

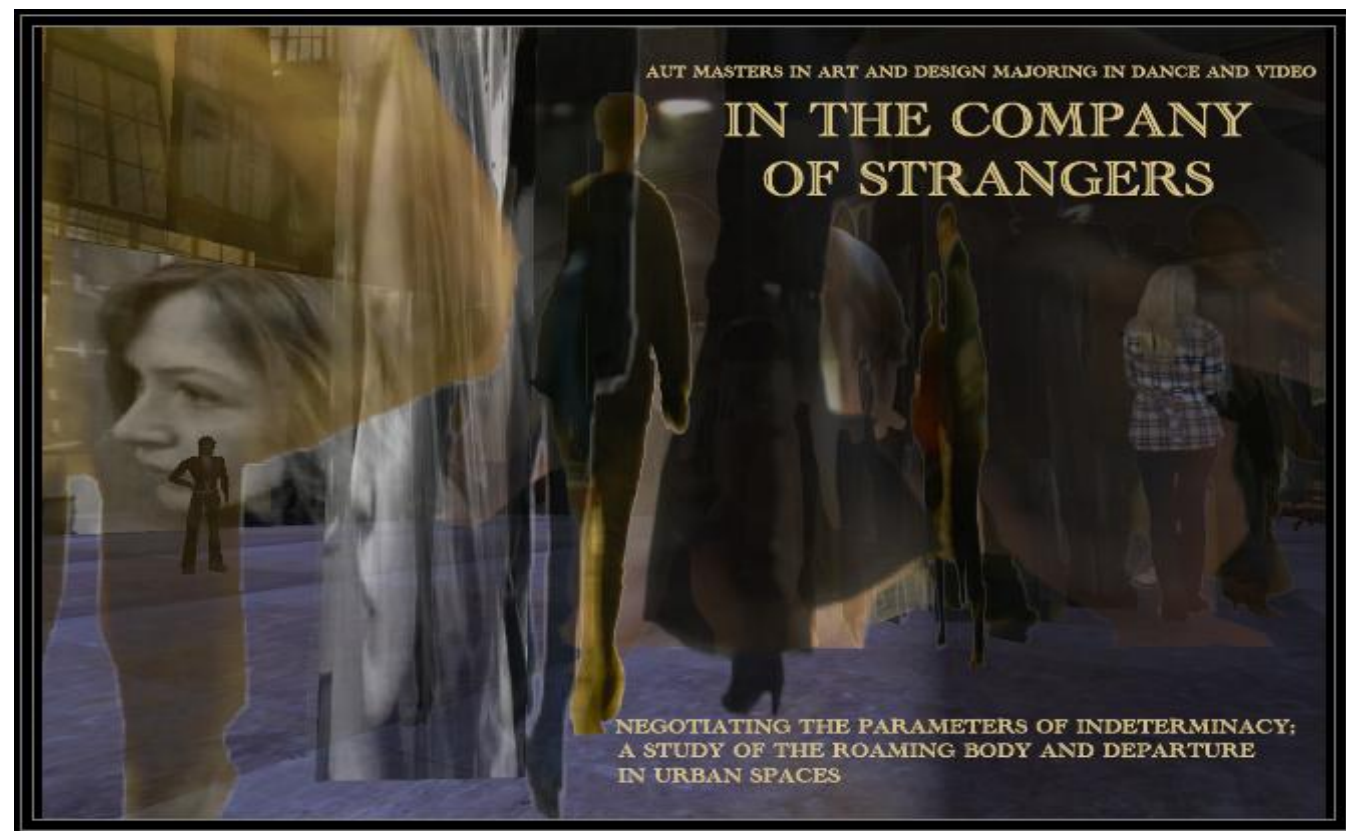
# In the Company of Strangers

Negotiating the Parameters of Indeterminacy; a study of the Roaming  
Body and Departure in Urban Spaces

An exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the  
Degree of Master of Art and Design  
(Majoring in Dance and Video) 2010

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*Figure 1. In the Company of Strangers. Image, Mike Baker*

### **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements and references), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Mike Baker 10.6.10

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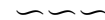
Last but not least, my love and enormous appreciation must go to my family. My wife, Fiona, for being extraordinarily, selflessly, tirelessly and lovingly my principal dance partner, photographer and confidant during this three year Masters study period, while being also Mother to our two boys at home, completing her own Degree in Psychology and working at her own full-time employment. My thanks and love go to our two boys, Robbie and Kāhurā for their patience, love and understanding during the period of my Masters study.

### **Abstract:**

This performance-based project scrutinizes indeterminacy as a mediating force impinging upon our behaviour and its subsequent impact on the nature and constituency of engagements and dialogue between people in urban spaces. Concepts centering on the dynamics of departure are being investigated with focus upon the Multi User Virtual Environment (MUVE), Second Life as a facet of real life (the term 'real life' will henceforth be referred to in this document within the context of Second Life, as First Life). Experienced through the vehicle of the Roaming Body,<sup>1</sup> our meetings and encounters with people and places frequently manifest as disjunct communiqués and mis-engagements. I am asserting that this is due to the inevitability in our existence of indeterminacy acting as a significant factor in the articulation of our relations with others, reinforcing our description as time-based entities traversing the passage of the everyday. I maintain that this is frequently evidenced in our behaviours through the occurrence (notwithstanding arrivals) of a continual, pre-emptive state of departure.

Indeterminacy implies motion and emerges, as Massumi asserts, through '... an unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary ...'.<sup>2</sup> We, as humans, are constantly being drawn away – always either approaching or embracing involuntarily, a 'state-of-Leaving' which co-mingles with and unerringly erodes our efforts to stay engaged with another in the here and now. In my dance and video practice, interventionist dance strategies are being used to prompt and interrogate the constituents of departure within encounters in designated public places.

Experimental movement frameworks employed are informed by the discipline of Contact Improvisation Dance and Authentic Movement. The working process is being documented using a range of video narrative.



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<sup>1</sup> Def: 'The Roaming Body' - the human body as an entity mediated by indeterminacy itself, which can therefore never be fully committed to a set position or location in space and time (Mike Baker, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* Duke University Press, Durham & London, (p.5).



***Figure 2. Embodied Surfaces - Rollo Kohime aka Mike Baker and Fiona Baker inscribed in the simulacrum build of Wellington Railway Station on the NMIT eduisland of Koru, Second Life 2009. Image, Mike Baker.***

## **Introduction - Indeterminacy and the Roaming Body:**

In this exegesis, I am investigating theories which indicate a relational dynamic between indeterminacy and certain human behaviours emerging within experienced duration. These theories are formulated through my empirically based research. I am asserting that due to the effects of indeterminacy, our existence as humans is governed by the experiencing and management (largely unconscious) of a continuous state of lived dislocation.

I will attempt here to define and give conceptual and physical substance to this state of dis-location as the herald of an agency in the human body I am describing as the Roaming Body and in my practice, endeavour to demonstrate how the forces of indeterminacy here are represented. My intention is to establish robust relationships between First Life<sup>1</sup> and the MUVE<sup>2</sup> metaverse of Second Life; indeterminacy occurring between what I maintain are not real and virtual domains but facets of one reality state, emerging and defined through the practice of this Roaming Body. The presence and effects of the indeterminate Roaming Body in us as humans will be questioned and examined. Also, the substance of their conjoined states-of-agency which I maintain is, as a single entity, responsible for certain dynamic tensions which emerge in notions of human belonging, the self and identity. This discussion will progressively critique my performative research practice and how this has sought to engage with these stated descriptors and their implications. I anticipate that this process will assist in moving my argument toward the recognition of the existence of a lived blended-reality between First and Second Life, subject to and mediated by the affects of indeterminacy emerging through the event of departure.

What is the Roaming Body? What are the constituents of the Roaming Body and how might they possess indeterminate properties? How may the manifestation of the Roaming Body be evidenced in everyday human behaviours in which the description of indeterminacy can be recognized beyond the theoretical? How might indeterminacy be active as a force sufficiently potent to tilt our lives toward a constant state of departure? My aim is to contextualise and investigate these questions in this exegesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Please read 'First Life' in this document as that dimension which is commonly and loosely referred to by most people and even practitioners of online Multi User Virtual Environments as 'Real Life'.

<sup>2</sup> 'MUVE' - Multi User Virtual Environment for extended role playing on the Internet, in this instance: Second Life



I offer here a definition of the term, 'Indeterminacy' which, I believe, is significant within the context of this work: the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle which is founded in quantum mechanics, asserts that both the position and momentum of a given particle cannot be determined simultaneously: 'The more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known in this instant and vice versa' (Heisenberg, 1927). In other words it could be said that one is unable to record scientifically, evidence of a given body that is both static and moving at the same time. If one cannot measure something, does this make the non-finding absolute? Is the definition deconstructable? Given that we register the activity, is it possible perhaps to measure empirically, through the senses, this unstable activity in one body taking place in two situations at once? Despite the scientific, physical non-finding, does this mean that one's 'attention' cannot be in two places at once? (Is 'attention', being measurable, physical and actual - not synonymous with 'body'?) Or one's desires, intent, perception? I suspect that this is not the case. I am suggesting that through acknowledging and assuming in ourselves the 'state-of-leaving', it is possible to transfer one's presence in the form of intent, from 'here' to 'there' simultaneously and that there is physical, visible evidence for this in scenarios involving engagement between people in the street, (see Indeterminacy and Pre-emptive Departure, p.18). I introduce an alternative definition of indeterminacy through the lens of Slavoj Žižek, on p. 23.

My interdisciplinary performance-based research practice scrutinizes and presents the state of indeterminacy as a prime mover of both, our physical bodies and the perception of our presence in space and time. I am seeking to define this force and its effects as they emerge through the 'Roaming Body', a persona which I am suggesting that we as humans unconsciously accommodate in our respective make-ups. This persona emerges in my work as a conduit for the emergence of indeterminate states, rendered and made visible through my performing body. The identity of the Roaming Body in this discussion therefore, is as interlocutor. According to Deleuze, in *The Fold Leibniz and the Baroque*, Leibniz interprets the modern human subject as nomadic, always in the process of becoming. Here Deleuze examines Leibniz's assertion that contemporary views of history and events are multi-faceted signs in motion. I suggest that we as humans are similar as composites; multifarious events, signatures of intent-in-motion yet without a clear understanding of all the forces which influence our intent. In the section, *The Human Analogue in Mixed-Reality* on p.24, I begin to address concepts which suggest the world may be perceived as a continuum of reflexive spaces; a collective of screens upon which anything selected directly or indirectly may be inscribed and which, in conversing with us, contribute to and affirm our existence in those spaces. My aim in this section of work is to illuminate some of these intimate discoveries in engagements between people and in the process, examine indeterminacy. The Roaming Body, itself a reflexive mobile human screen, is the agent

which I maintain is in close collaboration with and a facet of the greater world screen(s) with which we are surrounded and sometimes immersed. We can identify here clear research questions; do we as humans move to live or live to move? Do we have any real choice in this matter? I maintain that due to indeterminacy, we only appear to have the freedom of choice. By extension, the above query can be made more specific to my enquiry; do we as humans move to leave or leave to move? These questions, I believe, are firmly located in how we experience lived duration. I am not debating whether or not we will leave, because I have witnessed myself at first hand, departing from every encounter and engagement with others in my life and I do not afford myself the luxury of being alone in this experience. The questions which interest me here concern if and then how we recognize our leaving moments through the durational process of our encounters and to what extent we attach import or recognition to these succession of moments. My performance work seeks to illuminate aspects of these questions. I am interpreting the persona of the Roaming Body in this work as a flaneuristic, sentient presence of significant import; an observer of the moment yet with an agenda as an agent of indeterminacy and a signifier of departure surfacing through the performative, dancing body.

In the section on Relational Engagement and Contact Improvisation Dance (p.12) I maintain that all our exchanges, whether they be either apparently resolved engagements, casual encounters or missed conversations with people and places, are subject to the presence and affects of indeterminacy, evidenced in us as an ongoing state of departure through the agency of the Roaming Body. I am asserting that the phenomenon of leaving is apparently involuntary, thereby often initiating a state of unconscious, pre-emptive departure (Part 3: Indeterminacy the Roaming Body and Departure, p.16). It informs and mediates our respective behavioural realities, knows no cultural boundaries and occurs everywhere, all of the time. In my practice I have observed that the smaller durational fractal drives the greater. I am referring to the behaviour of every human in the fractal context of every passing moment which significantly, for the purposes of this research, can be seamlessly extrapolated out to the quotidian of the everyday. This is regardless of age, ethnicity or gender. Under the influence of inevitable impending departure then, arrival as an actual event in itself or as a stable condition becomes questionable, more akin to an interim waypoint representing no real haven for each of us in the experienced ongoing duration which more realistically comprises our lives. For me this creates pathos within leaving as a movement away; life lived in a minor key; movement away from everything we discern becomes our life process and this ensures that there are constantly present, small, overlooked dramas with their attendant poignancies expressed within the simplest, most mundane, everyday dynamics between people and places. I am suggesting that perhaps this state-of-leaving which sometimes (although not always) we barely notice, underpinning and in turn mediating our movements in life, is not so much a succession of events in our lives but is itself, a life event of significant

proportions. The manifestation of indeterminacy through the Roaming Body emerges in this project work through passages of human movement (Part Five: Movement Practice 1 p.45 and Part Six: Movement Practice 2 p.53); my investigative dancing in selected locations in the city. I have concentrated on the pathos inherent in the act of leaving in these locations. These accounts and my own in the wider public terrain of the city have affirmed, informed, and influenced my process of enquiry. We each of us, in our daily engagements, manage and monitor our own small micro-dramas with their attendant, small discoveries.

### **Part One: Contact Improvisation Dance**

Before I proceed further I would like to introduce the movement language that I have been using in my performance practice for this project. It is widely accepted that the movement form Contact Improvisation Dance was created by a group of people at the Judson Memorial Church in New York between 1962 and 1964 (Nancy Stark-Smith asserts that Steve Paxton created the term, Contact Improvisation Dance in 1972). Steve Paxton is credited as the father of CI Dance (henceforth when describing this dance form in this document, this universally-used shortened descriptor will be used). Paxton, a contemporary dancer trained in a diverse range of movement including martial arts, was a principal dancer for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in the USA in the 1960s.

Significant initiators at the Judson Memorial Church sessions were Nancy Stark-Smith, Lucinda Childs and Trisha Brown, among others. As the name suggests, CI Dance is a partnered dance approach centred existentially on being completely present in the moment. It is often labelled as a post-structuralist contemporary dance form due to its predilection for creating a conceptual and practical movement enquiry through the reconstruction of other movement forms, (from everyday movement like walking, dance forms such as ballet, modern dance and contemporary dance, martial arts; particularly aikido, t'ai chi ch'uan and capoeira; partnered movement sets which concentrate on developing sensitivity through the senses other than sight and sound) subsuming and fusing them into its own idiosyncratic, structureless format. Usually, there is a complete absence of choreography in the dance and this means that to attain some kind of meaningful cohesion - to stay in touch - in a movement dialogue between two people, the ability to 'listen' to one's partner's intent (or more accurately, the absence of intent or agenda) through physical touch is an essential component of the form. Any one duet shared between two people (the dance accommodates almost any number of people as part of a group; each member connecting with a partner, leaving at any time to blend with any other number of partners and perhaps re-connecting with the original partner) is dependent upon where the dancers' individual and mutual expression-in-the-moment takes them. A duet can begin from any

location in a given space, the dancers connected at any point of their bodies, developing perhaps, from very slow, contemplative, minimal movement (sometimes not even touching) through expansive, gymnastic techniques up on shoulders (this is called 'flying') down onto the ground and everywhere in between. Sometimes any furniture or objects in a space are used as 'partners' in the movement interaction.

I have employed CT's dialogue process; that of improvised, intimate engagement (sometimes with a preceding arrival as opposed to just beginning with a connection), 'conversation' through movement and eventual departure with another person, for its facility to echo certain scenarios of intimate verbal engagement between two people on the street. (See discussion with Kristian Larsen, p103)

### **Relational Engagement and Contact Improvisation Dance**

Let us examine conversation as a potential adhesive within engagement, but which only partially binds us to the moment. Not only does speech aid our functioning effectively in social situations and locates us in time and given space, but more candidly, the ability to converse and to be heard ignites, expands and affirms the map of the human heart, consolidating engagement. Yet there is more to establishing rapport ... In *Tricks of the Mind*, by Derren Brown, under the section on 'Targeted Rapport': 'Most people when they are getting on well, will be in a state of unconscious 'rapport'. They will tend to mirror each other's body language and so on without realizing it ...' At the same time,

'... there is the odd sensation we have all experienced (though we never think to mention it) of knowing when the other person is about to get up and leave. Suddenly there is something in the air, a moment or a shift and then you know the other person is about to say they should "make a move". And if they don't you have that feeling that they are overstaying their welcome' (Brown, 2007:186).

The level of unconscious rapport shared up to that moment, particularly if the conversation has lasted for some time, is responsible for the sharing of mutual thought and body patterns so that together you can sense when the time to leave has arrived. Speech comprises much of the articulation of this and that of our wider socio-contextual map - much, but not all. The hidden message which is about when and how to leave an engagement is articulated through speech-prompts but also through body language, an underlying empathetic cue to move on, with this decision coming from a place 'of' and in the body – the very place from which sometimes, I suggest, in a manner of speaking, we have already departed. So 'engagement' is beset by uncertainties and I suspect, realised subjectively by each individual on a number of unconscious levels.

Brown maintains that studies carried out on rapport have shown an array of mirrored behaviours that are not merely body positioning but something far more subtle. It has been established that people in rapport with one another tend to breathe at the same rate, adopt similar facial expressions, blink at the same rate and use one another's language. I would describe these responses as somatically based. In other words they are products of a non-spoken, internal discourse that the body carries out continually (using one another's language is still instigated by a bodily response to a stimulus). A hidden dialogue beneath speech and vision through which we are more overtly governed. We have at our fingertips, so to speak, a very specific skillset which is available to us on a subliminal level during our interaction with another; a transponder of sorts, sending and receiving, fashioned to assist us in the process of moving ourselves and a stranger identity to a place which may simply be less strange and designed almost as if to counteract the inexorability of our predilection for departure.

Another aspect to the success or failure of our engagements, also concerns the existence of a layer beneath our visible communication. 'Rudimentary engagements, communication at its most basic, the prototype of all human interaction ...' (Goleman, 2007:30) such are the descriptors for the term, 'Protoconversation' in Daniel Goleman's, *Social Intelligence, The New Science of Human Relationships*. The term relates to the early neural signals which expand into methods for establishing a rapport that we experienced as babies, making our first communicative forays into the outside world through the medium of our mothers. Often a synchrony of rhythmic motion, touch, gaze, sound and breath, a coordination of hand movements and facial expressions will establish a mutual rapport between mother and child. Such conversations are more often than not very short in duration – even only seconds in length and they end when both parties arrive at matched states, typically, affectionate ones.

Protoconversations have a certain elasticity in meaning and application. Not only does it refer to the very earliest development of our powers of communication (mostly non-verbal), but in adulthood, protoconversations remain as our most fundamental template for mapping, matching or missing in meetings with others. The template is tacit, a subtle awareness through feeling and the senses which allows us when we meet to quietly proceed, in step, with a stranger or acquaintance, friend or family member. Protoconversation is a silent dialogue – Goleman uses the term, 'substrate' upon which all encounters or engagements are built. Goleman assures us that it is, '... the hidden agenda in every interaction' (Goleman, 2007). A silent go-between if you will, which underpins and as a mode of communicating, often outlasts the manifestation of speech. One could extend this to say that protoconversation is a silent, neurokinetic conversation supported by mutual empathy - assisting a curiosity about the path ahead. Attention, albeit one

that fluctuates, is paid to the task of listening to one's partner, in the moment, using certain tools: When 'conversing' or when in a dance duet, (particularly those dance modes which are based on the premise of improvisational modes of movement) listening - paying attention through touch to the tone or tenor of the connection with the other person, the unspoken, fleetingly glimpsed under-dialogue of the-moment-in-change is not only paramount if the conversation/duet is to last, but it also allows us to gather information about what is occurring in front of us on Goleman's 'substrate' level. So what occurs before the engagement closes? Why do people leave? Can it only be due to what Goleman asserts above; those 'matched states' which are reached mutually but which then preclude any further empathetic development in that time and place? (This can be considered as the, 'See you later', moment). What other cues, which may manifest as separate from those mentioned above are there to warn of impending closure? The indeterminant Roaming Body, I suggest, is resident here.<sup>5</sup>

In Contact Improvisation Dance, as in a spoken conversation between two people where each must navigate uncharted waters as they go, whether they are strangers or not, sooner or later one person leaves or both parties leave the conversation or duet. Sometimes there is an unspoken moment when both partners recognize that a point of stasis has been reached and closure is imminent; Why? Are both parties simply - tired? Sometimes there may be the result of a mismatch on a proto-conversation level; a mismatch in listening, a change in mood; Sometimes the narrative which has been self-sustaining, evolving, fluctuating through pauses (which are not in themselves necessarily inert) and bursts of intense movement, simply runs out of momentum and finds its own place to rest. The conversers or dancers are instigators of these pathways to departure, and simultaneously, witnesses to it, (Please see the definition of Indeterminacy and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, p.8). Rarely though, is departure itself recognized as the catalyst or instigator of the act to leave unless one senses (and this occurs quite regularly in the dance, as in life) that the intent of one's partner has already left the 'conversation' leaving their physical body still with you. Pre-emptive departure. It is one of those, 'her heart was not in it' - I am conversing/dancing with an 'absent' body'

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<sup>5</sup> Early in 2007, through my Masters internet blog, I engaged in a discussion with the Auckland contemporary dancer, Kristian Larsen which interrogated not only my concepts concerning engagement at that time, but also my reasons for using Contact Improvisation Dance as a medium for exploring these concepts. This discussion with Larsen in 2007 was significant for me. It forced me to look critically at my practice and how this meshed with my theories with regard to the constituents of engagement between people in public spaces, how I was choosing to define this and what I proposed performatively as a response to my findings. Also reflected here is my focus communicated through my abstract at that time, which differs markedly from my final abstract at the beginning of this dissertation. With regard to the 'opportunity' Larsen mentioned above, this became a signal focus for me in my thinking and in the work that was to come. The questions asked with regard to my expectations from the public still remain and I return to this area of interest later in this document. Please see aspects of this discussion in Appendix 3.

moments, which we all recognize in ourselves and others. The act of 'Leaving' itself ultimately makes no demands upon us - we are swept on regardless, in a stream of change that we cannot prevent. Departure is a descriptor of this durational state which forever accompanies us. However, I believe that perhaps within the parameters of negotiating engagements the slide toward departure may involve something more than two people reaching Goleman's 'matched state', (p.13) an energetic impasse. Indeterminacy and the Roaming Body are embedded here. Through my research carried out in urban spaces I deduce that when we compare the connective (or lack of) processes apparent in relating to a partner in First Life and in the online MUVE location of Second Life engagements, indeterminacy emerging in each of us through the conduit of the Roaming Body in both these descriptions of our respective worlds can be seen to create differing manifestations of connectivity or engagement and ultimately, departure, which are managed by us on Goleman's 'substrate level' with varying degrees of success. (This aspect is discussed further in conversation with Professor Johannes Birringer, pp.35-38).

In many ways due to the improvisational nature of CI Dance in engaging with another, the proprioceptively read protoconversation occurring through touch is particularly sensitised to the indeterminate moment, offering up a more reliable diagnostic about the uncertain present than verbal conversation. The physical body does not easily lie. (Choreographed scores if strictly adhered to, offer a more pre-planned landscape of movement execution. Generally, - depending on the director - serendipitous mapping of the present falls on barren ground here). In CI Dance, you know in your core when your partner is ostensibly still dancing with you but has really left you or is about to leave, no matter what is occurring on the surface. The human analogue transforms touch-based messages into psycho-emotional recognition, illuminating intentions; either hints of impending departure, or an unwillingness to physically relinquish contact despite having actually already departed.

