





# *Washing Lines: Encounters in Improvised Handheld Video Portraiture*

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# Summary

This project consists of a creative component and exegesis that explore the capacities of improvised filmmaking and performance techniques to convey the affective potential of places, people and other subjects. The resulting creative work, *Washing Lines*, is a series of improvised video portraits that feature people hanging out washing to dry in locations throughout Sydney.

The exegesis explores ways of sensing as a filmmaker, describing my (the candidate's) pursuit of a "haptic", non-mastering relationship to places and subjects through the development of specific parameters for camera movement: a "score". It explores the active *work* of improvisation, discussing agency, risk and affect in improvised practice, and elaborating an aesthetics of effort in filmmaking and performance. It also addresses the relationship between matter and meaning in the *Washing Lines* video series.

Affect and improvisation are not only explored in relation to filmmaking, but are considered as integral aspects of creative and scholarly research. This project is committed to iterative, practice-led and interdisciplinary enquiry, and attempts to enact and describe what I identify as a "playful" research methodology. This methodology combines improvised filmmaking practices with strategies from dance, music and performance, drawing on my involvement in BodyWeather, Contact Improvisation, Taiko percussion, and local dance research residencies. Through this process, I develop an approach to handheld video portraiture that appreciates the multi-faceted nature of improvisation, as well as the multi-faceted nature of the affective encounters it facilitates.



# Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “*Washing Lines: Encounters in Improvised Handheld Video Portraiture*” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information, sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201300613(R) on 18 October 2013.

Cleo Cecile Mees (Student I.D. 40955885)

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# Introduction

*Washing Lines* is a series of videos that portray places, people, and other subjects, too. Each video was recorded as a single, improvised take. The nine long takes included in the series are a sampling of a larger set of takes recorded throughout 2015, 2016 and early 2017, which explored how improvised handheld camera work might be used to facilitate affective encounters with places, and with the subjects that move through places.

The series and its accompanying exegesis grew from a long-standing interest in the ways various media – written, audio-visual – bring me into affective encounters with place. When I engage with certain images or pieces of writing, places (mediated, immediate, remembered, imagined) shimmer with "unlocalizable intensities" (Mroz, 2012, p. 5) and flood me with "desire and astonishment" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 101). These are characteristics of what Matilda Mroz and Gilles Deleuze respectively have called "affect". David MacDougall seems to describe such encounters in film when he writes of "that moment in a shot or sequence that gives it its life [...] what we wait for when watching a film a second time, as we wait for certain moments in music [...] that which is tender, alive [...] which is transient, appearing only in a flash" (MacDougall, 1998, p. 49). Such moments may be said to occur in the "microsecond of discovery", "when thought is still undifferentiated and bound up with matter and feeling in a complex relation that it often later loses in abstraction" (MacDougall, 2006, p. 1).

This project sought to contemplate such affective experiences of place through creative practice, and to find ways of facilitating them for viewers through video.

The videos and exegesis also result from an interest in creative research methods. They investigate the strategic and methodological aspects of desire-driven and aesthetically-driven forms of enquiry, and seek language for embodied and ephemeral experiences in research. A determinate vision of the eventual "creative component" of the thesis was actively warded off until late in the candidature, in the hope of keeping the research process-oriented. Chapters One and Two set out the methodology that ensued from this approach.

Chapter One gives an overview of the methods employed throughout this thesis. I begin by introducing key thinkers and artists who enriched my understanding of reflective, sensuous and iterative research practices. Next, I chronicle the emergence of my specific interest in handheld camera movement in relation to domestic routines, which emerged from a broader set of video-based experiments that sought a useful way into my research

concerns. I then introduce BodyWeather and Contact Improvisation, two performance practices that contributed valuable language, frameworks and strategies to the research; and, finally, I sketch a definition of the improvisatory "score" – a tool that was crucial throughout my improvisations, and that I refer to throughout this exegesis.

In Chapter Two I define my research methodology as a playful one and suggest that play may be understood as re-purposive, as interested in the properties of things, as the imagining of a second chance, as co-immersive, as enclosed and simultaneously resisting enclosure, as liminal, as joyful, and as politically engaged. It is also embedded in a broader physical, historical and political landscape. In suggesting that play could be all of these things, I suggest that playful *research* could be these things too, and I connect the above characteristics to specific experiences in my own research. Along the way, I grapple with some of the complexities that the *research as play* analogy throws up.

This research began with a broad and varied series of video-based experiments before it narrowed down to explore affect and film through handheld camera movement, specifically. Once working inside this more focused zone of enquiry, I started working towards an increasingly multidimensional understanding of how I might improvise portrayals of places and subjects in a way that invited affective experiences for viewers. Retrospectively, I see three distinct phases in this thought process. Each phase did not replace or supersede previous phases, but added new considerations and incentives to the improvised process that affected the flow and deployment of my attention while I worked, and that also affected the ensuing shape of the videos. As Anne Douglas and Kathleen Coessens have put it, improvisations may be repeated, "but never exactly", and each retracing adds "a new layer of consciousness" to one's practice (Douglas & Coessens, 2011, p. 196). Chapters Three, Four and Five reflect on this evolution in my thinking.

