalled images (Riley, 2004). It is this latter part of the double movement of perception that I will focus on as this final chapter of the dissertation comes to a close.

**Conclusion: In My Own Remembering**

She, a girl, a young woman, the performer, Siobhan, is seen in this landscape...achingly suggestive of lives lived, places inhabited, opportunities scattered. It is a reminder of a place in my life – an island filled with memories across generations, of intimacy, loss, even death. I am in my own remembering even as I am in this space watching this performance of “here, now”. (Alice)

The double nature of perception can be a generative factor in the domain of performance. Alice Cummin’s comment that she was in her own remembering while watching *here now* is a poetically succinct rendering of the kind of performance domain that is precious to me. I sought, in creating *here, now* to allow space for a personal experience of remembering in the audience. In this, I was guided by my experience some years before making *here, now* of watching Aleksandr Sokurov’s 1997 film *Mother and Son*. The film is achingly spare and meditative, and allowed memories to surface that had been dormant in me for a long time. ‘To surface’ is an apt verb here, because it was as though my memories ‘surfed’ the movement of the film like a wave.
This double perception, reaching into one’s own remembering while witnessing a performance, is the point at which my focus on intercorporeal remembering crosses over into that of the audience member. My hope is that the density of the performance domain created by intercorporeal remembering allows his or her own memories to surf(ace) as the performance unfolds. In the context of improvisation, Lisa Nelson expresses a similar desire to stimulate a correlative experience in the audience as in the performer: “I want to stimulate the awareness of the viewer that she/he is engaged in the same process as the performers, in the improvisational process of composing experience” (Nelson, 1995/1996, p. 14). This shifts the idea of what constitutes performance. It places priority on what is found in performance – as much for the performer as for the witness – rather than what is displayed. Performance becomes a witnessed somatic experience, and further, an invitation to one’s own somatic experiencing and remembering, rather than a spectacle.

As will be suggested in the Coda, my practice has entailed a deliberate use of the past to bring about an amplification of the performer’s presence. My hope is that this style of remembering and the presence it yields creates a mnemonic climate in which the audience is invited into their own remembering. To clarify the perceptual space that I hope my performances opened up for the audience, I turn to a discussion of stillness. In a paper on the performative qualities of stillness, André Lepecki makes a link between Steve Paxton’s use of stillness and John Cage’s use of silence. For both Paxton and Cage, what is enacted is an amplification of perception, of movement in the first instance and of sound in the second. The power lies not in claiming either silence or stillness as valid modes of performance but rather in seeing what modes of perception they open onto:

Paxton’s stillness, just as Cagean silence, is less a compositional strategy than an experiential rehearsal for what philosopher José Gil calls microscopy of perception, a mode of perception leading to a “meta-phenomenology” (Lepecki, 2000, p. 346).

Intercorporeal remembering similarly opens onto a mode of perception that is of a different order to quotidian perception. This is most certainly the case
for the performer, engaged in a somatic dialogue between remembering, imagining and sensation. I hope it is also the case for the audience. Witnessing the performance of intercorporeal remembering invites a state of kinaesthetic reverie in the witness. Lepecki notes that the still body engages the audience into “perceptual intensification” (Lepecki, 2000, p. 348). The perceptual intensification encountered when witnessing intercorporeal remembering is a product of the resonance between past and present in the performer. Lepecki’s description of the effect of performing stillness can also be read as a way of thinking about the effect of performing intercorporeal remembering:

It performs a call for multi-layered perception – while it is attached to a performing subject it nevertheless resonates with the many frailties and histories each body (the dancer’s, the audience’s) carries in that space between subjective core and body-image (Lepecki, 2000, p. 362).

In this chapter I have sought to clarify the extent to which we are intercorporeally constituted. To inquire into intercorporeality, from the perspective of both ethics and aesthetics, necessitates an inquiry into corporeal histories. For Behnke and Weiss, this inquiry springs from the belief that practices of embodiment are one of the vectors by which subtle yet powerful social change become possible. In my practice, the inquiry into intercorporeality has encompassed these ethical concerns and taken them into the aesthetic domain of performance.
CODA: REVERBERATIONS

Within my inquiry, acts of performance have at times forced a summary of what I know. Such acts have functioned as a prism through which the multiple strands of the inquiry pass. The moment-to-moment decisions that are made in performance call into the present instant what is most useful and resonant from within the period of inquiry. This could be termed a condensation of somatic and performative knowledge.