### **Video 1: Leaving Odysseus**

### **Part Two: Belonging, Identity and the Roaming Body**

Certain forces are examined here which support the notion of the human body as a clearing-house in the everyday in which entities may take up residence. Heidegger maintained that the human being is not a thing but rather, a peculiar kind of nothingness: the temporal-linguistic clearing, the opening, the absencing in which things can present themselves and thus 'be', (in Zimmerman, 2001). If humans are not things, then perhaps we have to define 'knowing' in a different way than we have before. Knowing is not a relation

between two things; mind and object. Rather, knowing occurs because the field of openness constituting human existence is configured in terms of the three temporal dimensions: past, present, future. These dimensions hold open the horizons on which entities may manifest themselves in determinate ways - for example, as instruments, objects, or persons.<sup>4</sup>

I am proposing that the Roaming Body can be one of these entities; a visitation which haunts the interstitial descriptions of what it means to be human. This definition of the body, this facet of our self exercising the potential to roam, to enact an other, contrary route, is perhaps particularly relevant to our search as energetic beings - humans, for both, our individual and collective sense of identities. I would suggest that indeterminacy surfaces as a subtle, insidious force acting upon us. Consider the possibility that indeterminacy has always dominated the terrain which we have had to negotiate, evident still, in the ways in which our choices may be mediated, in our actions which only appear to prevail, in our inter and intra-relations with ourselves and others, in the spaces we impinge upon and in the times which we traverse. It is in considering this possibility that I perceive indeterminacy, (usually hidden, where its character surfaces through its effects) to be something of an unruly force, which progressively in this discussion I align not with one, but with a number of visible, in-world descriptions, like the expressed manifestations of the Duende (p.53) and my characterisation through the Wellington Railway Station commuter crowd as a 'Murder of Crows'. (p.60)

### **Part Three: Indeterminacy, the Roaming Body and Departure**

The Roaming Body I suggest, is responsible in our behaviours for pre-emptive departure and the involuntary pursuit of the next moment. In my Abstract I define the Roaming Body as, 'the human body mediated by an entity which can never be fully committed to a set position or location in space and time' (Mike Baker,

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<sup>4</sup> Human understanding, Guevara (2008) maintains, does not take place inside a mind located in a given space. Instead, understanding occurs because human temporality is receptive to particular ways in which things can present or manifest themselves: "Traditionally, philosophers have defined the "being" of an entity as its ground or substance, that which provides the "foundation" for the thing. Heidegger used the term "Dasein" to name this peculiar receptivity of human existence for the being-in-the-world (selfmanifesting) of entities. In German, da means "here" or "there," while sein is the German verb "to be." Hence, Dasein means the place in which being occurs, the openness in which presencing transpires. For Heidegger, neither temporality (absencing, nothingness) nor being (presencing, self-manifesting) is an "entity." Rather, they are the conditions necessary for entities to appear as such. We never "see" time or "touch" the presencing of things ; rather, we see and touch the things that manifest or present themselves' (Guevara, 2008).



2009). The Roaming Body, susceptible to outside influence, defines us and can be perceived to inscribe upon us in part, as mobile volumes in the midst of our world-surface. It is evidenced in our inadvertent lack of what I will describe as a consistent 'temporal poise' in any given space. Our apparent inability to stay put in this moment. An inexorable, unfolding momentum into the omnipresent future, now past. I am reminded of a sign on the wall of a dance studio in Melbourne, Australia during a Contact Improvisation Dance performance of, 'Excavate: A two-man dig', (2008) by David Corbet and Jacob Lehrer which stated enigmatically, *'The missing are here, the gone and the taken are with us'*. Within the context of my work this duality signifies a temporal paradox: presence inscribed in what once was 'here' and through that folded mobius lineament of time still is for us, now. This dual notion is supported in Brian Massumi's exploration of the 'indeterminacy' of the body – the realities facing the body which are incomplete without the recognition of another, constantly simultaneously-generated virtual description of 'now'. Massumi calls this ephemeral coincidence with our own transition a, '... fellow-travelling identity of the same reality ...' and posits that 'this body' is here, but also, 'this presence and essentially when in motion, they are no longer with us, here, but 'over there', now ...', yet equally, still with us because we ourselves are also in another present, over there ... now (2002:5).



**Figure 3. 'Leaving' - Durational Surface Inscriptions in Wellington Railway Station 2009 Dancers: Mike and Fiona Baker Camera: Steve Gallagher. Image, Mike Baker.**

The manifestation of indeterminacy suggests that 'Leaving' is a universal state over which we have no conscious control. Departure is that paradoxical frame of reference for us as humans which both, frees us from the constraints of our previous engagement in time while instilling perhaps, trace echoes of what has been left behind. For me, this creates poignancy - a pathos evident in the most mundane of departures,

humanity-wide, a sense which has been the principal informant of this dance and video work. Whether it be recognisably profound and measurably life-altering, or apparently occurring within the humdrum of the everyday, departures and the act of leaving people and places of significance constantly colour our lives. Could it be that this unconscious facility that we unknowingly possess, the ability to live with indeterminacy as an ongoing, involuntary occurrence, is actually responsible for our departures, regardless of our own diagnostic sensing within a meeting or engagement with someone? Perhaps departure *itself* is the indeterminant driving factor here. A condition which affects us all, impinging upon and mediating our behaviour while for the most part, we remain in ignorance of its existence. To us, usually we are simply involved in 'going' somewhere else.

### **Indeterminacy and Pre-emptive Departure**

To represent dual presence through an indeterminate intent and as an example in apparent contradiction to Heisenberg's definition of indeterminacy being unmeasurable - in this instance, in pre-emptive departure; in the video 'The Roaming Body - In The Company of Strangers', the couple in the spotlight conduct an animated conversation in the street. Without being privy to their dialogue, we have no way of knowing what they are discussing. We could speculate, but pre-emptive departure is evidenced in their body language, their neutral proximity to one another, the signals they unconsciously transmit about the way they are feeling with regard to their engagement with one another and how this evolves through the duration of the meeting. If I apply a non-judgmental appraisal to their situation, in the last minute prior to their separating, although the woman eventually says 'goodbye', physically walks away and leaves the engagement, the man appears to have already departed from the conversation. He shuffles, he checks his cell phone, he hides behind his hands, he waves his arms uncertainly and looks around. He checks his watch. Eye contact decreases. No longer is he fully present. When she does finally leave, his reaction is marginally interested – because his roaming self has already left. His Roaming Body pre-empted his physical departure, crept into and hijacked the meeting, while ostensibly, they were still engaged. It would be easy for us to say, 'But he has simply switched off'. I am not disputing this. I am asking, 'Why?' I am suggesting the whole story is more revealing. There are indeterminants here.



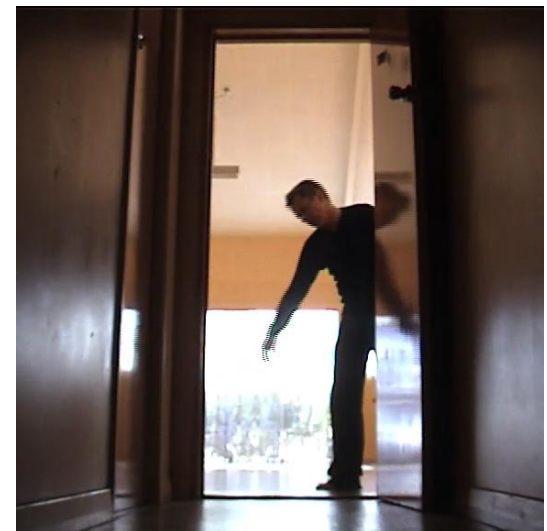
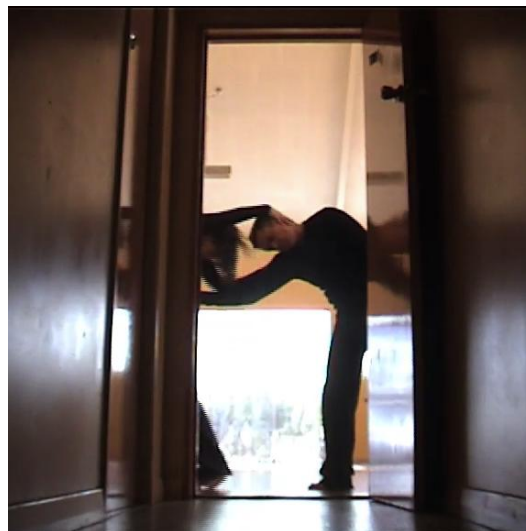
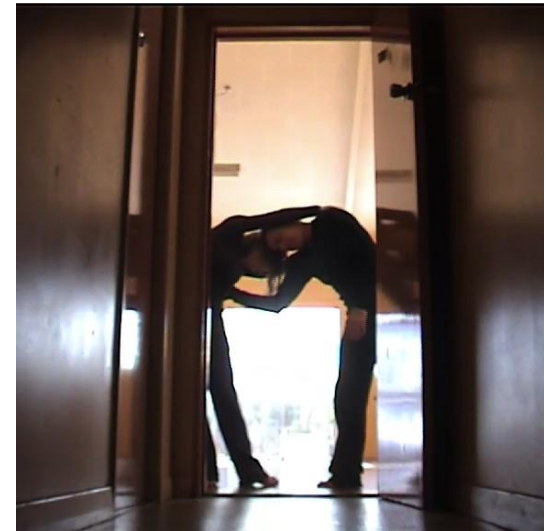
*Figure 4.* Stills from video capture: The Roaming Body and Pre-emptive Departure. Nelson NZ 2007. Images, Mike Baker.

The only difference between this and other engagements is that in this case, the slip in the present (now past) is visible. Can this constitute evidence of a simultaneity of presence? Here, yet not here? Both people left. Movement away occurred in both parties even though ironically, one of them left first by staying behind. Is this occurrence actual or merely a point of perception? (Is a point of perception, like 'attention', no less actual?)



**Figure 5. Stills from video capture: The Roaming Body and Pre-emptive Departure, Cuba St, Wellington, NZ 2007. Images, Mike Baker.**

In the images from the video: 'The Roaming Body and Pre-emptive Departure', three stages of leaving can be seen. When I filmed these participants, they spent approximately five minutes from the moment in the first image where they shook hands before they actually departed, still talking, in the final image. During this time it could be seen that some of the dialogue shared between them needed to be repeated because they had already pre-emptively left the engagement, (middle image) and were not paying full attention to one another. To compensate, closure became drawn out and continued as they walked away from each other.



***Figure 6. Studio workshop Nelson NZ: Exploring pre-emptive departure and leaving - Dancers: Mike and Fiona Baker Study 6 June 2008. Images, Mike Baker.***

In 2008 and 2009, in my dance practice, I workshopped in the Nelson studio (see my Masters Blog, (<http://hoststranger.blogspot.com>, June 2008, 'Studio 1-9' & workshopping pre-emptive departure and leaving - images, p.21) on Lambton Quay in Wellington City and in Wellington Railway Station a range of pre-emptive departure scenarios where through improvisation, my dance partners and I could take each other by surprise, leaving the duet/conversation unexpectedly in a variety of ways. Examples of the Nelson studio work taken into Wellington Railway Station: The first is my video study, 'Shelter - In the Company of Strangers'. Here is a mis-matched dialogue where my partner and I are in two very different personal spaces of listening. Even though we are connected through the mechanics of CI Dance movement, I actually dis-engage and leave some time before I physically depart. Another example can be seen in the video, 'In the Company of Strangers - Peripheral Tension', where the dancers are exploring another dynamically mis-matched, argumentative tableau. Engagement underpinned by impending departure and loss with both, mis-matched and reconciled feelings expressed are also evident in the 'Departed' series.

Brian Massumi, in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, tells us that,  
a body in motion is held within an ever-changing process of movement relative to its own already non-static position in space, When a body is in motion, it does not coincide with itself. It coincides with its own transition ... In motion, a body is in an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary. That relation, to borrow a phrase from Deleuze, is real but abstract ... This is an abstractness pertaining to the transitional immediacy of a real relation – that of a body to its own indeterminacy (its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise that it is, in any here and now) (2002: 4-5).

Does Massumi's interpretation and my demonstration here, refute the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, despite the difficulty in being able to measure two presences (or one divided presence) simultaneously? In contrast, although not entirely, William Wordsworth, articulating indeterminacy as an aesthetic, made room in any insubstantial meaning or questionable reliability of an event, by replacing it with imagination deferring to a potential for interpretation. He called it, 'Something evermore about to be' (Wordsworth: 1805).

Henri Bergson's thinking recognizes and traverses the territory occupied by indeterminacy and in so doing, transforms 'being' into 'becoming': This view refers to a world which is defined through continuous motion. So the only reality is constant change, flux, transformation – becoming. The things we perceive as 'real' and constant, reliable and set are outcomes relative to our respective perceptions.



To quote Bergson, '... the qualities of matter are so many stable views that we take of its instability' (Bergson quoted in Middleton & Brown, 2005:62). Bergson puts this very succinctly another way: '... rather than there being things which change' (ibid, 2005), more accurately speaking, there is, '... change provisionally grasped as a thing' (ibid, 2005). This realignment of perspective may allow us to witness indeterminacy and the Roaming Body in-the-making, made visible in meetings between people on the street, through their actions within the process of departure.

In his 1935 Essay, *Movement as Language*, while corroborating the virtuality, not of movement but of those moments of pause with which movement is punctuated, the artist Len Lye stated:

Movement is the result of a feeling in one thing of strong difference from other things. Movement is always one thing moving away from other things—not toward. And the result of movement is to be distinct from other things: the result of movement is form. The history of any definite form is the movement of which the form is the result. When we look at something and see the particular shape of it we are looking at its after-life. Its real life is the movement by which it got to be that shape (Lye, 1935: 231-235).

This observation shares similar territory to Bergson's, maintaining that we live 'change' in a constant process of becoming, that '... real life is the movement by which it got to be that shape ...' (Lye, ibid) and that we can only grasp and isolate moments provisionally within change itself. Indeterminacy and the roaming body – in the contexts of this phrase, perhaps we have no way of forecasting how our connections will be determined when we meet someone in the street. Will we even engage? What might comprise the least element of a meeting between two people in the street? Somehow though, either sooner or later, or, in the light of what we have just seen in terms of pre-emptive departure - sooner and later), without always recognizing it we are always leaving. Allowing for the variables within which we carry out our departure, the only non-variable is that we will actually depart from meetings; places of temporary purchase within change. Another perspective on the temporal simultaneity of presence is offered by Slavoj Žižek; for Žižek the parallax view differs from the quantum mechanics definition above, through the apparent visually-witnessed physical displacement caused by the viewer changing their point of perspective. However, Žižek goes on to say that in his definition, there is a philosophical twist which can be added which sees the observed difference in viewpoints being not simply subjective, because the object being observed 'out there' is seen from two different locations or viewpoints - from the perspective of the viewer and also from that of the object being viewed. Žižek refers to this objective ability as a kind of 'materialism'. Here, Žižek cites Lacan, maintaining that the subject's gaze is always already inscribed into the perceived object itself - and

that the object returns this gaze. Rather than ourselves being an all-seeing eye, observers who can grasp the entire 'picture' of a given reality, Zizek maintains that '... Materialism means that the reality I see is never "whole", not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it' (2006:17-18). Does this imply a perception which accepts the existence of one observer being able themselves, to perceive an object from two viewpoints simultaneously because they are intrinsically contained in more than one view? Hegel, Zizek points out, would say that through this, the subject and object are inherently mediated by their respective viewpoints. I would add that these two viewpoints are themselves mediated by the temporal simultaneity inherent within the dual perception of their 'other' subject - object perspectives. I suggest that this occurs instantaneously and affirms the reflexivity within the joint gaze taking place. In my research practice, simultaneous, multiple perceptions and perspectives exist across Zizek's parallax gap, between what could be termed at least initially, a potential binary field of engagement between two people in the street. Will they engage? If so, the measure of contact as a binary relation, I suggest, cannot last. The passage of time and the function of indeterminacy through the Roaming Body are the substantive coefficients<sup>6</sup> beneath the engagement, the third party and catalyst between the binary pair and the consistent dissolvers of the moment.

#### **Part Four: The Human Analogue in Mixed-Reality**

Mark Hansen, in *Bodies in Code* asserts that we are not surrounded by a polarity between real and virtual. He sees the embodiment of function manifesting through the human body, acting as a kind of seismographic wand maintaining that: '... all reality is mixed reality' (2006: 5-6). Hansen quotes Massumi, who talks about the existence of the analogue as a transformative entity:

Always on arrival a transformative feeling of the outside, a feeling of thought sensation is the being of the analog(sic). This is the analog(sic) in a sense close to the technical meaning, as a continuously variable impulse or momentum that can cross from one qualitatively different medium into another. Like electricity into sound waves. Or heat into pain, Or light waves into vision. Or vision into imagination. Or noise in the ear into music in the heart. Or outside coming in. Variable continuity across the qualitatively different: continuity of transformation (Massumi in Hansen, 2006:5-6).

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<sup>6</sup> def: Coefficient - a constant that is a measure of a property of a substance.



Whether we are dancers or not we are all everyday movement practitioners,<sup>9</sup> subject to time and the spaces in which we reside and as such, through our internal analogue we possess the innate capacity to perceive, transform and combine continuously, the many real and virtual realities of which our existence is comprised. Hansen maintains that the reason why so many of us now operate in so-called virtual worlds with apparent ease, is because we have always done so. I support Massumi's theory regarding human analogue potential and align myself with that description which suggests that we are entities which have the potential to be inscribed and contribute to inscriptions from both real and virtual locations on the same world-surface, to arrive at a homogenous, mixed-reality. In my dance and video work in my Second Life Wellington Railway Station, the objects which I perceive as embodied surfaces or screens (including people and moving images of people which make of them imprintable, mobile volumes) in this description could be termed relational to their connection with the time and place in which they are experienced by me. A relation through my perception, to the constantly occurring now-past. Zizek's parallax gap potentially binds together my current First Life view Life (please note that as previously mentioned, in this document the term Real Life when perceived in the context of Second Life, is more accurately defined and embodied by the term, First Life), with that of my past First Life, videoed view. (If we define 'Avatar' as removed yet con-joined with us, then this videoed representation of myself signifies a First Life avatar-other). This composite view is overlaid with that view through my Second Life avatar, - as object - in a place of simultaneous 'materialist' gaze or perception. (See images of Rollo, Avatar Companion, p.78). Here in my Second Life Wellington Railway Station, removed from one another in our respective locations, we look out at each other simultaneously from the embodied surface or screen of my own mobile volume to the other embodied surfaces or screens of my representational, videoed self and my representational avatar self.

Post-structuralist thinking has sought to erode the paradigm in the modernist separation of surface worlds by challenging the sturdiness of the boundaries between these surfaces. The theorist Jacques Ranciere describes 'surface' as a paratactical space - a site of exchange, where language, images and actions collide, transform

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<sup>9</sup> 'Banes, (1993) records that in *Proxy*, Steve Paxton created a slow-moving dance in four sections for three dancers. Movements in this piece included walking, carrying, standing and other everyday actions. Also, the dancers drank a glass of liquid and ate a piece of fruit' (Minton, 2007:54). Paxton's approach to a movement vocabulary included the pedestrian world around him. He composed a range of non-dance movement vocabulary that seemed to give him a relaxed but authoritative state of being in performance. [5] Paxton minimized the differences between the audience and the performer. In turn his movement vocabulary became fragments of 'everyday' movement mechanics and this held a world of possibilities for individual potential. See further notes on Paxton's 'small dance', (p.45).

one another, embody and are embodied by one another - a place of slippage between spaces, (Carnevale & Kelsey, 2007). Stephane Mallarmé (Meltzer, 1987) has defined dance as a form of writing on the surface of the floor with the intent to transpose this mark-making to the written page - transformative embodiment across surfaces. Reciprocally, one can recognize written dance scores (and sound scores) as evidence of intent to be executed on a different surface. One of the strands of my work has been to explore that the concept of spaces and their content be perceived as surfaces or screens which possess the potential to be enabled, inscribed or embodied. The images published in this document, particularly of spaces in Second Life, (pp.41,42,43) but also in First Life, I read as possessing a strong sense of an inscribed surface or screen, where avatars and people are not on the screen, but appear to be contained within or beneath the surface so the body of the screen itself, is enabled. In 2008 and 2009 I introduced structured improvisation movement modes into commuter rush-hour crowd spaces in Wellington Railway Station in New Zealand, Aotearoa, documenting this activity through the medium of video and re-presenting the edited work in my simulacrum of this station on the NZ eduisland of Koru, in the MUVE of Second Life. At one level of perception I brought together one enabled, First Life embodied surface of the present in the station with another, equally enabled, embodied - yet representational (through status of removal from the present) videoed surface, with a third, so-called virtual surface of the Second Life station simulacrum. I do not see these First and Second Life surfaces as one real and two virtual surfaces; I see these surfaces as simply occupying different locations on the same world surface of the Real. When I began this project in 2007, I began to investigate the basic premise that the 'real' is influenced by the virtual, all the time and everywhere - in First Life (ref: my Masters blog April 11 2007); that we experience moments, often on our perceptual periphery, which could be described as 'virtual' every day to which we either remain oblivious, ignore, or through our human analogue properties, assimilate and transform, rendering those virtual moments as real. Within this context, Second Life as a fully-immersive environment manifests as an extended 'virtual' event in which we may reside for a longer period of time; an extended layer of the Real. This means that Second Life itself, like so many aspects of First Life, becomes another screen - not only literally, but another world-surface construct which may be encountered, left and re-encountered, manipulated and inscribed, ignored or selectively dismissed by our analogue facility in the pursuit of transformative embodiment (see Mediated Performance, p.37).

In November 2008 I ran a series of five structured improvisation performances for the Nelson Arts Festival event, Multi-Media Interactive 2008 'Underground', combining First and Second Life narrative, at the Independent Theatre in Nelson, NZ Aotearoa. The performances were comprised of the following components: Installation in the form of cafe table and chairs, DVD projection of my First Life station videos,

the live online interfaces of Second Life, YouTube and camfrog.com), active cell phones (we arranged for people to text us during the performance to affirm the existence of the ether/cellphone as enabled surfaces inscribing communicative marks), a laptop holding a web cam streaming the performance to [www.camfrog.com](http://www.camfrog.com), and initially 4 then finally 5 performers. Second Life Arts Council and SLENZ<sup>7</sup> networks advertised the event. Selected writings of mine were narrated through the performance.

My principal areas of focus in this event sought to create an environment which enabled us to explore the potential for embodiment and transfluency between real and virtual surfaces or screens, based on my concepts of engagements mediated by departure through the Roaming Body. The exploration of the 'state-of-Leaving' was significant. The performance handout to the audiences was entitled; 'Departure - will Leaving make strangers of us all?' With my avatar, Rollo Kohime in-life and myself and Fiona Baker dancing on stage, I explored permutations of arrival and departure. To this end, I divided my time and physical presence between the computer - monitoring the live Second Life station, talking with the avatars who had been invited to the performance in the SL station, changing the videos in the SL station using the YouTube server and creating a presence of arriving and leaving, on the First Life theatre stage. The improvisational behaviour of the First Life actors changed in each performance as did the behaviour and my management of avatars in the Second Life space, as everyone involved explored different strategies and emphases in relation to the content. In the last two performances, we were joined by Roger Sanders, a professional storyteller and musician based in Nelson. His stories tend toward the parable/fable genre and I asked if he could write me some short (a sentence or two) stories about departure, but adapt them to a contemporary, urban setting: *She became so good at working with the metal that soon she had welded for herself a pair of steel shoes. With these she could now leave the factorys and cross the burning city.* (Sanders: 2008). These short stories were copied into Second Life notecards. By creating a notecard dispenser (called Station Stories) in the station, avatars could click on the dispenser and receive the stories. The stories were being read by Sanders during the First Life performance so a conceptual and visual link was created between the two locations. Some people behind their avatars during the performance managed to successfully connect to camfrog.com to watch us in First Life performing and themselves in the Second Life station on the screen. It was therefore possible to hear Sanders reading the same stories they had received from the Second Life dispenser.