The first phase of my thinking, after I started exploring improvisation in handheld camera movement specifically, involved the search for a repeatable activity and set of parameters for camera movement that would facilitate a fruitful exploration of place and affect through video. Specifically, I was looking for a structure that would help me cultivate an overall disposition, or "way of being" in relation to my surroundings, which allowed me to engage with the affective potential of places and subjects. Inspired by the work of Laura U Marks, David Abram, Paula Kramer and Anne Rutherford (among others), as well as by experiences in the performance practices BodyWeather and Contact Improvisation, I pursued a bodily disposition that appreciated the vibrancy, agency, and unknowability of subjects, including non-human subjects, and that sought a softening of body-boundaries: a receptivity, a mimetic tendency, an ability to be *moved* (literally animated) *by* other bodies. I hoped to find a way of pressing up closely to the world (Marks, 2002, p. xiii) rather than analysing it with a more distanced eye, in order to invite affective experiences through video. Chapter Three describes this foundational phase. In this chapter I set out several principles for a receptive, "haptic" way of "seeing" (or sensing) as a camera

operator; I identify three related "bodily dispositions" that I pursued in developing a structure for repeatable improvisations; and, subsequently, I describe the gradual development of a video-based improvised technique and a structured, repeatable activity (featuring the hanging out of washing) that supported these bodily dispositions. This technique would be used in the ongoing iterative improvisations that eventually produced *Washing Lines*.

However, ongoing improvisations, in combination with reading, reflective writing, and conversations with my supervisor, Tom Murray, suggested that aspects of this technique (and of my reasoning in relation to it) were not quite resolved. One of these was my own presence in the videos, as a mediator. Besides attempting to "be moved by" my surroundings, I was trying to make myself invisible as a filmmaker – to conceal traces of the thinking and effort that helped to bring these long takes into being. This desire to remain invisible constrained my experimentation as an improviser, as it had the effect of inadvertently rendering unviable or undesirable any improvised actions that might reveal my presence, or my thinking, as a camera operator to an audience. Over time, I started more openly acknowledging my agency and active constructions as an improviser, and allowing these to be noticeable in the recordings. This was not only driven by a desire to revive my own commitment to process and experimentation, but by a growing sense that traces of the decision-making and effort that produced these videos –traces of their material becoming – might actually create more opportunities for audiences to engage affectively with the videos. As a closer engagement with the existing landscape of improvised, reflexive practices in both dance and film would suggest to me, allowing traces of the compositional process to be palpable might include audiences in the affectivity of risk-taking and "thinking on one's feet", which are central to improvised composition, and might solicit an appreciation of the materiality of the digital video medium.

This second phase in my thinking is the focus of Chapter Four, which contemplates the inevitability of artistic efforts and contrivances in processes of mediation, as well as the potential value of allowing these interventions to be palpable in the resulting artwork. (By "mediation" I mean the attempt to convey reality through media, audio-visual or otherwise.)<sup>1</sup> I briefly examine discussions around the impossibility of total "veracity" in documentary and also look at the work of John Cage, who tended to understate the active, creative role he played in his chance-based compositions. In noting the inevitability of authorial intervention in processes of mediation, I suggest that certain artists' claims to non-intervention or transparency can be understood as expressions of what they were

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary does not list this context-specific use of the term, "mediation". However, it does define mediation as an "intervention in a process or relationship", suggesting that an interference by the author/mediator is indeed integral to any attempt to convey reality (Oxford Living Dictionaries Online, 2017).

*trying* to do, rather than what they were succeeding at doing (or what they thought everyone else should be doing). I argue that this trying is affective; revelatory. One way of allowing audiences to access this "trying" is to foreground improvisatory processes which, as it has often been suggested, are characterised by *risk* (Frost & Yarrow, 1990; Grant, 2014; Waterman, 2015). The chapter thus goes on to explore risk in improvisation and suggests that by foregrounding creative process (and the risk-taking that it entails), dance makers like Simone Forti, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, and more recently Rhiannon Newton and Lizzie Thomson, as well as ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, allow audiences access to the affectivity of real-time composition and accentuate the sensuousness of creative effort. The work of these artists encouraged me to start acknowledging and disclosing my own efforts in *Washing Lines* – which still aspired to a haptic, receptive participation with places and subjects.

The final phase in my thinking was characterised by a growing awareness of the potential interpretations that *Washing Lines* may lend itself to. At an earlier stage in the research, I aimed to engage more with the sensory and material aspects of my environment than with its potential to *mean*, or *signify*, and hoped to encourage a similar mode of engagement for viewers. Yet it eventually became clear that meaning-making processes always weigh in to some degree, and that there might be a place for the active encouraging (or discouraging) of certain interpretations of the videos, considering that, once released, they would participate in an emergent social and political reality saturated with, and thus profoundly shaped by, images (Hongisto, 2015, p. 12). Further, I came to realise that a film's ability to signify – to engage my interpretive or analytical faculties, which may tend towards a reduction of sensation – does not necessarily diminish its ability to *affect* me; to fill me with an unlocalisable desire or astonishment. Feelingful experiences emerge from a dynamic interplay of sensation and meaning-making, and audiences may be able to attend to both of these dimensions simultaneously. This acknowledgement of – and engagement with – the interpretations that *Washing Lines* may invite, is the focus of Chapter Five.