In lieu of a conclusion I provide instead a speculative and poetic ending that seeks to enact a condensation of this kind. The ‘speculation’ touches briefly on resonance as the quality of performance that has guided the inquiry. The ‘poetics’ entails a multi-voiced remembering of here, now. This poetics of remembering does not evidence ‘the past’. Rather, it evidences the particular dialogues with the past that I have staged in the dual modalities of writing and performance during the course of the inquiry.

i) Resonance

Philosopher Keith Ansell Pearson suggests that memory be thought of not as a return to an originary moment, but rather as a perpetual displacement (Ansell Pearson, 2008). This repetition without an original yields a lively resonance rather than exactitude. Ansell Pearson describes this as “the strange return with the present moment set in resonance with an earlier one” (Ansell Pearson, 2008). He is speaking of Deleuze’s account of memory in Proust, but his notion of setting a past moment in resonance with a present one is also a potent means describing what I sought to bring about in performance.

The somatic dialogue between the present and past moment creates a resonance that I would put forward as the performance quality that guides my practice. This resonance is generated by the somatic triad of remembering, sensing and imagining. These three activities sustain the interplay between past and present. The emphasis on current perception and
imagination does not mean that such remembering is not grounded in the ‘truth’ of a memory. The potency of intercorporeal remembering is most certainly due to its rootedness in actual experience.

In my work, this rootedness is seen in the very palpable practice of choreographic tactility and in the autobiographical anchors of here, now. But working with these rememberings does not entail faithful repetition so much as a gathering of the past into a future potentiality. It entails harnessing rememberings in a projective movement aimed at the ongoing present moment of performance rather than a nostalgic past. The apparent contradiction of being fully ‘present’, as one must be in the moment of performance, and yet also engaged in active remembering is what sustains the work. With this thought, the inquiry comes full circle and returns to the conversation I had with Bill Henson in 2002 when first making Ink:

You have to understand the difference between intimacy and familiarity / Unapproachable but tenderly close / Ultimately unknowable but still with a breathing presence / This contradiction is what keeps the work suspended / Then, the space becomes charged with longing – although it is not exactly loss (Fragments from personal communication with Bill Henson, 2002).

It could be said that ‘the contradiction that keeps the work suspended’ has been a guiding, if unconscious, intuition during the inquiry into tactility, remembering and performance. In conversation, Henson spoke of the contradiction between intimacy and distance in his photographic subjects. In my work, I have gravitated towards the contradiction of actively gathering the past into the present moment of performance. The somatic oscillation between past and present in the act of performance involves an imbrication of apparent opposites that can never be completely contained or resolved. In this lies its value as a performance practice.

ii) A poetics of remembering

The writing that follows is a poetic remembering of the multi-modal performance work, here, now (Melbourne, March 22nd – 25th; Sydney, October 11th – 13th, 2007). The work is in three consecutive ‘movements’
with discrete modalities: video installation (14 mins), text (7 mins) and movement (25 mins). The written poetic remembering of the live performance work incorporates various voices. My own writing is found in the following forms: in 1: Video as a description of the video installation; in 2: Text as the full text that was recorded with Nikki Heywood and heard during the performance; and in 3: Movement as an articulation of the movement states I worked through in performance.

Re-visiting and developing the choreography (November ‘06 through February ‘07) and the six performances in Melbourne in March ‘07 represented a personal watershed. It was the first time I had been able to dance in two years. The un-danced history I had accumulated in my body during that dormant period surfaced in the performance season, making it an intense experience. After the short season, I was shocked by how quickly it had passed, and I felt a keen hunger to know more about how it had been experienced by others. I was also thinking ahead towards the dissertation, and aware that the work might need to be languaged in ways I was not be capable of, being the solo performer.  