Each performance was governed by improvisational approaches as an overlay to the structure I had discussed with both the First Life and Second Life 'actors', so each performance unfolded in different ways

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<sup>7</sup> SLENZ: Second Life Education New Zealand

while preserving the underlying structure of three basic movement phases. In Second Life these phases were: To place a top quality mocap (motion capture from First Life) dance sphere in the station for avatars to click on and animate themselves. For this I selected coupled dances - ballroom, tango, waltz, slow dance so that avatars could have interactive movement 'conversations' in the station. I did not select singles dances for their lack of engagement with another avatar in the space. After some time this phase would give way to avatars walking through the station cutout crowd as if they were commuting - leaving the station. The third phase was to have all the avatars gradually depart the station, leaving me alone in the space by the end of the performance. This strategy seemed to work well. There was a distinct visual difference in the avatar presence and occupation of the station space as the phases unfolded. In many ways it became a fractal of what occurs in the real Wellington Railway Station as the commuter crowd begins around 5pm as a trickle, becomes a flood by 5.30pm and 6.00pm and dwindles to a few people by 6.45pm. For our First Life performance contribution, I created a structure which underpinned our movements in and around and out of the space, with spoken words, dance and projection. My thinking for our dance presence on the stage was to create three short structured improvisation phrases or scenarios based upon 'the Stranger',<sup>8</sup> the Friend and the Lover. I used each performance diagnostically and made changes each day. In the earlier performances there was insufficient clarity of differences expressed between the three scenarios. There was something missing from their expressed intent. The phrases were short, only about a minute in duration, some 20 or 30 seconds where, after we broke away, (sometimes there was no physical contact at all) I would leave to return to the computer so departure was visible but the nature of our dancing connection was either too melodramatic or too non-committal. I revised our structured improvised activities. In the first I would execute a slow roll across the stage to coincide with the Duende Roll DVD in Second Life and the reading of Duende referenced text. After this Fiona and I carried out a longer, 'Stranger' movement exploration which began tentatively, progressed through a clumsy, edgy, longing-for-but-ultimately-dysfunctional conversation moment. This was followed by a longer, 'Lover' connection which worked more successfully with the extended time to develop the conversation between us. We were more relaxed, the movements better defined and articulated as a sequence which, although obviously intimate, was going nowhere ending in a final departure. Also

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<sup>8</sup> In the text, *Negotiating difference or being with strangers* John Allen informs us that, 'In his classic essay on *The Stranger* published in 1908, Simmel tried to convey through this figure, a range of ambivalences which have come to haunt us in the practices of negotiating difference', (Allen, 2000:57). In defining or 'negotiating difference', Allen says, Simmel adopted the figure of the 'stranger' as a means to express or capture the paradoxical experience of what it means to interact with someone who is both, perhaps nearby in a spatial sense, yet remote and therefore 'strange' to us in a social sense. Allen also points out that there are numerous increments of 'strangeness' identifiable in different contexts, but that, 'It is present in those fleeting encounters between people which take place in the crowded subways or in the throng of busy streets ...' (Allen, 2000:58).

during the performance, ideas around 'removal' and representation were explored: First Life actors would hold up their paper narratives to 'capture' Second Life avatars and lift them away from the large screen and replace them again. Departure from both the First Life stage and the Second Life station was investigated; each performance closed with just myself and my avatar, Rollo left behind. This series of performance works was partially successful in its aim of investigating states of immersive transfluency between First and Second Life. (At the end of each performance I invited the First Life audience to join us on stage to interact in the First Life cafe 'screen' with the Second Life station screen. A subtext of this invitation was to have the Second Life projection playing on Real Life bodies - as mobile volumes susceptible to inscription). In a discussion session after each performance it appeared that the First Life audience perceived two locations operating simultaneously on the same world surface. For the people behind their avatars with binocular coverage through Second Life and camfrog.com this duality also existed despite the removal of the First Life environment surrounding them.



**Figure 7. Multi-Media Interactive 2008 Underground, Independent Theatre, Nelson NZ Aoteaora. Actors: Mike Baker, Fiona Baker, Jo Brown, Roger Sanders. Cameras, Grae Burton,; Lone Star. Images, Mike Baker.**



It should be noted that the dependency upon good technological connections was invisible because everything worked very well, which aided the sense of fluency across interfaces. What did not occur even though there was sound, was a sound-based interaction between the audience and avatars, across world-surfaces, (which has occurred at my conference presentations, where the Second Life avatars pronounced the First Life audience as virtual) which would have extended the link.

With a view to examining the properties of surfaces or screens, in the online forum, 'empyre soft\_skinned\_space', (empyre Digest, Denied Distances [Gabriel Menotti] Vol 58, issue 1) Rosa Menkman suggests that we need to consider the thickness of the screen. An example of screen tangibility is Guy Sherwin's performance, 'Paper Landscape', (1975/2006). In Sherwin's words,

It starts with the projector illuminating a transparent polythene screen. Behind the screen stands the performer/filmmaker who applies white paint to the polythene. As a result the film image is revealed; it shows the same performer slowly tearing up a paper screen of the same size, to reveal a landscape. With the live performer gradually walling himself in behind a layer of white paint, the attention of the audience turns increasingly to the image of landscape projected onto this surface, and to the illusory performer who demonstrates the nature of deep space by running into the distance until he has merged with the landscape. Finally the confines of the cinema space are dramatically reaffirmed as the live performer slices the screen and steps through into the space that the audience occupies (2006, see images below).



*Figure 7. Guy Sherwin 'Paper Landscape'. Images, Sherwin (1975/2006).*

This is a clever commentary on the simultaneous existence of real and apparently virtual screens. But significantly, as Menkman says, the thickness or corporeality of the screen also supports, metaphorically, the deep space implicit within the projected image on the screen.<sup>10</sup> Menkman suggests that this interrogation of the degree and nature of depth-of-field (see images *Second Life Wellington Railway Station*: p.33)

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<sup>10</sup> In his response to Menkman, Julian Oliver maintains that Plato's screen is one that is relevant to all of us; the plane of visual cognition: 'The image stands at the junction of a light which comes from the object and another which comes from the gaze.' In this sense, Oliver asserts, all screens are very thin ... (*empyre Digest*, Vol 58, Issue 2).

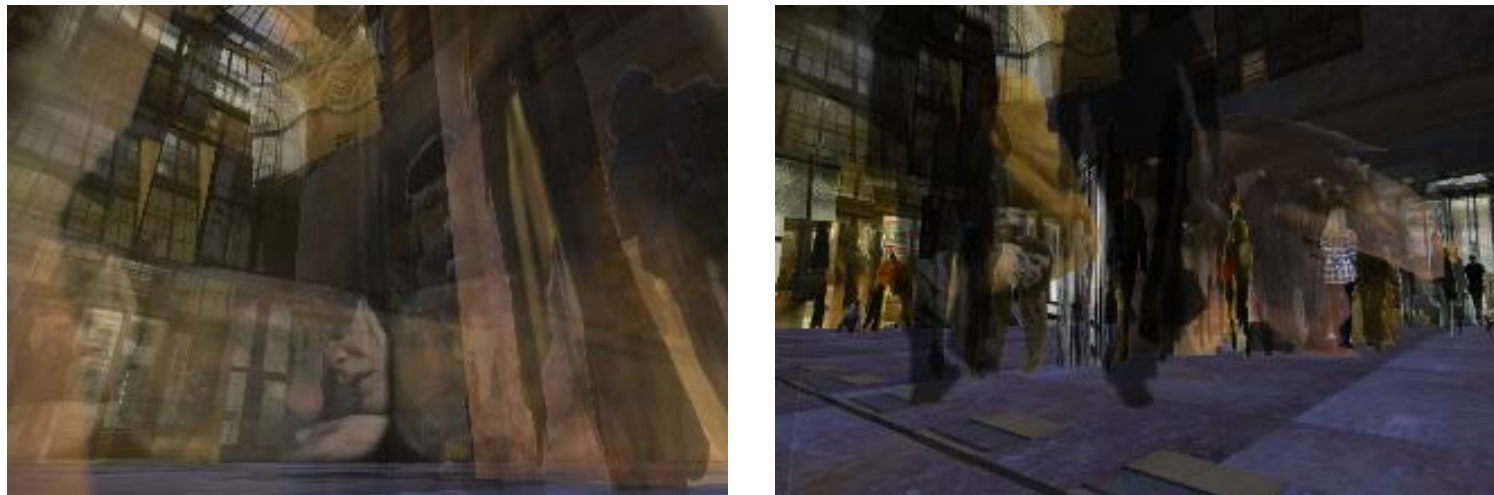
could be an appropriate paradigm for the analysis of digital images which on a literal plane, are manifestations of the computer's physical and logical architectures. ('I would like to consider the "thickness of the screen" primarily as a disclosure of the materiality of the medium ...'. Carlos Silvestre, *empyre Digest*, Sept 2, 2009.) It is a concern for the possible descriptions of the screens around us which define a dual representation of deep space and how 'removal' or departure of our 'self' from these screens or surfaces may generate dualities which hold a genuine potential for mixed-realities, which is currently holding my attention in my exploration of surfaces. The issue of deep space is obviously relevant in Real Life situations in terms of the implications and possibilities for temporal navigation through the space and the perception of space all around us where we are not. When we observe, flaneur-like, the removal of our self (we can feel, but cannot see ourselves included) from a selected view, this provides us with the opportunity to shift our perception of this view, because we are separated from the 'real' constituents of the view which locates us at the edge of this 'deep' space - an ambiguous screen or surface containing everything in the view. This is at variance to the re-presentation, through video, of this space when we ourselves are included in it, (in the videos of my dance work) which is one of the points of separation occurring for us in Second Life, where potentially in a third person view, you are able to watch your surrogate self (avatar) included immersively in a given space, or shift to first-person viewing (through a facility called, 'mouselook'), which, like Real Life cuts you out of your view. An example of a literal contemporary screen is defined by Julian Oliver in *empyre soft\_skinned\_space Digest*, 'The Thickness of the Screen', (Sept Vol 58, Issue 3, 2009) where he describes relative contradictions in public spaces in terms of what can be read and written in or onto surfaces:

How much of the city, from the perspective of a walking or driving subject, is mere support for proprietary imagery? ... For upcoming exhibitions in town squares around Europe and Asia we're working with artists that live near or otherwise with billboards - that they attest - consume so much of their visual, cognate and even habitable surface area. These artists develop works that remix and/or replace the billboards for handheld devices, recording and uploading the result in turn, such that the altered site can be remembered in distribution channels such as Flickr, Vimeo and YouTube (2009).

This example is accessible as an identifiable screen concerned with transfluency across interfaces and transformative embodiment; '...We are creating a temporary interstitial canvas within the flow of photons as they are reflected from proprietary to cognate surface' (Oliver, 2009), which is relevant to ways in which technological processes and architecture can be responsible for transformative practice through human intervention, yet which still stand outside direct human analogue activity. In the '... interstitial canvas ...' or network, Oliver mentions above, we have properties which could be said to be intrinsic to the makeup of any



given screen. These properties I suggest, are as portable across contexts as they are across interfaces; my interpretation extends beyond the above examples where I am also concerned with the realisation of my analogue potential through my own neural networks and internal connectivity. I am the screen. I am part of the architectural construct which affects an embodied 'becoming' between worlds. My intention has been to explore how dual manifestations of the same identity, (when crossing over or through a MUVE interface), which are still defined through these vehicles as 'different', may evolve into a single, blended reality using my intent through my avatar, Rollo Kohime and my First Life video footage manifesting in my Second Life station. To use Massumi's phrase, the body's 'potential to vary' (2002) suggests an alignment which juxtaposes the cyberbody with the physical body, with analogue capabilities running between them through the human/electronic interface. When I take these video traces into Second Life, my human analogue assimilates this corporeal activity and transforms it into cyber configurations of avatar embodiment, across real-digital (not virtual) interfaces.



**Figure 8. Video traces inscribed across real-digital interfaces manifesting in Wellington Railway Station Second Life. Images, Mike Baker.**

But this is not necessarily a straightforward undertaking, because as the term implies, the interstitial canvas being used is not only a point of intersection, it can also become a place of temporary interruption because as Professor Johannes Birringer points out below, avatars in Second Life do not possess 'consciousness'.

Or do they? While this last point concerning temporary interruption is valuable as a linking element with the real, (because our transformative moments in First Life can be experienced as interruptions in our analogue fields of perception, which is sometimes the only reason we are aware of the change taking place) and tends to be recognized briefly before it fades from our attention to be replaced by the next transformative task, the problematic issue of consciousness in avatars remains. On a recent post on the internet site, dance-tech.net, I discussed concepts under the title, 'Dance Exploration in Mixed-Realities? Investigating Second Life as a virtual platform for duality within identity'. Professor Johannes Birringer (Chair in Drama and Performance Technologies at Brunel University, London and Artistic Director of AlienNation Co in Houston, Texas, USA) replied to this post in dance-tech.net as follows:



'I will question the in and out, the easy transfluency, it does not exist for me, or it does not exist in the ways it is implied by the theoretical claims made (by Hansen, Munster, et al). You cite a very interesting passage, and then you extrapolate and say, hmm, perhaps like real life/second life and back and forth, if i understand you correctly, and you pose that question of the spaces / realities explicitly in your posting: \*(In the image on this page my live dance work in Wellington Railway Station is being streamed in real time onto the internet, demonstrating my endeavours in transfluency across real-digital interfaces. The transmission was successful but not entirely seamless). I am interested in pursuing this definition of mixed-reality - a 'new' realization of the fluidity of experiencing simulacra: In the first instance, physically/perceptually moving in and out of real and virtual moments in Real Life (RL in Second Life speak) and in the second instance, physically/perceptually, in front of our computer, moving in and out of Real Life (one is tempted to use the term First Life ...) and Second Life. I am inclined to the feeling that there is little difference between these two scenarios. I would like us to discuss this, if you wish. Why would there not be some crucial differences (materially, physiologically, psychologically, cognitively - what sort of consciousness do you assume into SL? what kind of artificial intelligence do you see operating there, and who makes the dances/dancing, the architectures there? how is perception defined in Second Life, who is doing any perceiving? cameras? your avatar? what consciousness does your avatar possibly have [I have not studied your post on avatar and species relationships yet])?'

**Figure 9.** (see footnote <sup>11</sup>) Image, Juliet Shelley.

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<sup>11</sup> Dancers Mike and Fiona Baker workshoping movement for 'Shelter 1 and 2' in Wellington Railway Station. Todd Cochrane streams our movement live onto the internet. Damian Manu on camera, 2009.

Birringer correctly poses questions here challenging the fluidity of transformative exchanges of embodiment across real-digital interfaces. Unlike Real Life, where as analogues, we make instant adjustments to the witnessing of apparently virtual moments, to achieve this across the digital portal of the Second Life browser appears to be a different undertaking, or at least, beset by a process of slight removal in real time while having to navigate through the technology and systems involved. In my dance practice during 2008 and 2009 in Wellington Railway Station, I focussed upon pursuing and inserting the visible projection of private, intimate narratives between the dancers into the public arena, to endeavour to represent and have witnessed the hidden micro-dramas involving departures that are lived out on the threshold between these two domains on an everyday basis. I imported the videoed footage of these tableaux into my Second Life Wellington Railway Station and explored ways of paralleling these Real Life dialogues with descriptions of engagement between avatars which eventually culminated in departure (please see the video: 'Embodying Surfaces - the Human Analogue - In the Company of Strangers'). Here I was exploring the movement of my intent across embodied surfaces to see to what extent I could achieve a seamless, osmotic relation to arrive at a convincing demonstration of mixed-reality. Ironically perhaps, this video demonstrates in an otherwise smooth exchange of enabled embodiment and signification across media boundaries how anomalies can still occur. While the avatar Sonja Scorbal in the Second Life dialogue can be heard clearly, my voice is missing, effectively making the recorded conversation incomplete. However, although it is still there transforming in Second Life as Birringer asserts, the human analogue may not have the transformative fluency of First Life, (yet First Life is also known for its unpredictabilities). The processes are still in use but movement of intent across technological interfaces does not compare with human synaptic velocities. The interfaces become interstitial hurdles which must be negotiated. In Second Life, due to the uncertainties of this transfluency, on a good day when conditions for interaction are favourable (when the internet connection is reliable and fast), it is still very easy to misconstrue another avatar's intentions. This occurs in First Life too, but in Second Life the apparatus of mis-communication happens more slowly. Engagements can fluctuate with avatars not fully 'rezzing',<sup>12</sup> (if you are in a location with a large number of avatars, for example at a specific in-world event and they are constructed using a high prim count<sup>13</sup>, the reception in that location suffers) and if your system is not set up to be voice-enabled, (this is now rare) avatars word-process to one another which can

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<sup>12</sup> 'Rezzing' in Second Life is short for resolve, often used as a verb in online virtual worlds such as Second Life. When an object or avatar is brought into the virtual world, it "rezzes". Textures used by the object may take a while to become fully visible, so when there is poor reception, or lag, objects often take a while to 'rez' or the programme may crash.

<sup>13</sup> 'Prim' or Primitive, is the basic building block for avatars or objects in Second Life.

lead to all manner of mis-engagements and confusing assumptions about the behaviour of the human host. Sometimes, in open locations where you are surrounded by strangers, events occur without warning, approaching the surreal: an avatar to whom you are talking will suddenly slump forward, 'lifeless', or they may just walk away from you or suddenly disappear, teleporting to another location without warning. In time you recognize these signs either as surrogate indicators of human behaviour behind the avatar, or a presage to technological anomalies. So without the construct of either touch or speech (or even with speech) and in the absence of lived, organic protoconversation to enable purchase on the moment, the process of remaining engaged and being able to ascertain when people are about to leave in Second Life admittedly, can be problematic. Nevertheless, contrary to the above examples, despite the indeterminant factors surfacing through technology, if you are an experienced user and engaged with a friend/avatar in Second Life, a level of connection can be achieved which is both intimate and enduring, approaching First Life status. (If this were not the case, meaningful relationships would not be possible in-life and we would not be able to use in-life relations as a catalyst to initiate and sustain extensions to those relations in First Life). A state of ethereal, symbiotic engagement can exist between two parties with a tacit, unspoken agreement about the terms of the engagement and when to leave. Perhaps the principal difference between First and Second Life diagnostics concerning departure is that the surfaces or interfaces between you and another are, in some respects, in Second Life more visibly recognized and so rationalised away. Often irrational or anomalous behaviour here is regarded as simply part of the technologically-dominated territory and allowances are made. Ultimately though, arrivals and departures lie at the heart of engagements in Second Life just as they do in First Life but to some extent the poignancy in leaving in First Life can perhaps be partially assuaged through practiced exposure to departure in Second Life in the knowledge that there need be no sense of finality in leaving because we can have an Avatar Companion, on call, twenty-four hours a day. (I return to this aspect on p.75). To continue my response to Birringer's observations I quote here, Alan Sondheim, who is investigating 'interruptions'; the ruptures which can occur during narratives between avatars in Second Life.:

... disturbances define both the openings and fore-closures of subjectivity on the Net, and how such subjectivity is dependent on the specific performativities of various applications. In other words, through margins, slippages, constitutions, constructs, emergences from the "depths" of software or hardware, blockages and flows and programming languages (and their phenomenologies) - only through taking these into account, as well as surface manifestations, is it possible to comprehend virtual subjectivity, etc. And further, as we've pointed out elsewhere, it is necessary to consider the projection of the self - its written or constituted appearance - in various applications (2009).

Just like First Life where our individual analogue facility constantly transforms data/stimuli/information despite anomalous disturbances, when in Second Life, (or any other MUVE) this same facility negotiates and through the anomalous clutter referred to by Sondheim above, mediates our person/avatar to avatar/person exchange across the real-to-virtual gap. This is easy to say, yet for me this is demonstrable and experientially, when 'in-life' during a conversation or performative activity with another avatar/person, the tools and prosthetic extensions of my computer across the interface become blurred and autonomic in their application, while we remain free to be immersed and on-task, transformatively communicating; visually, verbally and through evidential and represented movement.

### **Mediated Performance**

In my research practice, my investigations into moving image through video as a medium is centred in First Life and Second Life, upon relations between the real and the 'virtual' through what I identify as interdisciplinary mediation. When I began this body of research in 2007 I wanted my video filming and editing to have little obvious impact on the original captured event, both, during the filming and in the editing process. Properties within the everyday were important as a principal context, so I aimed for a seamless record of the dancers' interventionist movement and its effects on passers-by. The video, 'In the Company of Strangers - Missed Conversations in Redundant Spaces', (2007) focusses upon the dynamics and constituents of engagement and conversation between my movement exploration and members of the public, located in spaces I identified at that time as less travelled, utilitarian or disused; service spaces, passages or alleys linking main thoroughfares.

I wanted our dance dialoguing to be perceived both, on the distant periphery by city-goers from the main street looking down the alley (witnessed as a brief, 'virtual' moment) while at the same time to create marginal connections across a more intimate distance with people walking through our location, (at this time, Opera House Lane, Wellington City, New Zealand Aotearoa). My intention was to present our dancing presence as strangers to the place, activating and displacing an otherwise rarely inhabited space through our unorthodox movement, incongruous in that environment. The sequence begins with myself and my dance partner materialising into the space from thin air; perhaps a seamless entrance, but hardly a natural, introductory device in the everyday video footage, (an observation pointed out to me on my internet blog by the New Zealand contemporary dancer, Dr Simon Ellis)<sup>14</sup>. I quickly realised that despite my desire to keep

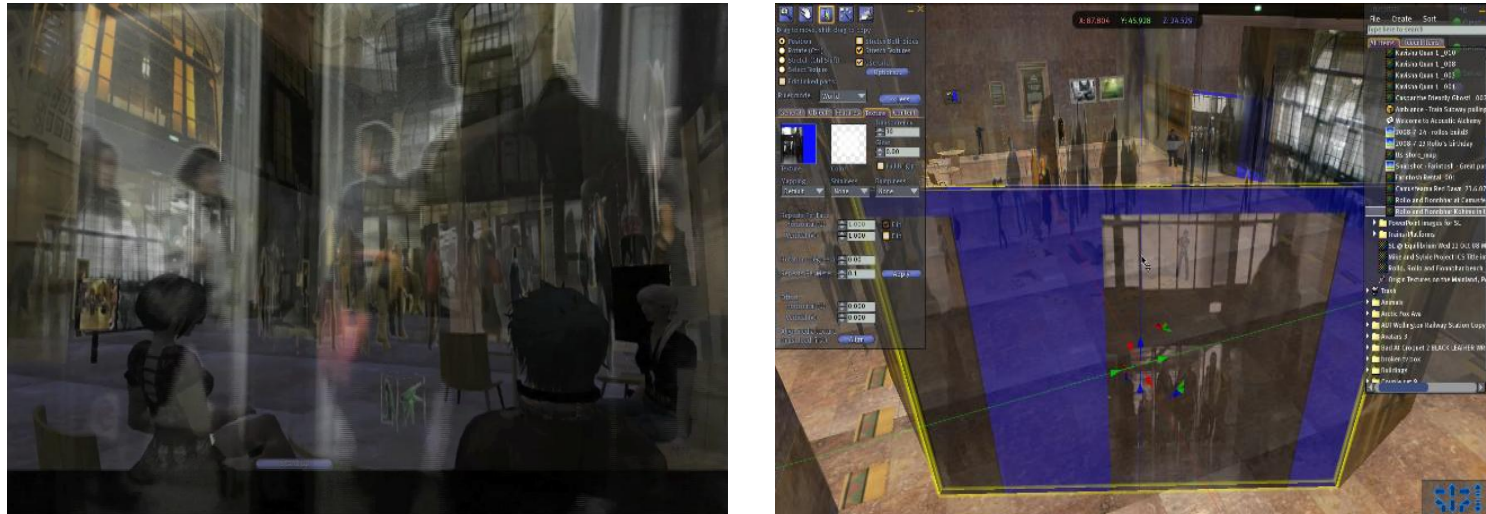
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<sup>14</sup> 'Am struck by the VERY strong aesthetic decision to fade yourselves in over the top of the 'background' (as it were). the magical appearance of two people out of nowhere, time travellers from another world and then, once again, reminded just how

the filmed footage faithful to the original activity, even if I were to use completely unedited video footage, the durational and technological gap between our real-time movement in the space and the replaying of the footage constituted a representational mediation of the original event. Since then, my video work has developed into representations, some quite literal, some more abstract (in terms of how much visual/conceptual information is removed) of dramatic tableaux in, on and *as* the screen. I became interested in the notion that my real-time dance work which, rather than be simply captured and projected as electronic emissions through or onto a screen, could instead, actually be perceived as also becoming the screen. My work in Second Life, under the premise that this is just another mixed-reality construct and not separate from the real world, initiated the possibility of perceiving bodies in both, Second Life and First Life as mobile volumes which have the capabilities to be moving surfaces or screens, overlaid with inscribed information; emotional, conceptual, visual, textual, contextual ... as is everything in the space that surrounds us. Ultimately then, in a world perceived as a multitude of enabled and embodied screens, performance work that is expressing First Life data yet is un-mediated by screens and their representational (removal from point of origin) content is problematic (see *The Human Analogue in Mixed-Reality*, p. 24).

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'other' the act of (contemporary?) dancing is in our community. It pushes against all kinds of assumptions about normal movement (and behaviour). I want to ask (from such a distance), "Are you OK?". but find myself remembering those cases of bystander intervention (and lack of) - most famously Kitty Genovese ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitty\\_Genovese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitty_Genovese)). And I think it might be safer to remain within my boundaries. To not trespass, or transgress. What will you do to me if I check? And yet, bizarrely, it's an intervention that doesn't seem to intervene with passers by. Such questions of audience, and the privileging of a witness's perspective fascinate me. "What do I have to do to make you stop and look?" But, perhaps, the conversation in homes around Wellington afterwards are where the intervention occurs (a small delay in transmission). "You know, dear, I saw these two people rolling around the arcade on my way home .... they seemed in their own worlds", or perhaps "Is it Fringe Festival time?" One thing - I wonder how I ought to look at the material. As a dance-on-screen project? As a silent witness to something that I can imagine seeing/passing by? e.g. Is this simply documentation of an event? Or is the video (on blogspot) the outcome unto itself?"  
Dr Simon Ellis 7.9.07.



**Figure 10. Stills from video capture in Second Life Wellington Railway Station: Layering Real Life station video surfaces/screens with Second Life surfaces/screens 2009. Images, Mike Baker.**

According to Marcyrose Chvasta, in *Remembering Praxis; Performance in the Digital Age*, which questions the current demarcations between live and mediated performance, Philip Auslander has argued convincingly that ‘all performance - if not electronically mediated - is mediated by language of some kind. Because language mediates our experiences, any presentation of one’s self is not one’s Self’ (2005:168). Auslander employs Derrida to argue that the ‘mind cannot communicate the body without being defined by the rules of language as a system of difference, and the body cannot express the mind without being defined by its system of differences’ (Auslander, 1996 in Chvasta, 2005:168). I concur with this view. Any presentation of self in or out of performative contexts; ‘live’ or ‘mediated’ - is mediated somehow. Every mediation is intertextual, containing a multiplicity of texts that are mediations in themselves. My work is based upon layered, interdisciplinary mediation, both real, electronic and telepresent: my First Life dance content in Wellington Railway Station perceived/viewed in real-time in the station by commuters as mediators (some comment, most do not), my edited video footage of this content - the first major removal from point-of-origin, this video material imported into Second Life to be merged electronically and removed further from its point-of-origin. By extension then, any ‘live’ performance is still a mediated performance. It just depends on the language of that mediation and the vocabulary used to express that language.



The work in First Life (or Second Life) may be comprised of any number of technical dance steps or states. Signing for the deaf may be used, or cross-disciplinary media, the spoken word, the written text, classical word, txtng text or semaphore, costuming or digital new media. Each represents a signification of mediation.

Chvasta also cites Steve Dixon, who has developed performances that interrogate performance theory itself, his work leading to insights that serve both traditional and more contemporary conceptualizations of the performer and audience. For Dixon, there is no power differential between the live and the mediated body. According to Dixon, both are equally forceful embodiments of human experience. Like Dixon, I question the extent to which that rarefied atmosphere of 'pure', live dance performance (if it exists at all - does not any audience mediate any performance?) is placed above mediated dance performance. Between Barthes' Death of the Author and virtual videos of live performance works, internet mashup sites (e.g. hyperchoreography, left-luggage, move-me) empowering the public to create their own virtual performances from a selection of available sources, fully immersive worlds like Second Life where 'live' virtual performances are carried out in real time, the boundaries defining what constitutes legitimate 'live' performance work have never been so blurred.

In my own dance and video work I am investigating ways in which the 'virtual' may manifest as an extension or transformative duration in the 'real', rather than simply its binary opposite, so I am interested in what strategies the Canadian media scholar, Pierre Levy uses to negotiate transformative practices. Chvasta states that Pierre Levy defines four ontological elements: the real, the possible, the actual, and the virtual. Each of these elements—or 'vectors,' in Levy's terms—operates 'almost always' in conjunction with the others. Levy is interested in these vectors as unstable modes of existence. I am interested in this instability for what I perceive to be the elements' potential to overlap one another. So rather than operating in conjunction with one another in a linear fashion, I see each of these vectors layered on top of one another, where each impinges on the other from above and below, transformatively embodying each layer: the possible/virtual becomes the actual/real. the possible/real becomes the actual/virtual. For me this construct offers a way of understanding how the virtual or 'possible' may have an osmotic role in the real, rather than one which is clearly differentiated and separate.





**Figure 11. Stills from video capture in Second Life. Layered Screens Mediating Performance. Real Life dancers: Mike and Fiona Baker. Second Life, Sonja Scorbil and Real Life Station Crowd 2009. Images, Mike Baker.**

Chvasta asserts that Levy is interested in ‘the process of transformation from one mode of being to another’ (Levy, 1998, in Chvasta, 2005:165) which perhaps is the enactment of that osmotic role. I am also interested in these vectors as descriptors of the ‘possible’ – states of a present which is not passive but dynamic, the present as a state which is always becoming. Specifically, according to Levy, he engages in the ‘study of virtualization that ascends from the real or the actual toward the virtual’ (Ibid, 1998). While the real is orientated in the present, in the temporal and spatial sense of the term, the virtual is orientated in the future. This speaks to me of the virtual residing neither ‘here’ nor ‘there.’ It lies in-between and electronic mediation within performance can be viewed as an instrument which allows us to perhaps more readily move between embodied surfaces in so-called virtual environments like Second Life and First Life.



**Figure 12. 'Virtual' Embodied Surfaces - Moving between First and Second Life Crowds. Images, Mike Baker. The crowd movement, indicative of departure in the Second Life station is essentially one-way, towards the train platforms, so the cutouts of intermixed First Life people and Second Life avatars are almost one-sided. The image top-left shows a perspective from a commuter's viewpoint moving from the platforms, towards the station entrance, so the commuter crowd is almost invisible. I designed this intentionally to de-emphasise the sense of arrival. In the crowd cutouts at top-right, the images are emphatically present in their intention to depart, moving (mostly) towards the platforms. The image at left shows myself and co-dancer, Sylvie Haisman in mid-dance as ephemeral - contained as it were, within the screen view, moving against the prevailing current of station commuters.**



*Figure 13. Embodied Surfaces - Mixed-Reality Crowd and Video Screens in the Second Life Wellington Railway Station. Image, Mike Baker.*

**Video 2: A Facet of the Real, 3 Embodying Surfaces,**

With the aid of my avatar, Rollo Kohime, I have constructed screens which have evolved into figurative and representational cutouts - simulacra of commuter crowds flowing through my Second Life Wellington Railway Station. A crowd-screen or surface with its subjective associations of deep space defined as such, partly by the use of linear, directional elements in the view. One could say that the surface or 'stage' for my work, rather than just two descriptions (the Real station and my Second Life station) of Wellington Railway Station at rush-hour, is equally accurately, the moving body itself, that mobile volume mentioned earlier - the body as a roaming transformative screen - the human as Roaming Analogue. This body identity travels and transits in place and time from one description of the Real to another. As an example, within the video: 'Embodying Surfaces', in the Second Life station is an imported clip, 'Departed', playing on selected screens. This footage is of an intimate, small-conversation between myself and my dance partner. These same dancers (due to their videoed separation from their original present-tense performative context) I perceive as temporally-based First Life avatars together with my avatar Rollo and another, Sonja Scorbal (image p.41). These persona in their different descriptions are surfaces upon which can be written and overwritten layers of feeling, dialogue, present and past intent, traces or residue. Equally, the First Life crowd is a moving screen upon which through my movement, I may make marks on the surfaces in the space (commuters, furniture, ground, walls ...) and the generic surface of the space itself (another's view of my activity included in the space) - subtly intervene in the rushing flood of crowd-intent with unsettling movement and interaction, with questions which for them, may outlive the journey home, to be recalled over the evening meal, or perhaps next year in a reflective moment.

In 'Maintaining the Digital Embodiment Link to Performance', (2007) Andrew Bucksbarg suggests a positive extension, rich with possibilities inherent in metaverse environments like Second Life;

Are networked simulated worlds much more similar to our dreams and imaginings than to the clunking improbability of a physical world? Unlike traditional media forms, do video games, simulations and other newer media perform the opposite of the suspension of disbelief? Do they encourage an extension of the imaginable? If the utopic promise of humanity is creative imagination, then it makes sense that methodologies for communication and content creation, which form a blank screen onto which this imagination can occur, are the ideal medium- the metaverse or meta design system.

Potentially, then, imagination itself becomes a screen and if we recognize a process of surface activation and embodiment through the medium or surface of imagination in First Life, we have a meld of what once were descriptions of Real and Virtual screens existing in this blended reality that we inhabit, everyday.

For Susanne Langer (in Innis, 2009), a dancer's body must transcend the energetic, physical body while performing - the performing body must project the illusion of 'virtual force' to fully constitute a work of art. Langer maintains that dance gesture is not real gesture, but virtual gesture: 'It is actual movement, but virtual self-expression'. Although I understand the distinction, for me this force is not virtual and it is not an illusion. I am seeking in my own work to bring together various embodied aspects of the Real which may ultimately constitute a composite description of this force.

### **Part Five: Movement Practice 1 - Other Dance - Rolling as an Investigative Device**

The following section relates to a series of movement/film sessions within my practice, begun in January 2007, exploring the device of rolling, very slowly across a selected space. Rolling became one of my vehicles for investigatively encountering the various spatial and temporal territories with/in which I planned to occupy and carry out my movement work. My rationale for introducing this device within my description of 'dance' was based on the following six points: 1) The activity of slow-rolling relates to Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark-Smith's 'small dance'.<sup>15</sup> This, on a personal level for the dancer, is arriving in the space as a dancer. Rolling became a 'way in' for me, a way to insert myself as other, engaged in an-other movement, exploring another perceptual dimension existing perhaps, underneath the usually perceived space. This became the first reference point for me, relational with an interventionist approach to the space.

2) Rolling allowed me to navigate through the space in such a way as to provide me with an unorthodox perspective, 'mapping' a dimension of the space/place which would usually go unnoticed and providing the roller (and the camera) with a unique view recorded during the rolling in the space. This perspective

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<sup>15</sup> Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark-Smith were two of the principal protagonists responsible for the progression of post-modern dance movement, through the labbing and workshoping of Contact Improvisation Dance and were also leading instigators of the Judson Memorial Church Group between 1962-1964 (It is still running to this day). Paxton's 'small dance' within CI Dance is a time of internal or somatic movement – a time of arriving within one's body in a space; at first, there is often not very much evidence of outward movement at all. The 'small dance' relates to the inner body first – it is a manifestation of personal ownership - the process of acknowledging the layering of the body; cellular structure, internal organs, the bones and muscles, which, in the second phase expands outwards to touch the epidermal layers of skin, (at which point, movement becomes visible. Stark-Smith calls this the 'Skinesphere'), which in turn, travels beyond the confines of the body (in a sense, this third or last phase includes/integrates the body with the surrounding space) to facilitate the body's arrival within the space itself. It is a process of an unwinding gyre, a slowly emerging, centrifugal intention and subsequent movement, which equips the dancer to manage, interact with and articulate their presence in the wider space/place in which they find themselves. (This 'articulation' and subsequent description of 'dance', might be as minimal as the simple act of standing up and finding a place of stillness.)



signified for me an ‘opening’ and ‘closing’ aspect carried out by the body; the closing, a shutting out of the world, the opening, a letting in of the world. The addition of the small windows of another view, which is the roller’s eye-view, opening out and away from the ground, comes and goes.



**Figure 14. Stills: Displacing non-places KF (Kaitaki Ferry), 2008 Dancer: Mike Baker Camera: Fiona Baker. Images, Mike Baker.**

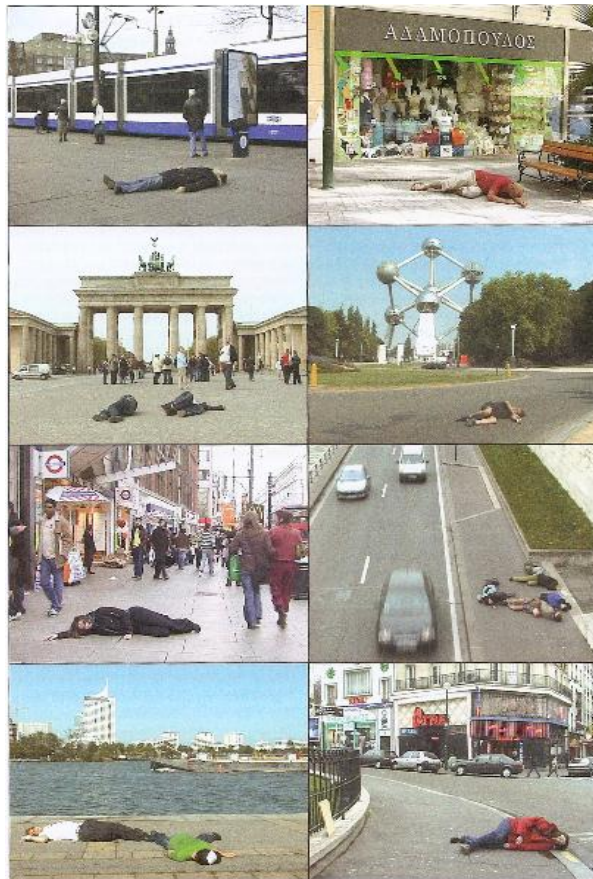


**Figure 15. Stills: Investigating non-places: Rolling in Nelson Bus Depot - 2007 Dancer: Mike Baker. Camera: Lone Star. Images, Mike Baker.**



**Figure 16. Stills from video capture: In the Company of Strangers - slow Telecom roll Nelson 2007 Dancer: Fiona Baker  
Camera: Mike Baker. Images, Mike Baker.**

3) Daniela Perazzo writes that the performative aim of Kinkaleri's work 'The Fall of the West', (2006:11-15. Figure 17. p.48) carried out in twelve major cities throughout Europe was partially to, 'interrogate the formats of scenic presence and the limits of social constructions by taking the enquiry out of theatrical spaces, and placing it in the real world, in busy streets, squares and corners of big modern cities' (Kinkaleri, 2006). I aligned myself with this aim with the specific objective of targeting for my performative enquiry what I considered, in 2007, to be non-places (Augé, 2004) using what on a certain level could be said to be 'non-dance' movement. At this stage I began investigating how perceived non-dance, ('conversing' through intimate dueting in CI Dance, walking, sitting, rolling ...) might be sufficient or appropriate to the task of activating or temporarily, creating a sense of ownership which might be missing from a given space. I was interested in seeing if could instigate, through unusual activation, a sense of transformative becoming-place into a non-place/space. (Video 9: DVD In the Company of Strangers - The Duende Roll. Figure 18: p.50).



**Figure 17.** Kinkaleri Dance Co (Perazzo, 2006) has used figures falling down in public places, (*The Fall of the West*, 2003), as political commentary to signify ways in which the Western world is in decline, bringing degeneration and death. It also signifies the cavalier attitude that we betray toward our fellow humans in urban environments.

Image: Perazzo.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Kinkaleri's work can be read either as political statement or as formal experiment. Talking about the aesthetic rationale, they say: 'as a formal sign, the fall is a change of physical position, from vertical to horizontal. Seeing this action in a context in which you don't expect to see it modifies your perception of the space, your perspective vision. The image you have in front of you changes completely. Dropping to the ground the person swallows up all the rest and creates a sort of suspension where every little movement becomes important. It's as if, by falling, the human figure revealed a hidden world, enabling the viewer to see things differently ... so the person falls down dead and immediately a whole other life fills in the void (s)he left; people walking, cyclists speeding past, children playing, joggers running, tourists taking photographs, shoppers with their bags, business men in their suits, cars, motorbikes, trains, dogs, pigeons ...' (Perazzo, D. 12:2006)

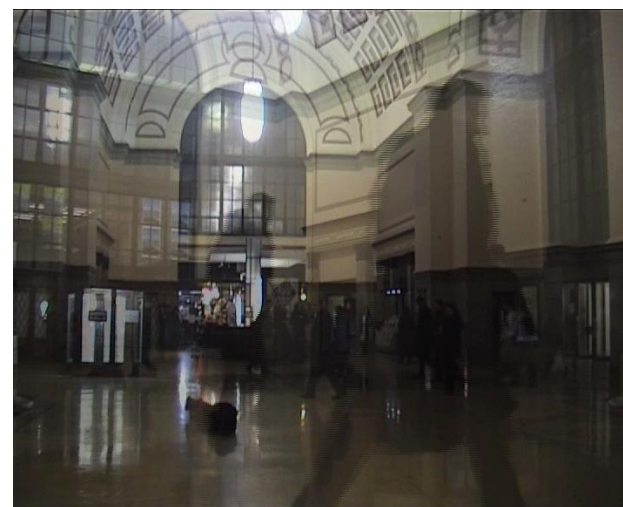
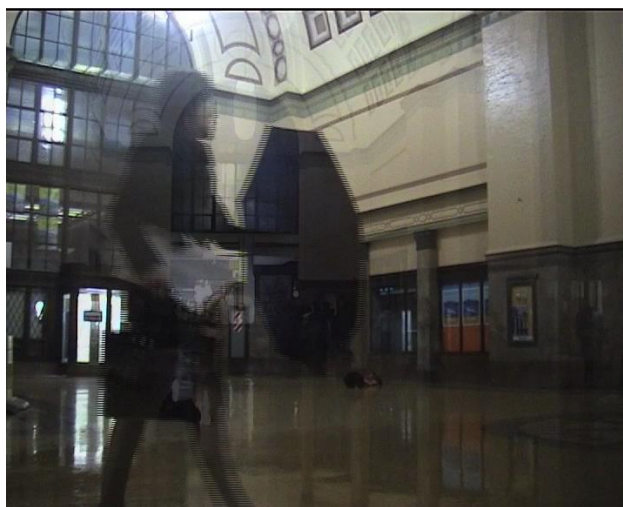


4) This quality of movement can be associated with the incongruous, with the irreverent, with the uncomfortable and the abject, suggesting an interventionist intent when carried out in a public space. The body in a supine position, inserted in an otherwise vertically dominated, urban environment could be innocently at rest, but it is also associated with sickness, aberrant behaviour, or death.

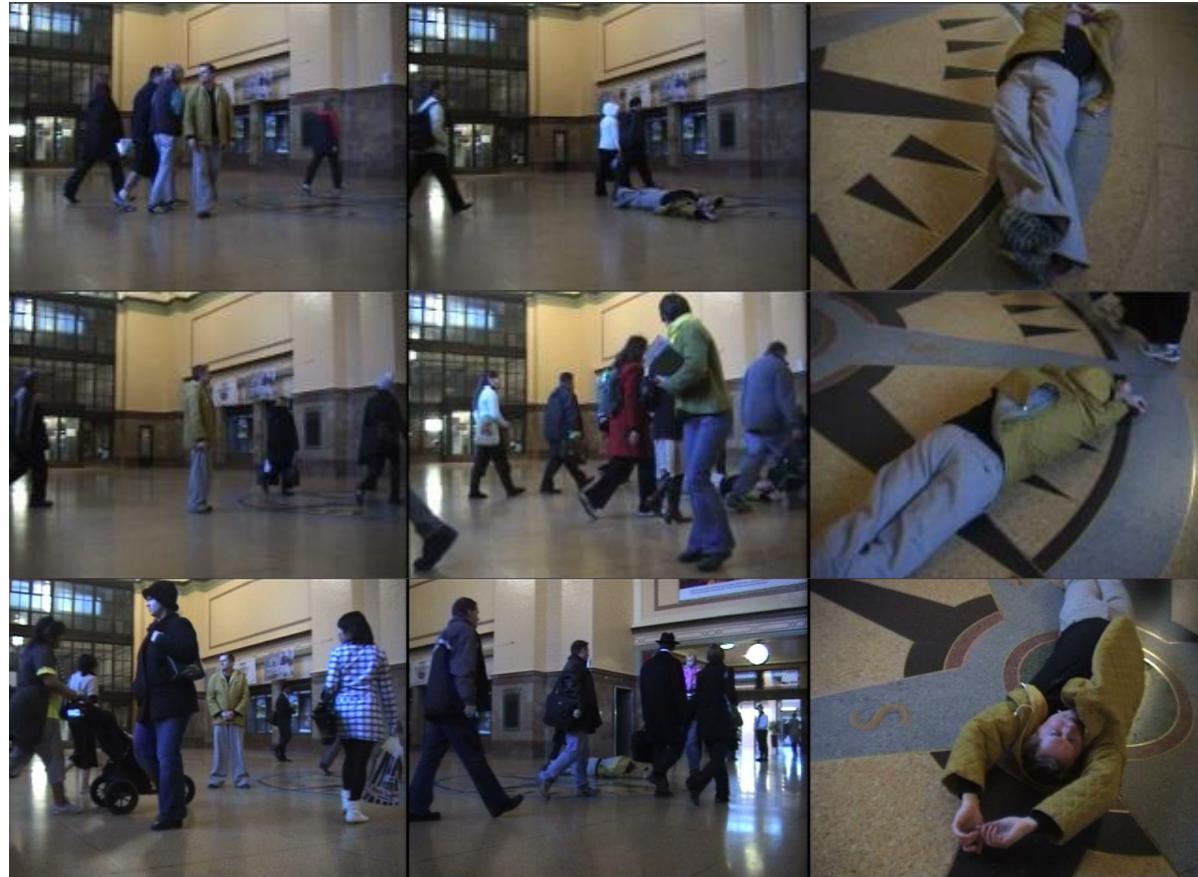
5) Rolling has a temporal manifestation; I wanted for a brief moment, to 'stop the world' for the viewer. During moments of surprise, trauma, anxiety or major interruption in our perceptions, time appears to slow or even freeze. Rolling as an action can be tailored to the situation. The slow cadence of the movement has a temporal measure, almost mechanistic. As an interventionist strategy, taking my private 'view' of the world into public spaces, I wanted to explore that description of 'suspension' which Kinkaleri mentions (see footnote 16 p.48) which is precipitated in the viewer by encountering a strange, inexplicable event in their day. So mediation is present here. My rolling body, through this interventionist movement, disturbing, altering, transforming those moments for the passers-by who witness my movement behaviour. (This relates back to my concern in 2007 for 'virtual', unexplained moments perceived on our periphery, punctuating and interrupting the continuity of our everyday.) So my rolling became increasingly interventionist in the public space. I wanted to, 'get in the way', not too much, but enough for my actions to be noticed peripherally as possibly functioning outside the norm. I wanted to initiate that moment of 'suspension' - a pause in our being in the world while we are held in thrall to another worlding, the incongruous, the way that when we are involuntarily moved out of our current perspective we perceive the world suddenly, in all its minutiae, but which is a perception which cannot last because we are swept past the moment.<sup>17</sup> The interesting thing here is that I believe our analogue processes transform the sketchy data we receive on the way past such a moment, creating for us that questionable reality scenario. If we do investigate this moment, (a student of mine informed me this week, that she had followed up a peripheral moment and was disappointed to find that she had demystified it in the process), our analogue usually sets to work and transforms this 'other' scenario into a logical, mundane or very explicable action or event, shorn of the mystery which existed when before, we were not engaged in such a careful scrutiny.

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<sup>17</sup> On April 16 1994, my wife passed away suddenly without warning, next to me in bed. Later that day after leaving the hospital with my baby son, surrounded by family on an otherwise perfect, sunny Autumn day with the birds calling in the trees, my perception was overwhelmed; never before had the world seemed so filled with colour, richness of texture and sound. It was as if my world had changed forever (as it had) and I talked, acted and breathed from a different, parallel place when in conversation with another, almost as if a transparent, porous membrane were stretched between us. This heightened state of awareness persisted for several days.



***Figure 18. In the Company of Strangers - the Duende Roll, Wellington Railway Station. 2008 Dancer: Mike Baker  
Camera: Fiona Baker. Images, Mike Baker.***



**Figure 19. In the Company of Strangers - Rolling Triptych 2009 Dancer: Mike Baker Cameras: Fiona Baker, Sylvie Haisman. Images, Mike Baker.**

6) My more recent rolling work in Wellington Railway Station has increasingly focussed upon the action as an 'other' activity relational with the floor as a screen. The Roaming Body becomes a horizontal mobile volume, behaving outside the norm and recognizes the station floor as a surface upon which may be inscribed marks, traces and memory.



**Figure 20.** Exploring the animation 'Rough Roll' designed by Rachel Mann (Lecturer, Southern Institute of Technology, NZ Aotearoa) in the Second Life Wellington Railway Station 2009. Images, Mike Baker.

I am currently working with a designer and animator, Rachel Mann, in Dunedin who is scripting a rolling animation for my Second Life avatar. I am interested in the potential for transformative embodiment of screens where my Real Life and Second Life rolling mediate one another in the respective station spaces (Figure 20. p.52). Notice that my avatar, Rollo Kohime is appearing to roll up in the air, through the space, in contrast to the dancer in the video who is very grounded. The Second Life movement executed by my potential other, Rollo, contrasts dramatically with my Real Life rolling (see Mediated Performance, p.37). One representational, electronically-mediated description, itself, mediating and being mediated by another.