Shortly after the performance season, visual artist John Wolseley sent me a spontaneous response to the work. This prompted me to ask a curator and two other performance-makers who had attended the performances to write a response to here, now. They were Alice Cummins (dancer and BMC® practitioner), Jenny Long (curator) and Nikki Heywood (director and performer). I sent them the writing that I include here at 3: Movement, asking if it helped them remember and/or imagine the work. I sought a way of writing about the performance that might induce multi-sensory embodiedrememberings (and imaginings) of it. I sought to resist regarding the memory of a performance as being exclusively a series of visual images replayed in the mind’s eye.

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36 Early in my candidature, my attention was drawn to the intricacies of performance documentation (both written and digital) by conversations with fellow artist researcher, Simon Ellis.
While *here, now* is a solo performance, it has arisen from multiple collaborations with other artists over a considerable period of time. It is fitting, then, that the words used to describe it are not exclusively mine. It is particularly fitting that the words of Nikki Heywood are present here. It was during a creative process led by her that the seeds for the text of *here, now* were sown, a decade ago. The words of John Wolseley, Alice Cummins, Jenny Long and Nikki Heywood are intermingled with my own writing. This foregrounds the shared nature of performance and reminds us of the intercorporeality of remembering.

As mentioned in the Introduction, much of what the inquiry as a whole has come to mean resides in the live works themselves. However, the poetic remembering of *here, now* is not intended as a nostalgic gesturing towards that past point of ‘expired’ liveness. Rather, the traces of the live work that I orchestrate here are intended to induce an experience in the present. I hope that this ‘experience in the present’ might reverberate with rememberings of many kinds, but also gather these rememberings up into a new way of knowing *here, now*. To remember is to create something anew each time, as I noted in Part III. Instead of the ossification implied by the memorial, I hope that the ways I use language to evoke multiple experiences of the live performance might effect alternative modes of remembering performance: as active trace, as current imagining, informed but unfettered by its past liveness.

I include thoughts from Alice, Jenny, John and Nikki on writing about their rememberings of a performance about remembering. In articulating this mnemonic task, interesting qualities of remembering arose, such as Alice’s hint that certain things can surface and be remembered specifically through the act of writing.
[my writing] is my response to your work and to your request ... I decided to write before reading what you had written as I wanted to see what I recalled. What had remained, what was hidden and then in the writing what is remembered. Then I read your words and ‘felt’ them in me .... I think they are a rich form of connective tissue that does speak of your performance and invites an embodied state before viewing any video. Perhaps you could request this reading before ‘viewing’?

Alice

I think your memory prompt [...] has a light touch which makes it easy to overlay onto my own memory of the performance, the words don’t get in the way but provide another layer of richness. The indication of the kinds of triggers you were using to give the work that level of intensity and strength, which so obviously affected the audience, is very moving in itself. (Jenny)

So, today, I gave your words a fast read. Then typed up what I’d written the day or two after seeing you perform. After spending time thinking about the piece while typing my stuff up, I went back and reread your words more carefully. Through your description I was able to revisit each of the different sections of your work and remember their qualities very clearly... you took me inside your experience. As a performer I understand the topography you detail very well.

(Nikki)

For me as someone who does not see much contemporary dance I found the way there were different dimensions as the evening evolved took me to unexpected emotional places and states of being. It’s always so difficult to describe such things in words - the whole point of any art form being to express things which can only be expressed in their particular medium

- but....

(John)

[later] I seem to have become distracted from the task of giving you feedback on your text to remembering your performance but perhaps that is a sign that in fact your writing works the way you hoped it would, as an re-entry point back to the lived experience of the piece. (Jenny)
ENTERING

A reverie of memory, of childhood, place and family. Of grieving and letting go. (Nikki)

I select my seat carefully – a round stool positioned without a determined direction. It is an invitation to a three-dimensional performance space. And it keeps me dynamic – I cannot collapse into a seat with sides and a back and a two-dimensional point-of-view. (Alice)

here, now evokes the paradox of memory – here fragments of wind-blown ephemerality and the sensual tangibility of lived experience (embedded in cells, nostrils and finger tips) can coexist and speak to each other. (Nikki)