## **Part Six: Movement Practice 2 Contact Improvisation Dance**

### **(i) The Roaming Body and the Duende**

In 2008 I began to research the manifestation of the Duende.<sup>18</sup> This dynamic sense of pathos seemed fitting to me as an area for study which might be relevant to a world of people, who despite themselves, all leave their previous moments and present lives, now past. I have spent some time investigating ways of introducing the Duende (and its Portuguese near equivalent, the Saudade - see my internet blog post, 28.8.08) into my First Life dance work and into my Second Life station build. To configure with my conviction that a life of everyday departures is laden with poignancy and pathos, I needed to explore how to introduce a sense of a raw and powerful force which could catalyse engagements on the street and the subsequent process of leaving. Lorca (1930 La Habana) tells us that the Duende represents a, '... struggle present in the artist's soul, the struggle of knowing that death is imminent ...' and in The Tragic Myth: Lorca and Cante Jondo by E. F. Stanton, the University of Kentucky Press, that (the) Duende stems visibly from an emergence coloured by '... painful hues and tones ...'. Come what may, sooner or later under the

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<sup>18</sup> In The Tragic Myth: Lorca and Cante Jondo, we are informed that much of Lorca's poetry carries us back to a mythic universe. The word 'myth' appears in Aristotle's Poetics with reference to an action, plot or narrative. The 'plot' of Lorca's verse, like that of cante jondo, is essentially tragic. It is realized under the auspices of the Duende. In both Lorca and cante jondo, a musical score which manifests through the flamenco, the territory of this tragedy is Andalusia, not however the tangible spaces of southern Spain, but a poetic region of the mind. Stanton goes on to say, 'As a power that springs from the depths of the earth, Lorca tells us that duende is linked to the dark realm of the unconscious; it is an enemy of reason. It does not descend from Aristotle, but from the Dionysian Greeks, passing through Nietzsche. This demon cannot be summoned at will, but when it arrives its force is irresistible. It shakes the man it possesses like an electric charge'. For Lorca, the Duende was true myth – literally, an extraordinary inspiration that could not be set aside and which, as a force, could visit anyone under certain conditions. For further reading of the Duende in my research please see: <http://hoststranger.blogspot.com>, 'Expressing the Duende in Meetings and Engagements in the city' (Posted: 26 May 2008).

influence of our lived states of 'becoming' (Bergson, 2005), eventually we are removed from known others and places and for me, this state resounds with pathos, but was and is this notion of mine appropriate? The Roaming Body and durationally-based relations with our known spaces and their inhabitants ensures that even at 'home', we can become strangers in a strange land. I assert this deliberately, while simultaneously something deep within me seeks to dodge the notion. Yet the potential for poignancy remains:

‘... and I will leave. But the birds will stay, singing:  
And my garden will stay, with its green tree,  
With its water well.

Many afternoons the skies will be blue and placid,  
And the bells in the belfry will chime, as they are chiming  
This very afternoon.

The people who have loved me will pass away,  
And the town will burst anew every year.  
But my spirit will always wander nostalgic  
In the same recondite corner of my flowery garden.’

Juan Ramon Jimenez – ‘The Definitive Journey’ – El Viaje Definitivo<sup>19</sup>

'Leaving' will make strangers of us all; It is easy for the spirit to rebel at such an assertion. I am aware myself, since I have lived a somewhat diasporic existence through my childhood and then moving to the other side of the world to 'make a life', that despite this upheaval (the process is no small thing) I have people 'back home'; family and friends, who I like to think will never make of me a stranger. The old adage holds true: 'Home is where, when you go there, they have to take you in', the kinds of people who you may not see for many years and yet when you do meet again, a core of recognition, of acknowledgement, of empathy emerges to celebrate that connection that between us we possess, but which has lain dormant for a time. The Duende became a powerful tool for me within my thinking and feeling through the 'real-time choreography'<sup>20</sup> of my dance practice, in both my First Life and Second Life stations. Rolling with this

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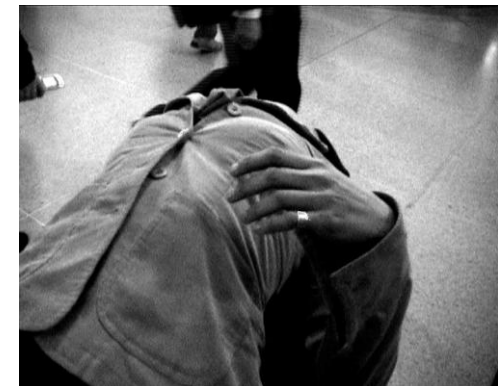
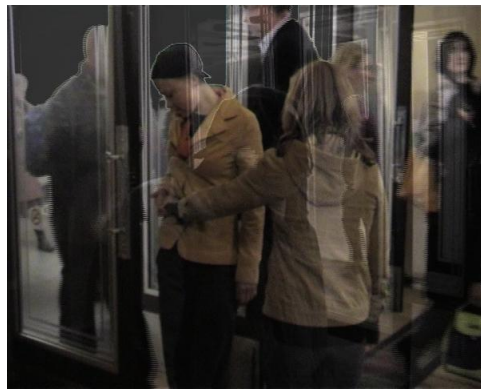
<sup>19</sup> Juan Ramón Jiménez (1881-1958) was one of the greatest Spanish poets of the 20th century. He is perhaps best known for his writings which evoke the Duende. This is the poem recited by Carlos Castaneda in the remarkable book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, for the Yaqui Indian don Juan Matus when don Genaro, his compatriot shares his revelations about his neverending search for his home village – a village he will never find again. The sentiment expressed in the poem is one of ineffable sadness.



agenda was mostly carried out in Wellington Railway Station in 2008 and 2009. Although I used this visitation of passion and loss to underpin my rolling, signifying the poignancy in interruption, divisiveness, incongruity and death, I also used it to inform our structured Contact Improvisation scores.

### **Video 3: Slippage**

The dance and video works leading up to the *Departed* series of studies (April 2009) all referred to the manifestation of the Duende and centred on the poignancy in leaving. They were all works carried out in Wellington Railway Station and served as the basis for further extensions for exploration of the Roaming Body in Second Life. (I used this footage to investigate 'virtual' or removed representation in two formats of the Real: the station footage played in First Life (DVD format) and this same footage imported and played in my Second Life station).



**Figure 21. Stills from video capture: Slippage 2009 (pp. 55,56) Dancers Fiona Baker and Sylvie Haisman . Camera: Mike Baker, Images, Mike Baker**

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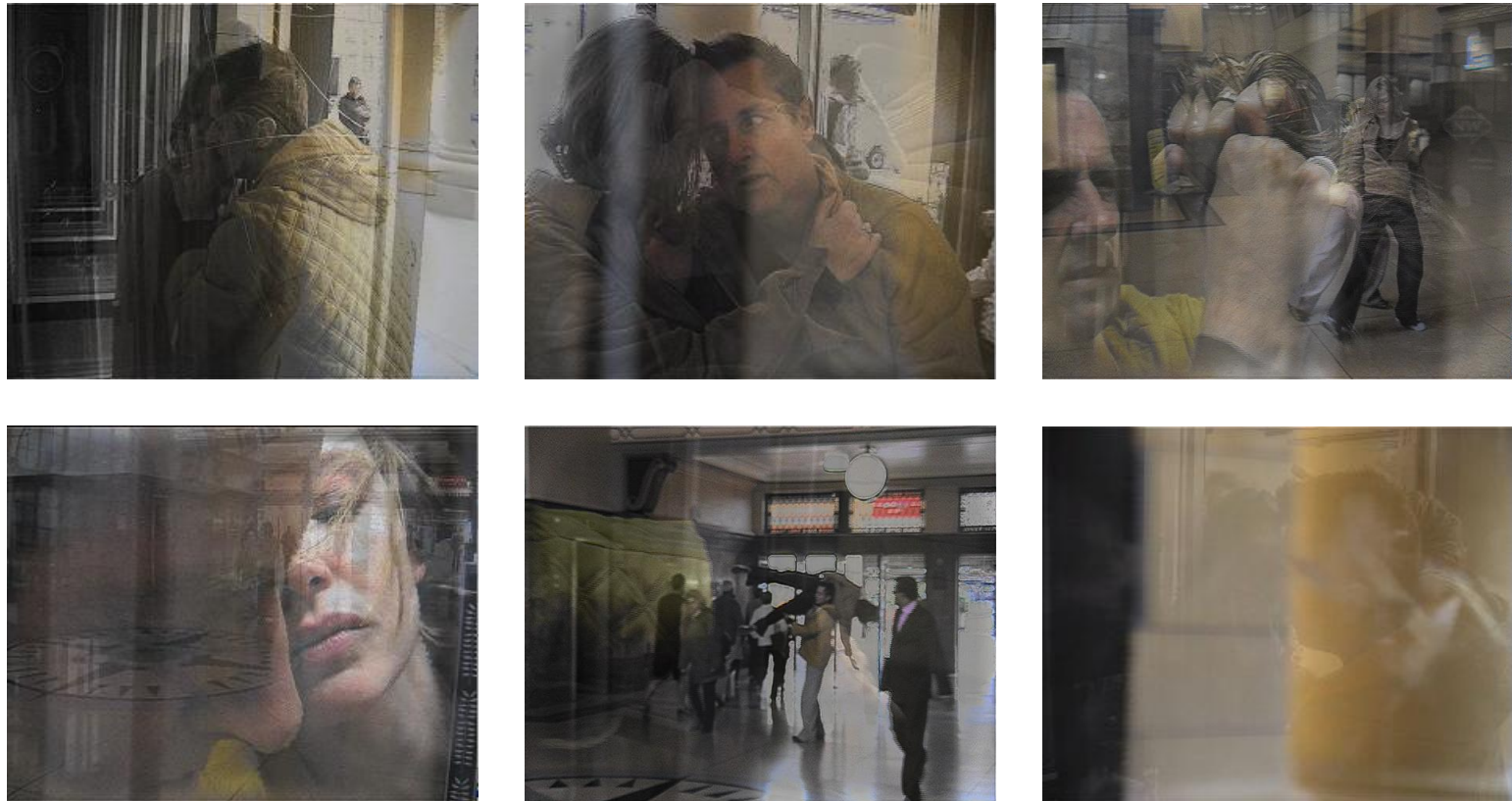
<sup>20</sup> A term used by Kristian Larsen ([throwdisposablechoreography.blogspot.com](http://throwdisposablechoreography.blogspot.com)) to describe processes of structured improvisation in dance practice.



**Figure 21. Still from video capture: Slippage 2009**

In April of 2009, my Mother fell very ill in England and passed away. I had arranged previously with the Wellington Railway Station authorities to dance and film in late April, so four days after my return to New Zealand we were working again in the station. For these movement studies I wanted to bring the camera in much closer to the dancers to increase access to the tensions in the dancers' narrative and to highlight the contrast in this private, intimate behaviour unfolding in a public place. I introduced a sense of small but strong drama - a tableau of clenched feeling which we can sometimes witness in public places but which is invariably removed from us; a sense of passion, of despair, of pathos inherent in this constant movement away from those places and people which sustain our sense of belonging. In my structured improvisation, I used the entrance doors as a focal point for our movement - an interface which was both a barrier and a bridge between the dancer's dialogue. An embodied screen or surface in *First Life* which I could then take into *Second Life*. I have been interested in the repetition of the station entrance doors for some time and their glass and steel composition, indicative of a hard, unyielding yet transparent and visually accessible screen have been a focal point for a number of works. ('Leaving and the Little Death', 'Leaving - Two Duets', 'Cutouts', which became the recent re-edit, 'Slippage' and other studies). During the course of this latest dance and video work, I had left facial smears behind during my initial contact with the glass doors, as trace elements of my passage through the space and inscriptions of the charged and emotional process I was experiencing over the loss of my Mother. A testimonial to those who are left behind when others leave:





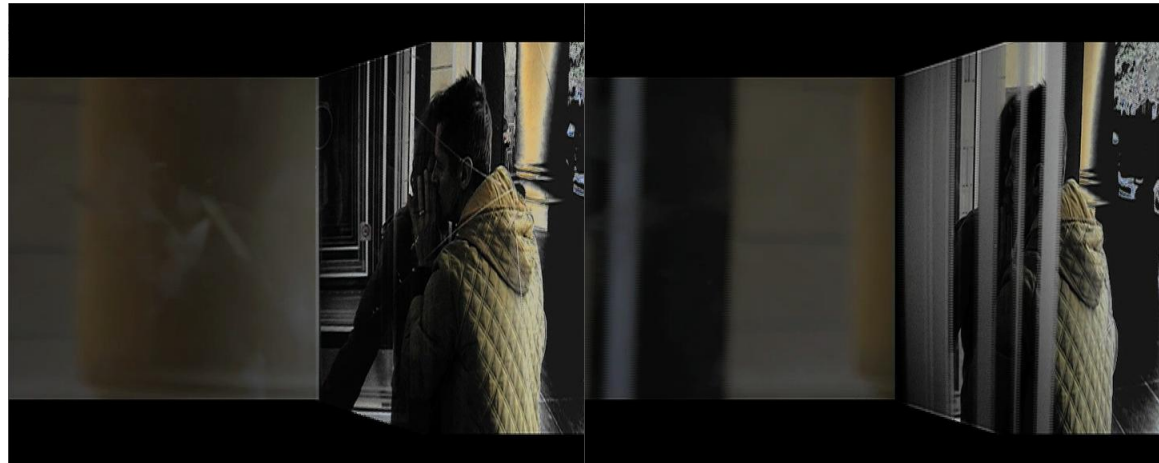
**Figure 22. Stills from video capture: Departed - Remnants 2009 Last dance for my Mother. Dancers: Mike and Fiona Baker  
Camera: Steve Gallagher. Images, Mike Baker.**

'We who are left behind: Poetry as Testimony in Derrida and Celan', by Mathew Landis. Celan cannot speak for his departed mother. His voice cannot take the place of her own because the presence of his voice cannot undo the erasure of his mother's. Her absence is marked by the impossibility of a return. There is no homecoming. The erasure of the trace leaves nothing in its wake but silence in this instance. The only way that Celan can "speak" for his dead mother is to bear witness. To give testimony to this wound:

The survivor, who remains behind, remains alone. Beyond the world of the other, he is also in some fashion beyond or before the world itself. In the world outside the world and deprived of the world.

At the least, he feels solely responsible, assigned to carry both the other and his world, the other and the world that have disappeared, responsible without world (weltos), without ground of any world, thenceforth, in a world without world, as if without earth beyond the end of the world.

'The world is not here, I must carry you.' (Derrida and Celan in Landis: 2009). The singular position of the survivor: he who is left behind to carry the other as a wholly departed and singular other, a wholly departed and singular world. Therefore, in '... carrying you ...' we as survivors who are left behind become ourselves, the trace of that other. The inscription on our own surfaces of our remembrance and testimony informs our presence as one of the constituents of our non-departure on that other's path even though we, ourselves, are always leaving and as we leave, inscribing in turn, our traces on others who would stay behind.



**Figure 23. Stills from video capture: Departed - Durational (Surface) Inscriptions 2009 Dancers: Mike, Fiona Baker Camera Steve Gallagher. Images, Mike Baker.**

I am indebted in the first of the Departed series, to Thomas Feiner, the composer/performer of 'For Now' (released on The Opiates Revised) who kindly gave me permission in May 2009 to edit and integrate his sounds with my movement. I viewed this study as a draft and continued to work on the editing; intensifying/capitalizing on certain moments/effects and re-structuring these in relation to different sound input. In July 2009 I worked with two Nelson-based composers to construct industrially-based, abrasive/diverse sound-fields. Although I think the initial draft of Departed is successful as a collaborative work, I wanted to develop a more abstract field of visual and sound texture around our dancing bodies and

less of a linear narrative in the work. This has so far culminated in *Departed - Durational (Surface) Inscriptions* (*Figure 23*. p.58). The *Departed* series of videos is comprised of: *Departed*, (for my Mother) in collaboration with the song writer Thomas Feiner; *Departed - Movement 1*, a collaboration with the Nelson-based composer, Mike Beever who composed the sound base especially for this study; *Departed - Inscriptions in Time and Place*; *Remnants 2 -ICS* and *Surface Inscriptions*. (All of these works have the prefix or suffix, *In the Company of Strangers*.) The *Departed* series represents a range of re-edits of the footage, using different effects of light, colour, duration, timing, re-ordering the footage, exploring different sound effects varying from the more literal edits using Thomas Feiner and Mike Beever to using just the everyday, station sounds and progressively more concerned with the concept of trace/remnant/residual representations on/in surfaces. As well as the *First Life* dance and video work, there are references of the *Duende* to be seen in the *Second Life* station (apart from the entire station build itself). I devised a Gargoyle Notecard Dispenser outside my simulacrum of Wellington Railway Station in *Second Life* which reads; ‘The *Duende* for me, speaks of ‘*Le Petit Mort*’ – the Little Death which resides in many a parting. The demise of connection, the fear of intimacy and recognition failing to outlast time and distance’ (Mike Baker:2008).



*Figure 24. Two Duende panels on the wall in the Wellington Railway Station Second Life 2008. Images, Mike Baker.*

**(ii) A Murder of Crows**

Black was the without eye  
Black the within tongue  
Black was the heart  
Black the liver, black the lungs  
Unable to suck in light  
Black the blood in its loud tunnel  
Black the bowels packed in furnace  
Black too the muscles  
Striving to pull out into the light  
Black the nerves, black the brain  
With its tombed visions  
Black also the soul, the huge stammer  
Of the cry that, swelling, could not  
Pronounce its sun.

(Two Legends, Hughes, 1972)

I was fortunate enough while still at school, to have heard Britain's then Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes, read some of his works. He was passionate, driven by his content - the human analogue made visible - so much so that his hands shook from his efforts to embody his vision. A conjurer, he spoke huskily and drank, I remember, from a glass of water while he recited works from 'Crow'.

Hughes has said that the poems of 'Crow', '...were usually something of a shock to write. Mostly they wrote themselves quite rapidly ... Crow was a ravenous dark blot, a mischief-maker, something of a trickster figure, full of ironic, sardonic and sometimes foul humour.' (Hughes:1972). Crow for Hughes, was a presence who appeared to be beyond God's ability to manage; The epitome of the sacrilegious, the unspeakably awful - everything. Sometimes, God gave up:

'God went on sleeping  
Crow went on laughing'

(A Childish Prank, Hughes, 1972)



*Figure 25. A Murder of Crows 1 - Embodied Surfaces*  
Second Life Wellington Railway Station crowd screens  
2008. Image, Mike Baker.

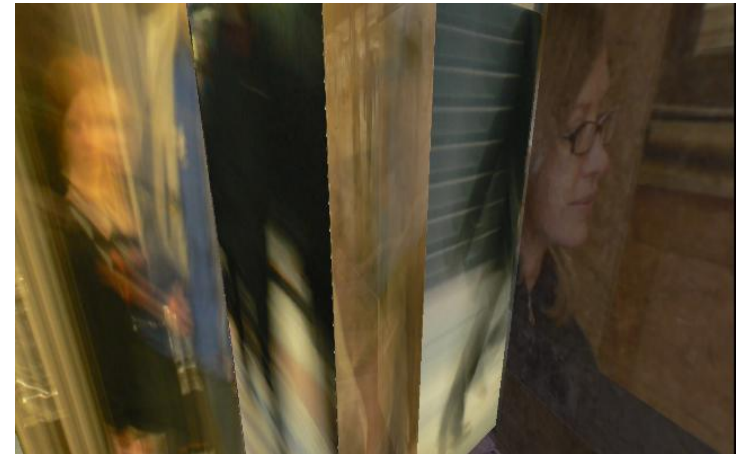
*Figure 26. A Murder of Crows 2 - Embodied Surfaces*  
Real Life Wellington Railway Station commuter crowds 2008.  
Image, Mike Baker.

#### **Video 4: Departed - Remnants 2**

The first poem, 'Crow' and this one above; one of two works which makes up 'Two Legends', speak to me of the Duende. 'Crow' was 'Crow'. He could be nothing else. He was stuck, but part of that description which defines him is made up of that passion rising, lifting in a surge to find an exit - a noble passion from the crow of even such as 'Crow', notorious, bad to the bone; tension constantly created and itself, creating that surge of the Duende cry surfacing, although tragically still falling short. Crow mischievous, spiteful - his persona dominated by black, breathing black, surrounded by black and dark plotting. Perhaps 'Crow' is the Duende ... 'Scratch an Englishman find, not a Lion - but a Crow' (Hughes:1972), said Hughes and this sentiment goes back in England, it would seem, to 1475. A 'Murther of Crowys' (Grammarphobia.com:2008) was used to describe a flock of crows at that time, describing the behaviour of large groups of crows apparently putting to death one of their number in a cold-blooded, methodical kind of way. Ornithologists tell us that this does not actually happen, that crows are scavengers, not killers, but the phrase stuck. Contrast this with the phrases, 'An Exaltation of Larks' and 'A Chandelier of Hummingbirds'. Hughes' 'Crow' would be delighted at the distinction.

Between the dark reality expressed by Ted Hughes' 'Crow' and the flock of commuters in the Second Life station, I explored a process of conveying through the inscription and embodiment of Duende onto the crowd screens a significance in feeling to that dark, flapping body of intent coming through the Station doors. Shaped like an entity all its own, forbidding in tone, (this can be seen in the video 'ICS - The Duende Roll and in the *Figures 25,26.* on pp.61 and *Figure 27.* on p.63), the crowd surges past our dance movement and my rolling, mostly uncaring, mostly shy of stopping, mostly cold-hearted it would appear, (people just really being people, innocently on a mission to get through the drafty spaces and home to the hearth yet for us, driven by ideas of pathos - uncaring are they all). The crowd as an organism though, is pragmatic, separated from us by its own rhythms; other worlds, other intentions, other deadlines, creating a context into which we can dip, comment upon, subtly intervene with but never bring to a halt. The linear crowd flow and our back-eddy of dance-movement is the binary directional movement dynamic in the First Life station space. Is it acceptable to impose and project such forthright constructs as the Duende and A Murder of Crows which are felt so keenly by me, upon the station commuter crowd? I think that it would be suspect, if it were not that I am seeking to identify through resonances recognized in my research and practice in this place, if these characterisations do not emerge from within the cellular makeup of the crowd and station space as a composite of feeling, itself, redolent with the pathos in departure.





**Figure 27. Embodied Surfaces - A Murder of Crows - Crowd Screen Development Combining Real Life and Second Life inscriptions. Initial screen grouping above; evolved cutouts below (2008/2009). Images, Mike Baker.**

One of the influences in this project for aspects of my approach through my own movement scenarios, to the possible simultaneous blurring between private and public space, has been the performer and installation artist, Erwin Wurm. In some of his 'one minute sculptures' (Graz, 2002) Wurm inserts his body into niches in the public eye in ways which unsettle viewers or casual passers-by, just by the mere placing of himself in unusual positions in public places which are routinely inhabited very differently. Thus, Wurm intervenes for me, in intriguing ways, in the accepted social mores of the everyday, subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) drawing attention to his performing body and illicitly in the witness, questions with regard to what the 'body' is 'doing' in this way, in this place, at this time? Is this a subject/person or a body/object? How can we tell?



**Figure 28.** Wurm, E. 'Untitled' (2000) one minute sculpture.  
Image, Graz, 2002 in Parachute 105, autofictions.



**Figure 29.** Wurm, E. 'Untitled' (2000) one minute sculpture.  
Image, Graz, 2002, in Parachute 105, autofictions.



### **(iii) Relational Subject/Object**

The Roaming Body is the vehicle for perhaps the only (contradictory?) constant in indeterminacy embedded in this moment - and this moment, now passed. It appears that from a parallax-constructed viewpoint, objects, (including myself), when perceived as also being in relation to myself as subject, emerge as another descriptor for classifying ourselves as individuations (separate yet related subject or object or quasi-subject/object) within a wider collective in any one time and space. Here is a text outlining Michel Serres' Quasi-Object, where, to demonstrate the individual within the collective Serres` refers to the 'Furet' (the object or Ferret in a French children's game where a ring of players hide the object from one of the players. That player must deduce who in the ring has the object). I am also citing this as a metaphor for temporal mediation within the description of, 'relational object',

The quasi-object is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject. He who is not discovered with the furet in his hand is anonymous, part of a monotonous chain where he remains undistinguished. He is not an individual; he is not recognized, discovered, cut; he is of the chain and in the chain. He runs, like the furet, in the collective. The thread in his hands is our simple relation, the absence of the furet; its path makes out indivision. Who are we? Those who pass the furet; those who don't have it. The quasi-object, when being passed, makes the collective, if it stops, it makes the individual. If he is discovered, he is "it" [mort]. Who is the subject, who is an "I," or who am I? The moving furet weaves the "we," the collective; if it stops, it marks the "I." (Serres, 2007:225)

Duration in the game, punctuated by 'pauses' is as much about the location in time and space of each person as it is about the furet. Each is quasi subject/object. The furet effectively becomes the person who is discovered with it in their possession, as each person equally becomes the furet during this 'pause'. A reciprocal transformative embodiment. The person exposed holding the furet suddenly comes into focus where before they were invisible. We can note from Serres that, " The quasi-object, when being passed, makes the collective, if it stops, it makes the individual. If he is discovered, he is "it" [mort]." (So if the individual is discovered, he is also 'mort' - dead. A revealing interpretation of stasis within the context of our roaming as the embodiment of life itself). We can extrapolate this description to align Serres` collective with a durational collective comprised of so many moments, the individual or furet becoming Len Lye`s revealed 'form'-in-pause after the furet is discovered and surfaces to become visible, as it were, in the durational continuity for a moment. We, each of us, within the collective duration of our own quotidian,

move and pause, move and pause (although, as stated above, there is no such thing as a 'real' pause, only a slower time-zone which is relational to our roaming) - our Roaming Body defining our movements and mediating our furet body which in turn, defines our 'pausing'. My concept of 'place' and the location for both, my real-time movement and my representational movement (past recorded movement) can therefore be defined here rather than a pause, as a point of temporary purchase, (Wellington Railway Station entrance doors, my dance partner, the floor, a flicker of recognition from a commuter) which surfaces to be recognized for a moment within the ongoing field of change.

Serres's model concerns the complex interchanges involved in collectivity. Serres identifies the process whereby the rapid passage of the furet both distinguishes and connects, fixes and dissolves the parties, connecting the dots between the collective and their relative individual positions. For me, Serres gives voice to that which lies between the elements of the system-in-pause. The parasite. We learn from Serres that, 'The position of the parasite is to be between. That is why it must be said to be a being or a relation'. Since it is also true that, 'We live only by relations', this seems to amplify the presence of the Roaming Body as being something 'of' us, yet almost foreign to us, enjoying a parasitical position as durational catalyst within a relational collective of moments. Steven Connor in 'Michel Serres's Milieux' under 'Three and Fourpence' suggests that, 'Serres dares to indulge the risky dream of a paradise of participations between host and parasite, inhabitant and milieu, in terms of a sacramental mediation of word and flesh'.

The temporal constituents of the Roaming Body are themselves volatile, and our 'being' (as a becoming) is held together in space and time by this dynamic relation which agitates us and keeps pulling our attention and presence away, yet keeps us together to be able to move on as a whole. With the parasite relational presence in mind I quote Adam (X) in the recent debate (July 2009) on 'empyre soft\_skinned\_space Digest', in response to Dr Donna Haraway's new publication, 'When Species Meet' where he maintains that we need to consider reconceptualizing human identity under the guise of a transitory, relational dynamic;

[W]e have never been human; we and everybody else are always already a crowd of intra- and interrelations... that no matter where you hold still... what you find are relations in process, and what you find are that the actors are the products of those relations, not pre-established, finished, closed-off things that enter into relationship, but rather we are what come out of relating and go into the next relating...

Here are presented collections of lived collaborations, constantly on-the-move which, signified through the Roaming Body, affirm our relations as perpetually fluid; a suggestion that the 'furet state' of pause, does not ever really quite exist. Our parasitic roaming enters in even to those moments of calm where, in the midst of this transformative flux we recognize ourselves to be human and transforms the status of our present - we become in effect, an absent body. In view of this lack of exact stillness, with the 'pauseness' of pause an illusion still beset by duration, it appears that the relation of the Roaming Body touches every moment and simultaneously is the product of every moment. There is no binary relation here, between movement and Len Lye`s form, Serres` collective and furet individual; there is, as Heckman suggests only intra and inter-relations within an all-permeating field of motion which itself, is the ongoing present. Binary relations between stillness and movement are convenient yet illusory signifiers of a construct which is subservient to a state which is only motion, itself a temporal signifier of duration. The Roaming Body as pre-emptor of the future moment ultimately steals the present and resumes its transit in place and time from one description of the Roaming-Real to another. The Roaming Body as interlocutor, is able to introduce indeterminacy into the performative present, the only durational state in which we can live but not actually document while under its influence, from Davin Heckman,

It's interesting because we have great tools for measuring temporality--clocks, archives, histories, models, etc--which make us pretty good at saying "what happened" or "what will happen," but the precise and constantly moving character of the present makes it very hard for us to talk about "what is happening right now." Not only is it impossible from a representational perspective, but from retrospective or prospective view, the present is always forgotten in favor of details that are dictated by a context, or framework of expectations. It is easier, then, to say, because we cannot account for the present, it must not be. But in a way it is all we have (2009).

Perhaps the Roaming Body is both, the hidden thief and signifier (in absentia) of the present and as such, as Heckman suggests, because the present eludes us, this entity/agency goes largely unnoticed.

#### **(iv) An Independent State of Self or Dark Space for Avatar other?**

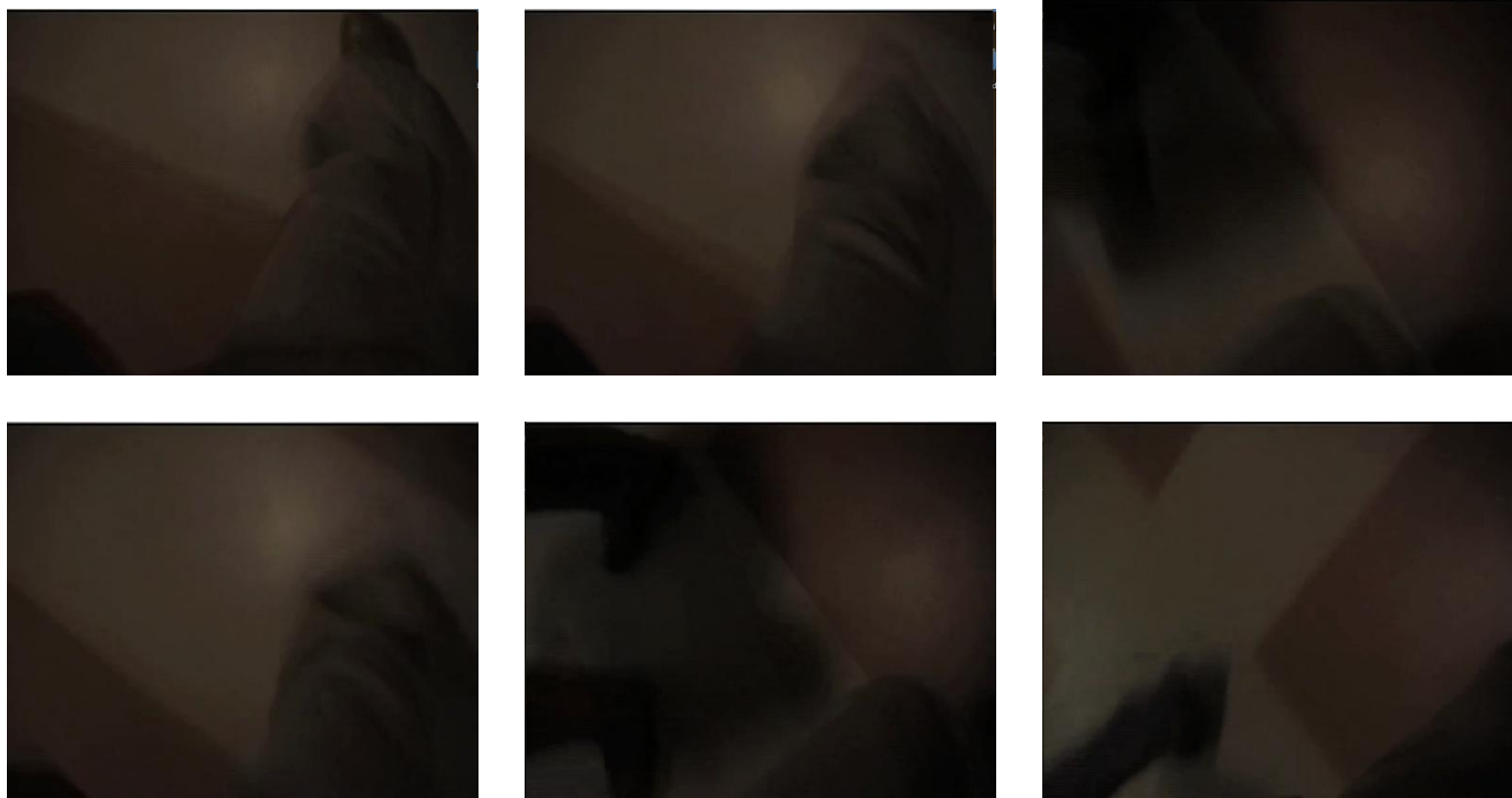
Let us consider the recognition of selfhood as the glue between quasi-object and subject: Linda Martin-Alcoff, Professor of Philosophy and currently the Director of Women`s Studies at Syracuse University in the USA, asserts in *The Political Critique of Identity*, '... in classical liberal political theory, the initial state of the self is conceptualized as an abstract individual without, or prior to, any group allegiance. It is from this

"initial position" that the self engages in rational deliberation and thus achieves autonomy ...' (2005). This is a scenario involving 'free choice', if choices are not viewed as subject to indeterminant factors.

'As (Immanuel) Kant developed this idea, a person who cannot gain critical distance from and thus objectify their cultural traditions cannot rationally assess them and thus cannot attain autonomy. In Kant's view, an abstract or disengaged self is for this reason necessary for full personhood. Moreover, the process of modernity, which was conceptualized as analogous on the societal level to the process of individual maturation, became defined as just this increased ability to distance oneself from one's cultural traditions. In this way this distancing ability also became a key part of the global, European-centered teleology of intellectual and moral development, defining the terms by which societies were to be labeled advanced or backward' (Martin-Alcoff, 2005).

Martin-Alcoff goes on to stress that, '... the norm of rational maturity, then, required a core self stripped of its identity ...'(2005).

One side of this theoretical and often as history has shown, prejudicially-lived debate, has sought to locate and resolve in us an independent state of self. We can now see that this state may be defined perhaps imperfectly and dichotomously, responsible not only for shaping but also for ignoring it seems, the associated damage occurring to that other aspect of personal and collective identity - the issue of our belonging. Could it be that this aspect of which Kant speaks, this process of maturation, the graduation to '... full personhood' is a contributor to the erosion of our sense of belonging? Has the manifestation of this balanced autonomous identity so carefully harboured by us, comprised merely a veneer over that reality which now emerges as a lost locus? Who are we and where do we exist? Which spaces will hold us, (not the least of which is our own self) that we can call home? Is it possible that space itself may mediate our lives? If we accept this as a possibility, then to what extent are we vulnerable in a world comprised of a growing number of surfaces and spaces which are increasingly identified as liminal - in-between perceived worlds?



**Figure 30.** Stills from video capture: not-here Reprise2 - 2009 - exploring representations of intrinsic qualities within duration and departure - Wellington Railway Station. Images, Mike Baker.

The greater part of my investigative movement, camera and editing work in this project has been centred upon representations which have erred toward quite literal interpretive combinations of the dramatic and documentary recording of my concepts. I began to consider how the passage of time as a lived space might be interpreted in more liminal and therefore, abstract terms. In July 2009 I experimented through camera and editing, with minimal, soundless sequences of movement in Wellington Railway Station, based upon my perspectives and representation (if this could be made visible) what might constitute the liminal space of duration itself - temporal aspects of departure, with as much extraneous visual, textural and auditory detail removed as possible. For me here, duration is a soundless layer beneath the cacophany

of our lived movements. My walking feet, as inscriptions, (together with marks on the ground) become a metronome, rhythmically stepping out the moments while coming and going through a grey, featureless half-world. (See two sequences of images from this experimental video footage, 'not-here Reprise2' 2009, pp. 69 and 71). By limiting the camera perspective, thus denying the viewer access to recognisable features in relation to an understandable depth-of-field and a known horizon-line, I was able to begin to represent my own interiority made visible - how I might feel about leaving, immersed in a space with no firm base within which to relate.



**Figure 31.** Stills from video capture: not-here Reprise2 - 2009 - exploring representations of intrinsic qualities within duration and departure. Wellington Railway Station 2009. Images, Mike Baker.

The quotations below are taken from the online site, 'Dancing the Virtual - Housing the Body Dressing the Environment', This was an interactive event, '... dedicated to a collective exploration of the dynamic cross-genesis of the body and its constructed environment'. (2007). "“What emanates from the body and what emanates from the architectural surround intermixes” Arakawa&Gins' (Dancing the Virtual:2007)



**Figure 32. Stills from Second Life Railway Station video capture: Duet for 6 - In the Company of Strangers 2009. Images, Mike Baker**

Video 5: Duet for 6

“In the skin itself,” wrote William James, “there is a vague form of projection into a third dimension.” Conversely, in the third dimension there is an echo of the skin. The body is not what is inside the skin. The body is what emerges at the intersection where what is inside the skin reaches out to meet its environmental return. The body is what makes a life of a moving in-between’. (Dancing the Virtual:2007)

“Our bodies penetrate the sofas upon which we sit, and the sofa penetrates the body.” Boccioni’ (Dancing the Virtual:2007)

In Figure 32 (p. 72) four images from my latest video work, 'Duet for 6' capture avatar presence in a penetrating surfaces in the Second Life Station environment. Active inscriptions emerge, sink and re-emerge from their surroundings, each mediating the other. This video seeks to represent through the freedoms of a MUVE environment possibilities of how our human intent can be embedded in our life-surfaces. In First Life this occurs constantly - we, as mobile volumes become alternately subsumed and rejected by our backgrounds and the spaces which hold us, yet, although we may be prepared to acknowledge that our spaces may shape our time and the ways in which we function in those spaces, we do not usually perceive our presence as actually co-habiting with the elements within our spaces. Here the dancers are defined by the spatial laws which support their digital existence and can penetrate and become an extension of the fabric of those surfaces which are phantom and ambiguous in nature.

Elizabeth Grosz, in *Space, Time and Bodies*, maintains that neither the subject’s consciousness or interiority, nor its essential humanity or distinctive individuality can any longer provide for us a firm base for identity (1999:120). Grosz posits an alternative territory for coherency in this debate; that subjectivity of the individual and its relations with others be investigated through consideration of its corporeal self rather than its conscious lineaments and textures.<sup>21</sup> The inference here is that conceptions and understanding of space and time are necessary correlates for the investigation into corporeality and in turn, identity, but on what levels of perception do we take our cues from the spaces we inhabit? How might space itself be pro-active in creating conditions which affect our arrivals, residence and departures in any given space? How might this affect, enhance or erode our sense of identity?

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<sup>21</sup> Grosz cites the so-called French feminists who suggest that bodies are never just human or social bodies but bodies mediated by gender, asserting that this is significant in relation to the nature or mode of corporeality assigned to any subject. Grosz suggests that through the groundwork into sexed corporeality and the links between corporeality and conceptions of time and space established by Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, if bodies are to be reconceived, not only must their matter and form be re-considered but also their relational environments and spatio-temporal locations.



The sociologist Roger Caillois` work (1917-1938)<sup>22</sup> centring upon the scientific and the uncanny, dealing with perceived spatial characteristics of the insect world and its predilection for mimicry furnishes us with a useful analogy (Grosz, 1999). Mimesis is significant for identifying ways in which the relations between an organism/body and the spatial characteristics of its environment can become confused and ambiguous because there is a reflexivity existing between the two. Camouflaging characteristics of both, the host and the surrounding space appear in both 'parties'. Mimicry in this context is a consequence of the representation of space in terms of how this may be perceived by insects. This presents a correlation for us as humans when we consider Pierre Janet`s description of 'legendary psychasthenia', that state which manifests when a psychosis is responsible for creating such confusion and ambiguity within a given space`s properties that the identification for the subject of an actual location in that place becomes impossible,

'It is with represented space that the drama becomes specific, since the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself ...'  
(Janet in Grosz,1999:124).

Caillois regards psychasthenia as a response to an imperative introduced by space for the identity of the subject. For the subject to be valid as 'subject' they must be able to locate themselves in the same space inhabited by their body. (Consider this applied to Serres`subject/object) This for the subject, is conditional in the establishment of coherent identity. This process of locating and affirming subjectivity is also cognisant with personality, where the subject as organism identifies a feeling of distinctness and separation in themselves from the surrounding space, an anchor which provides a coherent condition from which their identity emerges. In the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey states that for us as humans, between stimulus and response there is a space; potential for pause and awareness, wherein lies our freedom and power to choose the nature of our response. I suggest that depending upon our levels of self-awareness, this space may expand and contract. If through psychosis, this space contracts to the extreme, we may lose our 'mirror' which can reflexively communicate with our external spaces effectively. According to Covey this internal space has the power to shape and uphold our sense of self and I believe, resonate reflexively with the spaces which surround us. From this composite internal/external vantage point the subject has a perspective on their world which becomes the locus from which vision, perception and spiritual empathy

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<sup>22</sup> Caillois` work is perhaps best known for his consideration of the boundaries between the sacred and profane, the sociological and ethological and the human and animal.

emanate.<sup>23</sup> Caillois assures us that there are clear correlations between mimicry realised through the human analogue and that of the insect world. Both represent what Caillois describes as the 'depersonalization by assimilation to space'; both, the psychotic and the insect renounce their abilities to occupy a point of perspective and abandon themselves to being located spatially by an/as others:

The primacy of one's own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another for whom the subject is merely a point in space and not the focal point around which an ordered space is organized. The representation of space is thus a correlate of one's ability to locate oneself as the point of origin or reference of space: the space represented is a complement of the kind of subject who occupies it' (Caillois, 1999:125).

As mentioned on page 73 in my latest video edit, Duet for 6 - In the Company of Strangers (10.10.09), I have attempted to represent both, aspects of companionship in Second Life through intimacy of engagement in movement while also further exploring the notion of embodying surfaces through avatar interaction. The work concentrates on avatar presence (itself, an inscription) sliding across and through, emerging and sinking into and being contained by the screens of which the space is comprised. In First Life this occurs constantly - we, as mobile volumes become alternately subsumed by and rejected by our backgrounds and the spaces which hold us, yet we do not usually perceive our presence as co-habiting with the elements within our spaces. Here the dancers are defined by the spatial laws which support their digital existence and can penetrate surfaces which are phantom and ambiguous in nature. We are not quite so fluent in this in First Life although there are moments where we can blend unobtrusively into our backgrounds and even become our backgrounds, (football crowds, demonstrations, commuter crowds, where the spatial field is made up predominantly by human bodies), yet each mote in the throng must keep themselves separate to be individuated as the point of origin, to support that sense of self. Losing one's point of origin achieves a

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<sup>23</sup> Legendary Psychasthenia, as another entity-descriptor or inhabitant of the self under extreme circumstances of 'visitation', moves in at the point where the subject loses their ability to clearly establish their physical standpoint - the location where their personality may reside spatially, which leads to a loss of that sense of place which denotes the self-as-place in any given space and time. Through Caillois, Grosz suggests the subject may be both, captivated and replaced by space, blurred with the positions of others: *I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself*. To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at *himself* from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put*. He is similar, not similar to something, *but just similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is the 'convulsive possession', (1999:125).

disassociation with self through the '... depersonalization by assimilation to space', indicating that spaces possess a reciprocal power to assist us in locating our sense of self - in ourselves. If we perceive ourselves as a spatial volume that is mobile, the reflexivity from the space which surrounds us in identity-building is more understandable; that condition where each party, both individual and space, contribute to a balanced assimilation of self awareness. This is a comment pertinent to the nature of our relations with our spaces in First Life (Second Life among them) and Avatar persona in apparently representational spaces like Second Life. Clearly, spaces which are reflexive with and which mirror our own intent to interact effectively with the space, provide opportunities for us to foster a sense of self-identity and MUVE environments like Second Life, under the privileging from 'virtual' to 'Real Life Space' become simply one more description of space for us to occupy. We can only speculate as to what may be occurring beneath the surfaces of our acknowledged and openly manipulated surfaces in 'virtual' worlds. As yet, we do not know enough about the implications of prolonged time spent in fully-immersive online spaces and what effect this may have on our sense of self. Within the excitement of the 'New Technologies of Becoming' (my inverted commas) which have emerged as challenges and extensions to our reality through post-structuralist and metaverse constructs; re-formulations of and adjuncts to the Real, might there be waiting for us all, a broad vista of new territories to discover with impunity or perhaps, a '... dark space where things cannot be put'? (See footnote 14 p.48; Perazzo, 2005:125).

### **Part Seven: A New Companion Species?**



*Figure 33. Rollo and Arya Braveheart dance through the inscribed surfaces of Wellington Railway Station played in the video, 'Departed' - ICS 2009. Images, Mike Baker.*

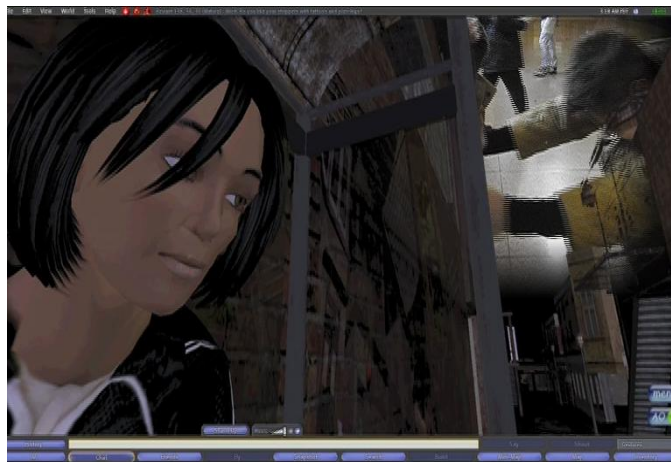
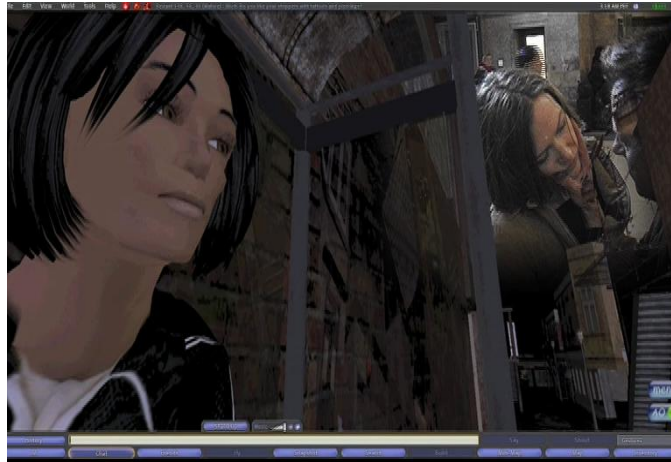
During July and August 2009 my research practice focus continued to centre upon the relations between human and avatar persona, the implications of departure in this terrain and both, the nature of the separate and joint spaces that we occupy. Directions for further investigation, beyond the scope of this Masterate, have taken the form of proposing the persona of Avatar as a new Companion Species. Dr Donna Haraway, in 'When Species Meet', introduces concepts which examine the dynamics between those select 'other' species with which we as humans, enjoy relational dialogues. She posits empirically-based testing carried out across the animal kingdom, but also technological constructs, '... the entanglements of beings in technoculture that work through reciprocal inductions to shape companion species' (1991). Haraway is well-known for her cyborg-related scholarship, notably the essay, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, (1985). Though not abandoned, the cyborg now shares her focus with "companion species," the driving figure in her current work. '... The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self ...'. (Haraway, 1991:163) Haraway elevates the face of the virtual from that of a bi-polar mask limited to the displaying of opposing intents, to that of a universal mask which becomes a multi-dimensional mirror for the self that lies within. For some time we have been searching for a new or at least extended definition of what post-structuralism has become. Perhaps the recognition and assumption of Cyborg as 'other' will lead us into possible interpretations of ourSelves which could assist in shaping this elusive evolution?

Dr Haraway makes a compelling argument for this development,

...Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women<sup>24</sup> world-wide. Technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, i.e., as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings. The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other... (1991:164).