VIDEO

What I remember is this:
We wait in the dark
It is full of anticipation
Light flickers
Images are revealed
It is a place that pulls me
Draws me towards itself.
(Alice)

here, now... a work in 3 parts... begins in a quiet space with a 14 minute pool of tranquil video light projected across a structure, a collection of surfaces in the form of vertical poles reminiscent of a disused pier or an amputated grove of ghost gums... the footage shows a pale figure in a blue dress. A woman navigates a squelching path across mud flats, brushes through long grass, soft ferns and treads the line of shore. A document of Siobhan’s journey to an island of many layers, surrounded by thick mud. An actualised landscape of sticky memory - keep moving or you’ll sink. (Nikki)

The opening mangrove swamp section where the figure is both connected and separate from the landscape bled through the rest of the work so that to begin with I tended to see the figure as a living form but not necessarily a human being. (Jenny)
She, a girl, a young woman, the performer, Siobhan, is seen in this landscape. It is hauntingly beautiful, achingly suggestive of lives lived, places inhabited, opportunities scattered. It is a reminder of a place in my life – an island filled with memories across generations, of intimacy, loss, even death. I am in my own remembering even as I am in this space watching this performance of “here, now”.

(Alice)

There were times in the more minimal dawning earlier phases of the evening when I felt I was seeing movements – configurations which did not say ‘human body’ or ‘Sea’ or ‘landscape’ but somehow were about the vital something - the secret of the correspondences (correspondences (!) between all those things. (John)

TEXT

The 2nd section is purely recorded voice (my own) telling of a return, to an island of family and a past of lovingly detailed textures and surfaces... a lawn in need of mowing, a faded garden past its flush of spring colour, the dusty well fingered books and later the cracks in the wall of her room. Where the remembered objects and peripheral sounds hold us at the edge of a whirlpool of longing. The centrepiece of the text is a reverie on the time of her father’s building of this wall, this room for her. A room with her own window to see the water. She refers to a later visit, after her father’s death, where she finds the remains of old tobacco. Tobacco he would have smoked while building this room for her... later she rolls and smokes it...inhaling him and her younger self...a sense that the tears have long since dried...There is both the ache of grief and the dry distance of experience. The woman who has moved on, yet is suddenly caught by the rich recall of her senses. Through both the text and the performance of here, now we move with her beyond nostalgia to a place of poignant regard, hovering at an observation deck with a view that catches your breath. (Nikki)
She is returning to the island after a long absence.

An absence – elongated – months, years, a decade perhaps.

Plane touches down. She blinks her way out into summer stillness. She is taller. The other is smaller, shrunken – greets her with gardenias – their scent – pungent, old – in a broken basket.

Ferry crossing full of news. His news.

This world – this particular world – it kept rotating. Her absence didn’t tilt its axis.

In the car, gliding through fields, grey green affronts her eye. Light is sharp as a lance.

Body remembers the car’s movement, the ruts and angles of these familiar roads. Were she blind she would still know when they had arrived.

Grass needs a cut. Her feet get bogged in mud. Someone does not come running out to help.

Standing in the yard, knee deep in grass, on the island, in the city’s absence – the silence is so deep it rings in her ears.

Wisteria is finished but is not yet flushed with green. She can smell the blooms still in their decay too sweet. Then he is in front of her – bloated, wobbling. They embrace, but it is too unfamiliar. She pulls away and goes inside.

House smells different. Years have added extra layer to its odour.

Music plays not yet, but here is the room where it will sound. Piano trios, chords with which she will go part way to death with him. That will be, perhaps, when the other chords will snap – when the umbilical embrace will come unstuck – gravity has never been explained.

Here, on the island, silence so deep it rings in her ears.

Things come to her, slowly, on the sly, like the tide slipping in over mud flats.

Months, years, a decade perhaps – it slips in towards her like water over mud.

Here in this hallway the books begin. Before – before the absence – she used his Greek lexicon to press violets. Violet juice obscuring his definitions – she couldn’t stand that violets would just die there below her window – send their scent, dense, through the crack between floor and wall, and then just rot.
Never told him the crack was growing wider. That the wall was slowly, slowly falling away from the floor. Didn’t want him to feel he had done a bad job when he built her that wall – when he gave her high windows that opened onto the sea – that gave her green bathed light from the new leaves in spring and stark blue light in the mornings of winter. She was there when the wall was built. In an old blue dress. Autumn.

Like water slipping in, things come to her. She was there in an old blue dress when the wall was built. Autumn. It was autumn pressing in and giving them space. They were out of sight. He was smoking as he worked. She was close to the ground. Smell of rotting leaves – she was curled up in a pile of them. Sound of sawing – smell of woodshavings. She pressed them to her head.

Outside and above, the seasons raged and wheeled. Currents swept, winds blew, things unfolded, reached up and then came back down to ground. But here was still this moment. Still.

From her pile of leaves sensed cold was coming. He was smoking as he worked. Opera crackled on the radio. The human voice is an amazing thing, he said, back then before the absence – elongated – months, years, a decade perhaps.

Here, now, returning – on the island – silence, deep, rings in her ears like a trapped fly.

Here, finally, is the room that is now only vaguely his but soon will become him for her. Some room, some sunroom where she will later say that things grow and things shatter when she speaks of that which is growing in him. And here in this sunroom he will be luminous and immanent and she will not feel in the instant when death comes.

Later, far away, she will return in thought to this, his room, and be drunk with the smell of musty books, eating themselves in disuse. Putty will be coming unstuck from the floorboards and she will be there, here, close to the ground, wanting to eat the putty, digest the grain of the wood, press her mouth against the wooden boards, behold the wood of these things he constructed, chew up the shreds of journals bravely begun and letters not sent, and out by the gap in the wall smoke the rest of by then moth-eaten cigarettes she will find there, hidden, she supposes, when he built things and she was small and knew autumn and wore an old blue dress.

Things go from her, slowly, on the sly, like the tide slipping out – out over mud flats.

Now, on the island, she’s left with a silence so deep it rings in her ears. (Siobhan)
She occupies a horizontal space – this vulnerability is heart renderingly familiar. Elongated and elevated we have to turn in another direction. Shift and see revealed a slither of light – Siobhan moving. (Alice)

i) She is high up, but close to the wood beneath her. The ground is a magnet that she momentarily escapes and then comes back down to rest. She is somnolent, on the verge of sleep but tugged back to the edge of wakefulness. Watching her is soporific – as though we are watching her dream, watching her as she dreams apart from us. There is sadness in her, and the arising and subsiding of breath in water. Something surfaces to be said but has no words yet. (Siobhan)

I have to admit my subjective relationship to this work extended to a strong sense of identification with Siobhan’s physical presence. A sense she could be my own daughter, or me at a younger age. (Nikki)

ii) She comes down a level, alerted by a warbling bird. Her eyes are glued to the horizon with orphic necessity. Going down the slope, she is full of resistance, wary, not sharing too much, guarded. Drawing herself back into bones. Going, not wanting to go, her mouth opens as though to speak or to gulp the last of the air. She descends as though it is a final act, as though knowing she won’t be able to go back up, as though entering cold water. An electrical surge glimmers in the fingertips, a spike of recognition. Leaving the slope, she launches herself into remembering, like slipping off the end of a jetty into water that is already deep. (Siobhan)

One woman’s dance amongst the myriad of other lives. She picks her way delicately. Her dress shrinking as she weaves a more complex narrative. The corresponding less is more – an invitation to look again – (Alice)

iii) Now, she has arrived. How to shift from dread and reluctance to a more willing remembering? The landscape starts to work on her, to infiltrate her like the slip between mud and water, and she finds her way back in. Her hands start to sense, to lead the body into recollection. Remembering the shape of his face, the dimensions of someone absent. Leaning towards the emotion that belongs to this place in which she finds herself. Not getting too good at it, staying vulnerable. Letting the emotion open up, letting the emotion open her up. Peeling off layers of skin, vibratile. Threads of
movement punctuated by stillness, giving her a chance to feel, to catch up. Not expressing but experiencing. She is companioned by another, by others. (Siobhan)