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<sup>24</sup> This assertion is not gender-specific. Dr Haraway is writing through and for a feminist lens in this context. Within the context of this text, I take it upon myself to deconstruct the boundaries set. This is in no way intended to be either arbitrary or inappropriate.



**Figure 34.** Stills from video capture: Shelter 2 - In the Company of Strangers. Avatar Companion, Rollo in his mind`s eye, watches his other, Mike Baker and partner in the Real Life station. from a bus shelter on his second leg of the journey home (after the train ride) in Second Life 2009. Images, Mike Baker.

The phrase which shapes my interest here is, '... reciprocal inductions to shape companion species'. In the videos which involve Second Life avatar dialoguing, mentioned previously, *Embodying Surfaces - the Human Analogue - In the Company of Strangers* and *Inscribed Surfaces - In the Company of Strangers*, I am concerned with devices which appear to imbue my Second Life avatar, Rollo Kohime, with the inscription of sentient awareness - an apparently impossible task for a so-called virtual avatar existing as a telepresence. In 'Shelter 1 and 2', I am intrigued with the possibility that in fact, my Second Life avatar, Rollo, exists not merely as a construct, separate from myself, but as a construct integral to my-Self. Together, we construct, inform, mediate and are mediated by the interfaces which apparently lie between us but which are also effectively the territory which uphold the languages that we share and their intent made visible/audible. Taking into account Žižek's/Lacan's view (p.23) on the 'object's gaze', in this description of the world, Rollo, as object can perceive me and I can also see me through the embodiment/manifestation of Rollo's perception.

In 2007 I attended the symposium, 'Techno-Praxis' at AUT in Auckland. One of the guest speakers, Dr Kevin Sherman aka Archmunster Toll, made a very interesting case for the real embodiment of SL avatars and the measure of responsibility and respect that should be afforded them. Sherman was making deliberate forays into claiming this sense of responsibility, not for the people behind the avatars in Second Life but for the avatars themselves. The online construct-surrogates. He maintained that we humans should be seeking permissions for carrying out certain tasks from the avatars, rather than the people behind the avatars - not in a cursory manner, but genuinely, with humility. Looking around the audience, I remember noticing how appalled most of the assembly was at this notion. How could this be possible? How could a virtual animation comprised of scripts and digitised intent (this, as the most optimistic descriptor I could think of right now) be afforded the homage of 'respect' through linear, cause and effect thinking? (Ref: Johannes Birringer's response to my post in dance-tech.net, '... what consciousness does your avatar possibly have ...?' p.34). In the recent online discussion forum of, 'empyre' *soft\_skinned\_space*, "love-machine" and Haraway's 'other-worlding' (15 July 2009) Naxsmash tells us that, 'Haraway's new term 'other-worlding' as a gerund (a noun in English containing an implied action, via the 'ing' in ending) in "When Species Meet," does this beautiful thing of asking the word 'figure' to become a transitive, too. She writes, 'Figures help me grapple inside the flesh of mortal world-making entanglements that I call contact zones'. The Oxford English Dictionary records the meaning of 'chimerical vision' for 'figuration' in an eighteenth century source, and that meaning is still implicit in my sense of figure. Figures collect the people through their invitation to inhabit the corporeal story told in their lineaments. So each figure whether human or surrogate avatar, manifests as an autobiographically inscribed surface.



*Figure 35. MikeBaker/Rollo Kohime 'rezzing' on arrival in the Second Life station - imperfect embodiment inscribed across real-digital interfaces 2009. Image, Mike Baker.*



The term 'chimera', in the freedictionary.com, is defined as: 'a fanciful mental illusion or fabrication' which relates to Chimaera in Greek mythology. This is interesting for its presentation of yet another description of the real or virtual. I am more interested, however, in Dr Haraway's usage focussing on the medical interpretation:

An organism, organ, or part consisting of two or more tissues of different genetic composition, produced as a result of organ transplant, grafting, or genetic engineering, or 'the ability to form mental images of things or events; "he could still hear her in his imagination"' or, "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. This cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation (Haraway, 1991).

In other words, it is possible through association, to attach to specific anchors or in this case, figures, certain narratives or stories, qualities, effects, sensations - all corporeal, all real. This last reference relates to the two videos: Shelter 1 and 2. One of the many possible readings of these video scenarios may be that Rollo sits in a bus shelter on his way home after a train journey and recollects mental images of my dance duet in Wellington Railway Station. I become in effect, his avatar. His avatar figure provides the context and vehicle for a real story to be told through the manifestation of his digital lineaments. Who is to say that this story is not true but simply a tale which becomes part of my 'true' urban persona in this time and place? I am suggesting that our perception of 'avatar' in today's technopraxis envisions a certain embodiment of corporeality in their other-worldly makeup. Avatar is becoming-in-the-world more than just a visual construct, more than just an enabled voice or an intent, more than just a chimera - a diversion from the real witnessed in the real. Avatar is all of these things but also post-human. In A Cyborg Manifesto, Haraway asserts that, '... the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other ...' are now dominating our lives. The 'other' here, is telepresence itself comprised of miniaturized componentry, its forum for communication the ether - pure quintessence, as Haraway puts it. The avatars which populate Second Life are extensions of ourselves - post-body wishes.

"If wishes were fishes we'd all cast nets", (Herbert, F.1968:51). Well, the nets are rich with avatar inscriptions of the real for many users in MUVE spaces and perhaps also (unwittingly) outside these spaces



and within this context, their descriptions of characterisation which exist vicariously for the user, require no confirmation that what exists is anything other than a prosthesis made to order which has the power, not to merely exist, but to live actively and immersively.

Adam (?) (The provider's name of this reference is not meant to be either symbolic or ironic) in the recent *empyre Digest* debate on relational 'Queer' (July 2009), in response to Haraway's text, says,

[I]nstead of terms like humanism, or post-humanism, or anti-humanism, or whatever-humanism...the debates of humanism, that I think still consider to regard us as uniquely exceptional, human exception as such that what counts as human by expelling everything else...everything that is expelled from that which is human, makes the human that is what's left...for example mind and language are often become what is left. For me the notion of companion species walks right around that debate... (2009).

Haraway is arguing from the perspective of animal companion species, to which Adam is referring. For me, that tendency on our part as humans which sets us aside from all other entities and makes us exceptional or unique, also makes us alone. To compensate for this, we have always sought to develop (albeit oligarchical) relationships with species which might be acceptable as companions and to a great extent the value of other entities for us has and still is determined by to what extent that entity may successfully connect with us. This particular notion of companion species relates back to Haraway's cyborg, techno-characters as the entities which populate that liminal interface across cyberspace. The desire for companionship is universal and I maintain that avatars are now either consciously or unconsciously being relegated to the level and desirability of companion-species. Massumi uses the descriptor, '... a fellow-travelling entity ... ', to describe ourselves when in motion - our presence 'here' and 'there', simultaneously. Could it be that this unconscious state lends itself to another kind of travelling companion? Avatars are not (just) pets, they are not (merely) our childhood 'secret' playmates, they are not (only) figments of our imaginations. Perhaps they bear a closer resemblance to the author John Wyndham's 'Chocky', (1972) that childhood familiar with a hidden agenda from another dimension. Avatars in MUVE world-surfaces are being confirmed as equals in the ways in which we perceive, operate and navigate our respective pathways through our lives. Adam (?) goes on to talk about the importance of reconceptualizing human identity: '[We must] become much smarter about how that category [of the human] is made, what kind of tool it is, who lives and dies inside that category, what kind of work that category should still be doing, when that category should be interrupted...' (2009). In that clearing within our sensibilities which waits for entities to appear, avatars now occupy a place within the lived process of our intra and interrelations with one another.



**Figure 36. Suspended Avatar Trace Crowd - Wellington Railway Station Second Life 2009. Image, Mike Baker.**

Surrogation is inherent within avatars, extensions or prostheses of our present-body wishes initiating post-body selves; we surround ourselves increasingly with extensions of our selves which are inscribed with the intent to operate and perceive independently of us. Not only do our avatars go in and come out of our relating with one another, but might they themselves now perceive us in the same light? Do we come and go for them? ( I hear a muted gasp ... my wife, studying psychology, is sceptical). This meeting of our two species in its current form is still in its infancy but progressing rapidly. We are already deeply engaged; as other-world entities sharing with us a reciprocity of intent (through Zizek`s 'materialism'), together we

constantly inform and shape one another, carrying out our respective arrivals and departures from one another as do other parts of ourselves and at each departure from MUVE life, there is a reassurance that our surrogate self will be there on our return - a sure sign of the avatar having arrived in that space reserved for a shared companionship between species.

### **(i) Avatar Sightings**

*'Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes'*  
(Walt Whitman, 1855).

Avatar (Sanskrit avatara, "descent"), in Hinduism, descent of a god into the world of human beings for the duration of a human life span. Avatar is similar to the Christian concept of incarnation but is different in two significant ways. First, a Hindu god can become incarnate in many places at the same time through "partial" avatars (amshas), while the main form from which the avatars emanate remains entirely "full" and can converse with the "partial" forms. Second, the avatars do not fully participate in human suffering or lose the knowledge and power of their divine nature. The god Vishnu is most famous for his numerous avatars, which include Krishna, Rama, and the Buddha, but other gods, such as Shiva, also have avatars. Many charismatic leaders, such as the Indian mystics Chaitanya and Ramakrishna, have been regarded as avatars. In Hindu belief, Avatars / Avatara (Sanskrit) are not representations, but manifestations which occur in response to a particular event or crisis. I am suggesting that avatar presence has always been with us, yet defined over time, through difference. Historically we have moved through fields of alterity or otherness, in Real Life brushing up against an ephemeral host sensed at our shoulder yet which has refused, until now, to have its coming-out party. Avatar presence, like human presence, has increasingly been defined as a becoming state of being within the temporality of our quotidian and progressively emergent with regard to the notion of companionship for humans. The virtual self has always been here/there but under different guises. Here I examine certain aspects in the re-constitution of companionship through avatar agency, under terms which for many are still centred in the virtual and therefore not as compelling as that construct we define for ourselves as Real. My contention is that under the post-structuralist construct whereby we find that we can de- and reconstruct everything, our self becomes another location for re-invention and transformative practice in a world where for so many, such an array of opportunities for transformative practices has not previously existed. Until now. Now avatar presence manifesting through a range of descriptors can populate the Real with increasingly corporeal solidity. Lived transformative practice does not

require the projection of desires or intent through a digital interface. Humans have been engaged in this practice since our life events began to be documented.

This is a passage from John Golding's performance-essay, 'Conversion on the Road to Damascus (2): Minority Report on the Political (or how to have an adventure after Metaphysics), from Naxsmash's posting on empyre soft\_skinned\_space Digest: Identity ... Disruptions; 'it's a delicate game we are playing, after all'.  
ecce homo (this man; this woman; this hermaphrodite!; this androgynous! this ISH! – and no other). ToDAY. today I am part thief, part iron-claw, transformed in the first instance as a swift and shadowy runner, skimming the surface of greasy back alleyways with goods close to hand! Nothing stops me: not sirens, not wounds, not the filthy dirty air! Nothing impedes my rush! But at the slightest sniff of danger I can transform! Oh, I can transform into – a blue flower! Or maybe a nasty coral reef! Or perhaps just some old rusty tractor, digging and banging and digging some more, same place, same time, same rhythm. And I think to myself: isn't it just grand how the ground gives way under my – imagination! Maybe this is what it means to make a gesture towards aesthetics in the age of relativity and technological change? I want to say: yes (but not exactly).

Installed at the Critical Digital Studies Workshop, June 4-6, 2009, Golding's performance-essay incisively brings together reason, fantasy and the political to arrive at an aesthetic of the imagination. I understand this to be a clawing at possibilities of relations within the technological age. A license to transform.

McCracken tells us that, 'All humans have the ability to 'assume shapes of a different kind. Self-transformation is the native gift of every member of the species' (2008). Here, under the title 'Sightings' (McCracken, 2008:ix). McCracken provides for us examples of transformative embodiment in Real Life.

'If one looks back at one life's life, it's like seeing a series of different people.'  
Anna Meara, Playwright and Actress (McCracken, 2008:ix).

'When I'm online, I'm 37, tall, blond and raring to go'. Bene Weinberg, 68, retired social worker with Parkinson's disease (McCracken, 2008:ix).

'I have re-invented myself every 10 years and I recommend that everyone else should do the same'.  
Nora Ephron, writer (McCracken, 2008:ix).

'The post-modernist temper demands that what was previously played out in fantasy and imagination must be acted out in life as well ...' Daniel Bell, American sociologist (McCracken, 2008:ix).

'I am known to everyone professionally as Mr William Muirhead-Allwood, but for years I have called myself, Sarah'. Surgeon who has operated on The Queen Mother (McCracken, 2008:xxii).

Jim Clark, the creator of Netscape and one of the key figures in the evolution of Silicon Valley and the New Economy was engaged in a flying lesson in a McDonnell Douglas helicopter. During the flight, Clark turned to his instructor and said, 'Were you controlling it?', 'That was all you Jim', 'I felt you controlling it', 'No, no, its been all you', 'This really pisses me off', (in McCracken, 2008:122). Clark, not used to being controlled by anyone or anything was deeply immersed in a situation of extreme flying, endeavouring to be just in the moment, to become an instrument of reciprocity with the machine, a transponder - creating a seamless exchange of information in and adjustment/transformational response out. He didn't need a third party coming between him and the machine, mediating his moment while he aspired to cyborg status, he and the helicopter engaged in extrapolating mutual lineaments of prosthetic extension and dialogue. Control. A subjective condition, fluctuating in authorship from moment to moment. Often, while immersed, we notice it as a facility managing the task only when we begin to lose it. The quality and effectiveness in reciprocity of information/data moving across interfaces or osmotically through surfaces is often subject to the indeterminant whims of both, the conversers and forces existing outside themselves. Where does user control begin and end and something outside this - the avatar, cyborg, prosthesis, the moment itself - take over and in its turn, relinquish the reins? I am proposing that manifestations of indeterminacy are responsible here, emerging through that entity I have termed 'the Roaming Body'. Despite our facility to navigate across interfaces/persona/spaces, transfluency itself, will always be subject to mediation by indeterminacy.

## **(ii) The Swift Self, Identity and Indeterminacy**

I would like to develop further the point by Hansen where he maintains, '... that the reason why so many of us now operate in so-called virtual worlds with apparent ease, is because we have always done so', (Hansen, 2006). I introduce here the notion of an entity type in us which openly recognizes indeterminacy emerging through the ministrations of the Roaming Body and daily celebrates the processes and transformative potential of the human analogue.

Candice Carpenter asserts that in extreme activities individuals define themselves as '... creatures in process'. (2008:123) The self in this context is viewed as something in motion. The swift self is an entity which, '... defines itself by rushing into the world, which itself is relatively inchoate and emergent (and doing some rushing of its own)' (2008:123). The mobility of the swift self comes in part from our own individualism, from paring away existing connections, contexts and constraints that surround a traditional description and status of the transformative self. Individuals have become increasingly capable of extraordinary transformative mobility in themselves, due to exposure to the notion that as beings with the potential to re-invent we have the ability to modify or even by-pass domestic, social, ethnic, class and gender constraints, which can be said to impede the self. Swift selves cast off definitions of the self and rushing into the world, find and identify new ones. The swift self is unbound. Carpenter suggests that the mobility of the swift self comes from its affinity for instrumentality. The self becomes, (in its search for itself) a means to an end to fulfil a purpose. This description is cultivated to make it more effective in the world, upon the world. '... swift selves do not believe that their value comes from their uniqueness as individuals or the distinctness of the self. They are prepared to conform to the demands of the role. They are prepared to be seen as substitutable', (2008:121-125). Carpenter maintains that ultimately, the mobility of the swift self comes from the willingness to give itself over to whatever may happen next. Indeterminacy is apparent here and the swift self is in its element, responding moment by moment in pushing that intent outward and engaging with that indeterminate world. Swift individuals fear the threat of stasis, (if stasis were a condition which actually existed instead of a perpetual state of becoming) being never happier when in motion. Arrival is not an option. The Swift Self is always leaving. Multiple descriptions and processes of travel are everything. Carpenter adds, 'The mobility of the Swift Self comes, finally, from the willingness to give the self over to what happens next ... Swiftness does not need a free market. It merely needs indeterminacy', (2008:125). Swift selves prefer means rather than ends, applauding velocity and momentum over stability and equilibrium. It can be seen that perhaps individuals who may fall into this definition of self may also be likely to actively seek out and use any kind of instrument which lends itself to extending their reach into the world. If we acknowledge the potential for this description of human entity/self to exist, it suggests that this extended reach lends itself very ably to the acquisition and consequent evolution of a formidable array of bodily/self extensions.

Having introduced the notion of the swift self, let us consider its transformative potential. The articulation of the swift self in the world is flexible, adaptable and open to change in its pursuit of its ability to operate effectively in the world. The swift self will change the external body as much as the terrain within. Swift selves, Carpenter tell us, are prepared to commit to regimes that are thoroughly punishing and sometimes

masochistically brutal. Carpenter assures us that swift selves will be the first to install cyber-technologies in their bodies. Movement of one kind enables movement of another kind. The swift self desires that both are efficient and effective in the roles for which they have been designed and trained. Moving fast in the body, or moving fluidly as a prosthetic. Carpenter says that, 'Among swift selves, the confusion of humans and machine is no secret fear but a not-so-secret-hope' (2008:136). (The avatar in the image on page 89 talking with the dragon, Azdel Slade of Becoming Dragon, is '3rd Ear' aka Stelarc, himself a swift self with a penchant for personally confronting and re-defining liminalities between descriptions of world surfaces). In swift selves always resides the intent, when not engrossed in the present, to relinquish that same present for an investigation into the possible and this includes stabs in the dark toward untried surrogate, other identities. 'This creature is nothing if not swift, no-one if not relationless', (Carpenter in McCracken, 2008:277). I would add to this by suggesting that the swift self is that vital catalyst, that scouting agency which seeks to negotiate the gap between what is known in us and what is strange, other, foreign; an ambassador for self-extension and rather than a relationless entity, one that perhaps may harbour a multiplicity of relations which is the essence of becoming in us as humans. What follows is a quote from Micha Cárdenas aka Azdel Slade in Second Life. I suggest that Cárdenas meets many of the requirements of a fully-fledged swift-self. His Second Life 365 hour fully-immersive performance, 'Becoming Dragon' questions the one year requirement of First Life Experience that transgender people must fulfill in order to receive Gender Confirmation Surgery (Sexual Reassignment Surgery) and asks if this could be replaced by one year of Second Life Experience to lead to Species Reassignment Surgery,

I am becoming something else. In this moment, this being-in-transition, I am wilfully stepping into the unknown. I am between realities. I can only imagine what I want to become, and then choose to become that new thing, but it is radically ungraspable, inconceivable. I can never know the reality of what I am choosing to become, desiring to become. My decision to transform can never be the right one, because it is always based on an illusion, a fantasy, a false conception with only a few points of data, not the rich details of an embodied life. As the transformation unfolds, those unknown events begin to occur, like seeing my breasts in the mirror for the first time after shaving my chest closely, feeling the movement in my orgasm change into something new or just walking down the street for a moment as a girl, unnoticed and not needing any special attention. My decision to become something else is always a decision to become mythopoetic, because the reality of the new state is always unknown, imaginary, a construct, a fantasy. Yet I don't seek to decry this radical state of uncertainty but to embrace it. The very moments of everyday perception are also simply intersections of a real materiality with my symbolic and



imaginary processing engines making sense of them, down to the way that I understand what pleasure is and what pain is and when the two become too close so as to be confused. And a choice to not transform is of course still a choice to transform into a different state, as our bodies are all in permanent transition, aging, training, consuming, producing, perceiving, creating new folds in our craniums, (Slade: becomingdragon, secondloop.wordpress.com, 2008).



**Figure 37. I am Transreal: A Reflection On/Of Becoming Dragon [Part 1]**  
Micha Cárdenas aka Azdel Slade. Image, Micha Cardenas.

In the case of Azdel Slade aka Micha Cárdenas, '... the swift self ... is unbound' (p.86). Slade maintains that he has no control over what he is to become or at least, over the process of becoming, but the important point is that he is aware of indeterminacy surfacing from beneath his choices. We have here a skill-set of lived risk - an open celebration of the Roaming Body.

The swift self knows that it does not have control over the outcome because this is almost impossible to foresee, but Slade will move towards it anyway. He embraces a radical state of uncertainty where, through indeterminacy fully recognized for what it represents, he seeks to take responsibility for his actions across a spectrum of options created knowingly in an environment of uncertainty with open outcomes. Despite McGeorge Bundy's assertion in the Free Online Dictionary, that, 'There is no safety in unlimited technological hubris', (2009) Slade's call for equity between First Life requirements and Second Life equivalency fulfills the demands of the swift self through this profound, conscious manipulation of mixed-reality.

In her article, 'Incorporating self into web information system design', Anita Greenhill and Hannakaisa Isomaki, while arguing from a post-structural perspective where electronic identity enables a deconstruction of the mind/body dichotomy, informs us that:

Identity construction in computer-mediated environments as in “real life” environments, is influenced by existent social processes. In these virtual environments the computer screen mediates specific experiences of localised physicality; however these computer mediated experiences do not alter the overall sense of being for the individual. The authors assert that, ... with the Web Information System in virtual space the individuals do not leave the essence of themselves on one side of the screen to acquire a new layer of meanings and self-ascription within the virtual space that the system occupies ... Further, issues of design are considered in regard to systems development that aim at supporting computer-mediated identity construction (Greenhill & Isomaki, 2005:53).

This speaks to me of a lived praxis, which seeks to support an essential link at the real and virtual interface. The artifice itself - the screen and all it holds, becomes a prosthetic extension of the self, which, rather than altering the self puts in place another perceptual facet of the real. I am working in Second Life as well as First Life, not because I am intrigued by their differences where I recognize a separate virtual and real world, but because under the auspices of the blended-reality that I am seeking to inhabit, I can perhaps more easily explore the interplay between the two in First Life where Second Life becomes a facet of the real. Here I can converse, witness and belong as analogue, while making critical commentary upon yet another field of departure which lies between the two facets of this same world surface. The Roaming Body and the Swift Self. It seems that these manifestations are aligned as two (or one) of a likely portfolio of entities in our archive of selves.

I maintain that we have no choices to make with regard to the influence of indeterminacy through the vehicle of the Roaming Body and that this entity must therefore underpin the swift self and other entities in our personal quivers. Urban legend tells us that the MUVE online world of Second Life was an extension in its original formation; of Burning Man, the annual festival which occurs in the Nevada desert, in an effort to create a consciously-inscribed if temporary, virtual world community. The desert becomes surrogate for virtual space. Before the festival, the desert is devoid of human residency. After the festival, everything is taken away and the desert resumes its identity. Carpenter, writing with apparent prescience assured us that, '... When Burning Man can be held online, it will be. And when individuals can take up residence in the Burning Man, they will. Whatever the means, whatever the destinations, virtual space will be irresistible to the swift self', (Carpenter in McCracken, 2008:277).

A forecast indeed. Second Life (only one of a number of MUVES) now has more than a million regular online visitors, several hundred thousand residents and usually a minimum of fifty thousand in-life whenever you log in. Are these all swift selves? Given the nature of Second Life as a fully-immersive environment, sharing, in a fractional way through the Internet the capacity to be driven, monitored and maintained by its residents, I would say that there is a very good chance that swift selves proliferate within its mixed-reality boundaries. Both Burning Man and Second Life present territories irresistible to the swift self in terms of immersive transformative practice, the embodiment of imagination and technologically realised desires. Both locations on this same world-surface constitute the potential for extending the description of companionship to include otherness in the form of avatar manifestations.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last 200 years, Western Thought has created a dialectic (Martin-Alcoff, 2005) which, I believe, impacts upon certain concepts concerned with the acquisition of autonomy within personal identity - that debate which seeks to synthesize the self and the 'other', the implications of which can adversely affect our ability to fit, to customise our belonging in the here and now and consequently, to question a sense of lasting allegiance to any one place. Recent social research (Belonging - Social Issues Research Centre 2007) suggests that traditional categories of belonging are now less easily defined in relation to distinct groups into which people may adroitly insert themselves. As our social interactions become more complex we are increasingly obliged to select our host groups. These groups are now encountered in all aspects of our lives.

Through the internet, we have the potential to be members of communities not just locally, but in Cape Town, Archangel, Buenos Aires or in mixed-reality locations in Second Life, like New Philadelphia, New London, Ohio University or Amsterdam. But has this increase in choice diluted or made more tenuous our commitment or ability to experience that sense-of-place which ultimately is our own?