Then ‘she’ is dancing in front of us, close, the phrase of movement unravels. It is distilled. We can see leg, muscle, back, and foot clearly. I am being carried backwards and forwards in time. It is tidal. (Alice)

Accompanied by the light touch of Dom’s sound... Siobhan inhabited the once lived environment of the video... water, birds, distant planes...and an interior of creaking boards, snatches of opera touched on in the text... the sound of a man clearing his throat, tapping a pipe. A man both present and absent. (Nikki)

iv) She is a child at play in leaves, in dappled light, in the sharpening of autumn. The animate and inanimate worlds are in a web of play around her. A game is made, followed, abandoned. Her interest is fickle and unencumbered. Light, restless, curious, onward bounding. She is held in place by the presence of another, attending gently. (Siobhan)

I entered the ease of Siobhan’s viscerality, gained access to her pleasure and her curiosity in complete inhabitation of her body’s history... I remember whistling, breath released, delicate fingertips, creamy voluptuous legs suspended in air... a fluid moving between states... between playfulness and soulfulness ...moving into the shapes of emotion and tender memory. Visiting the lost parts of herself. Like sitting for a moment in a familiar chair, and finding traces of dust. Moving on. Not detached, but wholly present without attachment. Siobhan moved with a sense that there was indeed nothing else she could do at this moment... the necessity to reveal... (Nikki)

v) She is on the brink of change, aging with the shifting of the light. She pauses on the threshold of a state more serious, slips into a differently aged self. Gravity pulls her towards a particular moment, a moment on the wall where something was lost. She walks, simply but with a storm gathering in her belly. On the wall, she catches at this moment in the light, like trapping a moth in a jar, grasping at the straws of something she can’t name. (Siobhan)

vi) She is propelled, she bolts from the wall, scattering urgently into the space. Her feet switch rapidly with the cadence of a heart monitor, florescent graffiti shooting across a dark screen. Her fingers scurry like a maze of spiders, nerve-endings on fire with the last days of a life. Grains of
phosphorescence glinting at night in a dark estuary. She is halated in the light recalling the moment of his death, remembering the pale luminescence glowing under the papery layers of his skin as he passed elsewhere. (Siobhan)

The narrative of the voice, and evocation of the room, cigarettes, dance music gave the figure an emotional and human density while retaining a sense that it had come out of that tidal zone between land and water and was part of it. (Jenny)

vii) She walks, to escape and to be lost. Whistling, leaning in against the wall out the back, recalling the gesture of his smoking, swaying slightly like she’s part of the movement of the air, moved and moving onwards. (Siobhan)

The ending arrives unannounced and my body sinks into the depths of it, the thickness of it and the exhalation of endings ... (Alice)
LIST OF REFERENCES


Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). The primacy of perception, and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history, and politics. [Evanston, Ill.]: Northwestern University Press.


APPENDICES

1: Credits for the works *the backs of things* and *here, now* which comprise the performance folio of the thesis.

2: ‘Plain Language Statement’ for research participants.

3: ‘Consent Forms’ for principal research participants Michaela Pegum and Joanne White.
here, now

Video:
Camera: Michaela Pegum
Location: French Island, Victoria
Performance: Siobhan Murphy
Video Editing: Michalea Pegum with Siobhan Murphy
Sound Recording and Editing: Dominic Redfern
Sculptural projection surfaces: Abi Temby
Screen: Abi Temby and Michaela Pegum

Text:
Words: Siobhan Murphy
Voice: Nikki Heywood
Sound recording: Dominic Redfern.

Movement:
Choreography and performance: Siobhan Murphy
Lighting and spatial design: Jenny Hector
Sound recording and editing: Dominic Redfern
Original cello recording: Anthea Caddy
Costume: Hieu Cat
Stage manager: Julia Smith
Lighting operator: Adam Hardy
Sound system design: Tom Willis

the backs of things

Choreography: Siobhan Murphy
Performance: Michaela Pegum and Jo White
Lighting: Jenny Hector
Sound: Eamon Sprod

Video documentations: Dominic Redfern with camera assistance by Michael Quinlan.