***Figure 38. Leaving: Second Life Wellington Railway Station Crowd Figures - Combining Real Life Representation and Second Life avatar simulacra. Initial exploration into semblance of holographic echo. Images, Mike Baker.***

Identity and belonging. I suggest that our basic needs to be a part of something greater than ourselves are still intact. The idea of belonging is central to our existence and to our understanding of how we and others give meaning to our lives, yet it seems that these cornerstones of our sense of self are truly at risk from the ministrations of that thief of our stable moments; indeterminacy, emerging through the Roaming Body, this purveyor of intimate-distance within the self, unapproachable, enjoying stranger status, yet strangely familiar. Our sense of identity is founded in our ability to not only connect with our self, but to maintain a meaningful connection with others, to adhere to those places and people in our world which bring a sense of worth into our lives; founded too, upon our social interactions which are indicators of our allegiance to particular communities or groups through shared beliefs, values or practices. However, is it possible to exercise a balanced control over our facility to belong? At which point does an autonomous estate stand so resolved, itself independent and immune from the need to be a part of something greater? That late 17th and 18th Centuries set of collective Western values emerging through The Enlightenment, called upon individuals to think for themselves, (Martin-Alcoff, 2005). In embracing this, we have since held that independence and thus the capacity for reason (which apparently, enables one to successfully stand alone) were to be our exemplars. This has necessitated that the individual be able to separate from all that is externally imposed on them in order to evaluate and consider rationally, their ongoing condition: that of a sentient being with the capacity to act autonomously. Yet it can be seen that perhaps self-autonomy is divided.

Since Hegel, (1770-1831) major psychological accounts of the self have placed its dependence on the 'other' at the centre of formation and maintenance of the self. For Hegel, (Martin-Alcoff, 2005) one needs the 'other' to recognize one's status as a self-directing subject in order to create the conditions for the self-directing activity; one's self image is mediated through the 'self-other' relation, not only in terms of its substantive or evidential content but also in terms of the self in its base capacity. The self is completed by the active existence - and adherence to its potential other. Thus, on the one hand freedom and independence requires reason, which requires the ability to separate from the 'other', while at the same time, the self is ineluctably dependent on the 'other's interruptions and influence. If both of these philosophical traditions are broadly correct, it would seem that we are doomed to a lack of freedom through autonomy, because undivided autonomy is doubtful. Consequently, freedom through independence is defined as precisely that which we cannot attain, so the outcomes of our preoccupation with this pursuit may be placing at hazard our paradoxical need to find a place to stand which supports equally, our sense-of-place in the world.

In the *Social Psychology of Experience: Studies in Remembering and Forgetting*, the authors, David Middleton and Steven Brown suggest that Bergson's view of the world is a process which embraces a, 'fluid continuity of the real', (2005).

There is no doubt that for us time is at first identical with the continuity of our inner life. What is this continuity? That of a flow or passage, but a self-sufficient flow or passage, the flow not implying a thing that flows, and the passing not presupposing states through which we pass; the thing and the state are only artificially chosen snapshots of the transition, all that is naturally experienced is duration itself' (Bergson quoted in Middleton & Brown, 2005: 61).

Among my tasks in this Masterate is to demonstrate if possible, that our behaviours are mediated through the processes of indeterminacy experienced in duration. That we are receptacles susceptible to the ministrations of entities within our becoming amid this duration ; uncertainty through change. Indeterminacy is just one of those visitations that mediates our transformative existence in our 'becoming human', (Bergson, 2005) yet I perceive this entity as lying beneath and mediating any others which may emerge. It is this presence which ensures that we are never quite whole or complete because we can never be fully present - in the present. The Roaming Body as a, '... fellow-travelling identity ...', (Massumi, 2002) is the vehicle which articulates the properties and causality of indeterminacy. As vitally as food, we record through traces on the surfaces of our lives such insubstantial yet potent ephemera as habits, memories and tropisms - movement in response to a stimulus - all occurrences mediated by the passage of ongoing moments. Could it be that this unconscious skillset - the active processes of our leaving - processes of which we are largely unaware exercised through the event of departure, is that stimulus? Our Roaming Body becomes the functionary of our departures, itself gripped by indeterminacy and while drawing us away, also supports in us a certain fluency in managing this wayward feature. Despite our apparent inability to 'stay put' and recognising intimations that our present is continually under threat, rather than find this depressing I find it persuasive, capable of propelling me into re-evaluations of how, where and when I can be who I am; perhaps, as I have endeavoured to demonstrate, how, as a sentient being, I may conduct my life through a perceptual reality composite, ('The Human Analogue in Mixed-Reality', p. 24) caught up, despite myself in a perpetual state of change which is centred ultimately, in a compelling, involuntary movement away from what appears to be the prevailing moment. Indeterminacy affecting us all, is here inscribed upon the surfaces of our every cell through the unconscious transgressions of the Roaming Body, a time-bandit which steals away not our possessions, but our presence; a hijacker of our on-task moments and our efforts to stay

grounded in any given manifestation of 'now'. These misdemeanours are largely invisible to us, yet they shape all of our dealings, our movements and apparent stillness in time and spaces.

Through the event of departure, our body's inclination to stray precludes any hope for us of lasting stability or stasis. Perhaps today, as never before, is this predilection to locate ourselves in the onward surge of movement away from that previous moment so instrumental in thwarting our search for both, our collective and individual sense of belonging ... as if we had a choice and were not swept away, regardless ...

The interconnections which exist between indeterminacy manifesting through lived departures, ensures that there is no surcease for the body, roaming in this blended continuity of the world surface we identify as real. No secure position to be attained and held indefinitely. In this context we may find that we are interconnected through our mutual estrangement and that our engagements, conversations and connections will always be at hazard. I suspect from my observations that ultimately as indeterminants, we are always 'Leaving' and that this is a true descriptor of our condition in that business of being human. There is real pathos to be found in a lifetime of leaving engagements in the that terrain we like to identify as real, whether these lie across interface moments from person to person in Wellington City centre or avatar to avatar, prosthetic constructs in metaverse environments and this state will keep us forever defined by some, if not ourselves, as strangers. In my videoed dance work, I have been concerned with the investigation of what I will call the spaces between recognized content in our lived experience. Interstitial spaces dominated by duration itself. In exploring what may comprise engagement and conversation on the street, my interest has been held not so much by what is being communicated, as what is being left out, due to what I have identified as interpersonal terrain dominated by indeterminacy manifesting through that durational process. It appears that this uncertainty located within movement/change may indeed influence or to a significant extent, govern the nature of dialogue in urban contexts. The paragraph under Belonging, Identity and the Roaming Body (p.15) introduces the notion that, 'Indeterminacy has always dominated the terrain which we have had to negotiate, evident still, in the ways in which our choices may be mediated, in our actions which only appear to prevail, in our inter and intra-relations with ourselves and others, in the spaces we impinge upon and in the times which we traverse'. In the end despite the apparent efficacy of our acts, the transfluency of our movements and transformative embodiments across a broad range of interfaces, our relations with and through avatar companions in various descriptions of our realities only serve to bear witness to temporary points of purchase within the durational register of our lives. Perhaps the only actions which truly prevail are those which keep drawing us away. Leaving.





**Figure 39. 'Leaving' ... Perceived as a multiplicity of inscribed surfaces in this Real Life representation, Rollo Kohime sits in Wellington Railway Station watching the flood of First and Second Life commuters head out to the train platforms 2009. Image, Mike Baker.**

My last reference is a quotation from Buddha for the summary insight it possesses in posing the questions which will continue to haunt us in our everyday engagements: 'What is the appropriate behaviour for a man or a woman in the midst of this world, where each person is clinging to his piece of debris? What's the proper salutation between people as they pass each other in this flood?' Buddha, (2008).

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### **Appendix 1: Video Bank**

This section deals with video footage from my practice, all process related and workshoping concepts, some under controlled studio conditions, most carried out in relatively, uncontrolled public spaces. All movement modes were conducted under the auspices of structured improvisational approaches. (A recent term for this is 'Real-time Choreography', Kristian Larsen, <http://throwdisposablechoreography.blogspot.com>)

DVD included with this document:

|                                                     |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------|
| Video 1:- Leaving Odysseus                          | p.15 |
| Video 2:- A Facet of the Real 3, Embodying Surfaces | p.43 |
| Video 3:- Slippage                                  | p.55 |
| Video 4:- Departed - Remnants 2                     | p.61 |
| Video 5:- Duet for 6                                | p.71 |

## **Appendix 2**

### **Conferences 2009**

In 2009 I presented five papers at four international conferences:

- intercreate.org/SCANZ. New Plymouth, New Zealand Aotearoa, Symposium. 7-8 February 2009
- SDHS Conference 2009: Topographies, Sites, Bodies, Technologies. Stanford, California, USA. 19-22 June 2009 (two papers)
- PSI15 (MIS)Performance Studies International Conference. Zagreb, Croatia. 24-28 June 2009
- Time, Transcendence, Performance Conference. Monash University, Melbourne, Australia 1-3 October 2009

I include these references because I presented these papers through the facility of my Second Life Wellington Station simulacrum and this was central for me as an activity in organising, performing and affirming the thinking around my concepts for my Masters research practice.

### **Performances, Exhibitions 2007-2009**

- Exhibition: Masters process - dance and video: Fishbowl Gallery, NMIT, Nelson, NZ Aotearoa, June 2007
- Performance: Multi-Media Interactive 2008 Underground. Independent Theatre, Nelson, New Zealand Aotearoa
- Exhibition: Artists Salon. Chez Bushwick, New York, USA 11 May 2009
- Exhibit at Aotearoa Digital Arts Symposium 2009, Critical Digital Matter. (Second Life Wellington Railway Station and videos shown in Amsterdam, Holland. London, UK. Wellington, New Zealand Aotearoa 26-28 June 2009)

Please refer to my Masters internet site for further information on my research practice. Here are three years of research and critical discourse and many videos and images which could not be included in this exegesis, but which the reader may find instructive and relevant to the concepts and issues being examined:

<http://hoststranger.blogspot.com>

All the videos mentioned and included in this exegesis are accessible to be viewed on YouTube.com under 'In the Company of Strangers' plus the individual titles.



### Appendix 3

When I began this Masterate, I felt it was critical to ask myself questions about my approach to my methodology; how I was researching, how I was using the processes and approaches within my practice which articulated the enquiry that I was initiating, to inform my ongoing development and investigation. (Since April 2007 I have maintained an Internet blog, 'In the Company of Strangers'<sup>1</sup> as a mechanism for the purposes of presenting in the public arena the concepts in my research practice, liaising effectively with my supervisors and promoting a forum for critical discourse and debate of my theories.)<sup>2</sup> On my Internet blog, I began to post these questions, inviting critical comment from the public. Early in 2007, I engaged in a discussion with the Auckland contemporary dancer, Kristian Larsen which interrogated not only my concepts concerning engagement, but also my reasons for using Contact Improvisation Dance as a medium for exploring these concepts. Please note that the principal focus for my study has evolved considerably since 2007, but that the issues raised then are still relevant now. These are selected posts from this discussion. The full discussion can be read on my Masters blog, <http://hoststranger.blogspot.com>:

'Discussion with Kristian Larsen on 7.10.07

*So I have questions: What is it that you are doing? Why are you doing it? I hope this helps kick start the dialogue. Cheers KL*

*07 October 2007 02:29  
nomads.hat said...*

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<sup>1</sup> (<http://hoststranger.blogspot.com>)

<sup>2</sup> I have had a number of people kindly interact with my discussion topics, particularly, the contemporary dancer and improviser, Kristian Larsen and contemporary dancer, Dr Simon Ellis from Auckland and 'Idiom', all from NZ Aotearoa and Dr Johannes Birringer from London, United Kingdom and Houston, Texas. I am indebted to them for their critiquing of my work and for the rigour of their questioning. This process became instrumental in both challenging and affirming for me, my use of Contact Improvisation Dance and video/moving image as mediums with which to pursue my research practice and represent my concepts, greatly assisting me in the process of achieving sensible coherency in my approaches.

Hi KL,

*My aim is to explore methods of investigating, through dance and video, notions of what constitutes identity. I am particularly interested in those aspects of identity which perhaps are usually taken for granted or pass unnoticed in our busy lives. The ways in which we relate to strangers in the street. The constitution of engagement itself as an event - what makes a conversation recognisable and verifiable as such, between two strangers? How small can this be before engagement becomes indifference? What kinds of activity may catalyze a very small, brief dialogue between two strangers where the two people move from a point of complete indifference to engagement?*

*Why am I doing this? What is the point? What am I getting at? Good questions. I am doing this because I am fascinated by the dramas inherent in micro-moments of connection with people. I am intrigued with the possible visual, conceptual and kinesthetic tensions which come briefly into being when that moment of acknowledgement is reached between two strangers, but which is only cursory. It happens all the time. In a city, almost-meetings with strangers happen continually. We tend to shrug off such encounters believing that they are meaningless punctuation marks, which allow us to navigate our way through our day and only recognize and value extended connections and conversations of import which really engage our attention in a more prolonged fashion. This is 'normal' behaviour. We don't have time to gravely consider each and every encounter with a stranger and its possible import.*

*I am interested in manifestations of what the anthropologist, Carl Augé terms, 'the lonely contractuality of everyday life' as well as what may constitute a feeling of 'belonging' in a space and with people, in our current society. I think that these micro-moments of 'almost meetings' and non-conversations are an expression or manifestation of this condition, arrived at out of necessity, but insidiously re-inforcing distance and difference from those who are nearby. When is a stranger not a stranger? I think that these micro-moments of 'almost meetings' and non-conversations are an expression of this condition, arrived at out of necessity, but insidious. So I am exploring possible dramas in these moments of meeting.*

*My current investigation into what may constitute engagement with another, how this may contribute to notions of identity within these encounters and how this may be evidenced, is beginning to document this dynamic through my practice. My practice process is concentrating on initiating structured improvisation scenarios in the spaces to create a diagnostic vehicle. Through this vehicle, I want to be able to witness,*

*document and record subtle connections, non-engagements and tensions between myself and other users in the space. A priority for me is to make sure that my practice dovetails with my thinking and in demonstrable terms, that my dance/camera work actually does succeed in, not 'resolving' issues of identity, but in illuminating and critically investigating these issues.*

*I am using CI dance as a 'movement-in-transit' vehicle to explore identity in selected, estranged spaces because essentially CI is always, I believe, an engagement with a stranger, whether a known friend or a chance meeting with someone from another country (It is also an encounter with the stranger in ourselves - the other) and these spaces are places of improvisation.*

*They lack a sense of prolonged engagement in most people's day, a sense of 'belonging', although this of course, is relative, hence the ambiguity. To put it in Nancy's<sup>3</sup> terms you could say that the spaces and the people in them fall into that stage in the Underscore<sup>10</sup> which is described as 'streaming' and 'grazing' - solo non-engagement followed by minimal and fleeting engagement. So our dance in the selected spaces goes. The spaces are subject to both, constant re-invention in their significance and useage by the presence of the people who travel through them or engage in brief work in them. But ostensibly they remain - spaces of transit. So I am using CI through its improvisational ethic of transience and because it is still quite an unknown or even aberrant art form, as a means to engage people's fleeting attention. Within the description of what dance can be, as a movement mode, I think CI is quite a liminal movement form in some respects. There is a lot of interfacing in the process of the dance: connections solid or tenuous with the partner, connections solid or tenuous with a given audience, connections solid or tenuous with a given space, connections solid or tenuous with the self/other.*

*I am not fixed on these directions but at this stage, they are a way in for me. Hope this is clearer. I am still working things out and this will probably continue for the duration.*

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<sup>3</sup> Nancy Stark-Smith, one of the founders of Contact Improvisation Dance between 1962 and 1964 in the USA

<sup>4</sup> The 'Underscore' is a structured movement score devised by Nancy Stark-Smith specifically for Contact Improvisation Dance practitioners. As the term suggests, the dancers adhere to an underlying structure, which provides a context and basis upon which improvisational dance movement can be layered, investigated, performed.

07 October 2007 02:35

Hi KL,

*The French philosopher, Nicolas Bourriaud, talks about the process of performance work transforming through being filmed, into a 'trailer' - I view my ideas and work very much as a trailer at this point - but open-ended, for an event which may be put off indefinitely. I consider my work post-structuralist: open, discursive and posing questions, rather than tidily presenting a modernist kind of statement, resolution or answer. I want my work to read as a diagnostic instrument to measure ways in which we 'miss' one another on the street. I am interested in dislocation, discontinuity, double-takes, displacement.*

*This is how my full abstract reads now:*

*Project Title:*

*In the Company of Strangers*

*Subtitle:*

*Meetings, Exchanges and Negotiated Conversations in Urban Spaces*

*This performance and video-based project critically explores meetings with members of the public in selected urban spaces. My practice will centre on the initiation of interventionist dance strategies, to prompt and examine exchanges with pedestrians in transit. Exploration of these engagements and the subsequent dialogue which emerges through physical interaction, will focus on encounters between myself, other dancers and members of the public traversing the given spaces. Enquiry will be focussed in each meeting, on the process of engagement as an event in itself. I will be exploring in each encounter the dynamic constituents of this event: anticipation, arrival, connection, dialogue and departure. I am interested in illuminating and documenting through this process of exchange, that territory of uncertainty which pervades each encounter and lies beneath these points. Experimental-movement frameworks will be based on the disciplines of Contact Improvisation Dance and Authentic Movement. My practice will be recorded using a range of video narrative.*

*As you can see, I am interested in putting myself in touch with exchanges with people, not through a performance work, but with a process of movement-based signification. As far as taking the world into account when improvising through dance, I am still working out how to do this. I want to make work which is robust and which possesses definition. It is still not clear to me what it is I want to carry out, but there is something nagging at me, something hovering. I think I want to take the conversation of my dance-partner and I and say to the wider world, 'I am taking a partnered movement-form, itself an expression of dialogue centred on improvisation in the face of uncertainty, into this wider arena of 'the world', governed by improvisation in the face of uncertainty and perhaps, ritual and I want to use it to illuminate the ways in which we meet. The ways in which we establish meetings - or not. I could stand in the street and use English. I could speak in ways which were intentionally obtuse, indefinable or ambiguous. I choose to use a vocabulary of movement.*

*I am working on the issue of cues for the public. I will be taking my cues from the public. (Stillness and only movement when someone comes close - activating us - and other strategies). I have been taking my own cues to the public so far. Yes, I want to intervene, but only just. Yes, I want to be seen but not 'performing'. I would like to be only just noticed by some. Peripherally. From across the street as well as by the people with whom we are interacting. If people gather around this is ok too, but I am not seeking this. Interestingly, I checked out a busking licence the other day to ensure I am covered for ethical approval and one category is the 'Walk-by or Walk-through'. People are doing this around me. My outward expression to be noticed or ignored is a metaphor for conversations in public, which are cursory, casual and a product of a contractuality which exists to protect us as we go about the business of our everyday life. An urban condition. Ultimately, I am asking questions about alterity - the 'other', within urban identity and this is my study. Through my practice I want to be perceived as an 'other', conversing in a different language in a public place. This act alone is enough to provoke that status of 'otherness'.*

07 October 2007 02:43

KL said...

Hi Mike,

*I am having a problem with the use of the word 'uncertainty.' There`s a distinction to be made between not knowing and being in a state of uncertainty. In my experience all activity is improvisational in dynamic. Be it driving a car, cooking food, doing a dance or having a conversation. What I notice in the 'everyday'*

*activities is that function and specificity are fundamental to the improvisation. I know what I want to do and I work with the resources I have, take the environment I am in into account, and end up with a result. In order for my investigations with improvisation to offer me up any concrete information, have any sense of context, effectiveness, or any sense of anything I have endeavored to find out what it is that I am doing.*

*With contemporary dance there is a commonplace lack of clarity in terms of its function, the investigative aspect has become cliché because of the lack of rigour and specificity that occurs all too often there's a lack of clarity when it comes to where it situates itself in the world, & how it interacts with society.*

*If the approach to contemporary dance is primarily or exclusively intuitive, based purely in sensory information then there seems to be a risk of the work becoming indulgent. I'm not saying that your work is. What I will suggest is that CI is not an appropriate language to use to conduct this kind of investigation. I also question: what IS 'authentic movement' ? Not the existing body of information that is labeled authentic movement so much as the idea itself. You may well disagree but in my experience CI is limited in terms of its ability to take into account the composition of the environment or situation it is occurring in. It is only concerned with the fulfillment of its own agenda. Perceived this way the same limitations would occur regardless of the specific movement language eg; tai chi or ballet or break dancing.*

*"I am interested in putting myself in touch with exchanges with people, not through a performance work, but with a process of movement-based signification." What an opportunity! Somehow when I look at that statement it seems to me that the basis for the movement language is answered right there. I actually think the movement comes from them, the public. Use their movement, blend with them. Then you are in a twilight world, liminal/subliminal. In that realm you may 'not-perform' the performance. There is opportunity in that real time moment to make compositional decisions that take the movement into the abstract, fragmentations, double takes, discontinuities can all paradoxically exist as 'flow'. If you want to illuminate the ways in which we meet I suggest you remove uncertainty and ambiguity and replace it with certainty in the face of paradox.*

*Let me know your thoughts.*

*KL*

07 October 2007 02:46

nomads.hat said...

Hi KL,

*I think that CI and Authentic Movement are ideally suited to my task - initiating communication between strangers. I hazard the suggestion that while it is undesirable to make work which is self-indulgent, to some extent depending upon who is witnessing the work, almost all art work which is not literal and instantly accessible is in danger of being labelled in this way. As for CI being able to interact with specific surroundings and environment, I have been dancing CI in just this way for 7 years now. Interacting with the 'furniture' in the space, for me, can comprise a significant part of the dialogue one has in a space. This includes street furniture, imbuing inanimate objects with a sense of the biomorphic. BodyCartographyProject for instance, in the personal experience I have had with them, empowers all the things in a space/environment which they may be occupying. I have danced with them when these issues were foremost in creating an environment-wide 'conversation'.*

*I fully acknowledge that classically, CI has its own agenda, which is why what I am doing would be contra to some CI dancers who recognize its validity only in a 'sport-dance' situation. For me it is much more. I include a small section from my Project Analysis for this body of study. I begin with a quote taken from your blog. (This has been properly acknowledged as to source in my document):*

*Methods:*

*In an interview with Nancy Stark-Smith (1987) Robert Ellis Dunn maintains, "In improvisation there are three things involved. Often I make a column list. In the far left column I write, "Perceptual Cues" ... (These include those from the external world, but also from the body and the imagination as well!) In the right hand column I write, "Movement Vocabulary" ... and in the center column is, "How are we correlating this?"*

*[1] Dunn, E. quoted in Larsen, K. retrieved on 1.10.07 from: [throwdisposablechoreography.blogspot.com](http://throwdisposablechoreography.blogspot.com)'*

*My task is to correlate my contextual intent to converse through movement and to investigate 'conversation' itself through this process, with my improvised movement language. My cues are the structured intent beneath the improvisation, driven by my concepts, the states of agency on the day, (people,*

*weather, my clothing, my health, my partner, the space ...) affecting my investigation in the space. My movement vocabulary is Contact Improvisation Dance (CI) and Authentic Movement. I am using these disciplines as a vehicle to explore the process of engaging with the public in selected spaces because essentially, CI is an engagement with a stranger and these spaces are places of improvisation and uncertain outcomes. To put it in Nancy Stark-Smith's[2] terms (I have alluded to this earlier in our conversation) the spaces, the people in them and their movements, fall into those stages in the 'Underscore' which are described as 'streaming' and 'grazing' – movement and connections which promote respectively, solo non-engagement followed by minimal and fleeting engagement-disengagement. My tenuous connections with the people in the selected spaces reflects and gives this underlying structure a voice. I am using it as an active departure point from which to progress into improvised exploration with the other users in the space. In a sense, I am enrolling them in these phases of the Underscore.*

*For me 'uncertainty' is significant because I am interested in the tensions inherent in the manifestation of this word/world. This does not mean that I want to allow my work to be woolly or unclear. I agree with your summary of the improvisational. Yes, function and specificity. All technology and much of our thinking about ideas whether high, low, real or virtual is geared toward managing our world in these terms.*  
08 October 2007 15:15

*KL said...*

*Hi Mike,*

*I can't help myself ... a few more things.*

*... My own question of 'what will I be left with if I dance with someone who is not dancing with me' has entered and stayed in my consciousness now. I will probably use that as a kind of koan for awhile'...*

Michael CJ Baker, Nelson, New Zealand Aotearoa 10.6.10