The chapter begins by sketching out C. S. Peirce's distinction between firstness, secondness and thirdness, as taken up by Gilles Deleuze. I propose that the progression from firstness to thirdness describes a progression from initial, ineffable sensation, towards the recognition of sensation – and as I explain in this chapter, I mean "recognition" as the location of sensations in relation to prior experience; as the feeling that something is familiar (*I know your face but I can't remember where from*, or, *Oh yes, I recognise this place, I know where we are*). From here, I suggest that firstness and thirdness are overlapping and mutually enriching fields when it comes to affect – firstly, because viewers can actively apply and suspend their interpretive faculties to bring different affective registers of an image "forth from latency" (Marks, 2002, p. 13); and secondly, because recognition is often uncertain – one has the feeling that something is

familiar, but cannot quite locate it – suggesting that sensation and signification are closely intertwined in the affective encounters we have with images (and at the washing line).

In Chapter Five I also explore the relationship between improvised handheld cinematographic strategies and meaning-making in the work of improvising filmmakers who were influential to me, as well as in my own schema for camera movement. Following on from this, I examine the ways in which human bodies and the site of the washing line may be interpreted on screen, subject as they inevitably are to the symbolic frameworks that history, personal memory, and current socio-political contexts impose. I discuss the potential implications of these interpretations (politically and affectively speaking), and describe how, in some instances, I responded to potential interpretations upon noticing them, making a conscious effort to invoke certain associations, or to overturn readings that might perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes. Chapter Five ends with a reflection on the role of the long take in relation to affect and meaning, as well as in relation to the concerns of the broader thesis.

Through a four-year iterative process in which the determination of a final creative product was postponed for as long as possible, I arrived at the conclusion that one of the biggest challenges in improvisation – and one of the things that is virtuosic about it – is the improviser's ability to work *between* different incentives; to divide and direct their attention between tasks and to modulate between immersion and reflection *even as* they compose. This is not a new idea, to others or to me. In fact, these challenges were already familiar to me in a dance practice context. Yet my attempts to gain a stronger embodied understanding of them in a filmmaking context enabled me to find language for certain aspects of practice-based research experience and to come to theoretical syntheses that enriched my understanding of improvisation, both in filmmaking and in research more broadly.



# Chapter One

## Methodology – An Overview

This doctoral project is deeply interested in the process of creative research. In this chapter I provide an overview of my research methods and process, and define some key terms, before going on in Chapter Two to discuss the idea of "playful" methodologies in relation to the project. I begin the chapter by introducing several key features of practice-led research drawn from literature on creative practice methodologies, and show how discovering some of these features in my own process led to new insights about practice-led research. I then introduce two performance practices that have been important resources throughout this research: BodyWeather and Contact Improvisation. Next I describe how creative experimentation in this thesis began as a very broad range of activities and eventually became more focused, entering a sustained exploration of affect and mediation through the prism of improvisation in handheld camera work. Finally, I introduce the concept of an improvisatory "score", giving some discipline-specific definition to the term and identifying ways in which a "score" for improvised camera movement served as a valuable research tool.

### Practice-Led Research: Some Defining Features

The literature on practice-led research is vast. In what follows, I draw on the work of several Australian creative practice researchers whose reflections on the research process have provided a particularly rich foundation for my own.

#### Knowledge as process, not object

My approach to research builds on a specific understanding of knowledge which holds, firstly, that knowledge is not an "object" to be transferred from person to person, but rather a process undertaken; and secondly, that knowledge is co-created and emerges in the exchanges between different practitioners and contexts. In their book, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, artist-researchers Hazel Smith and Roger Dean note that recent OECD<sup>2</sup> definitions of research defined "knowledge" as an

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<sup>2</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

object that is "generalisable" and therefore cleanly transferable from person to person, or context to context (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 3). They suggest that this view of knowledge may not be entirely accurate, and that it certainly is not always helpful for practice-led researchers in the creative arts. Instead, they propose that knowledge be understood as "unstable, ambiguous and multidimensional [...] emotively and affectively charged", and not able to be "conveyed with the precision of mathematical proof" (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 3).

Painter and researcher Barbara Bolt similarly notes that "positivist scientific thinking has demanded observable, measurable and repeatable processes and methodologies" from creative practice researchers (Bolt, 2010, p. 34). Her co-edited book with Estelle Barrett, takes issue with the underlying scientific belief that "knowledge is static and phenomena are pre-existing, immutable and waiting to be revealed or discovered" (Barrett & Bolt, 2014, p. 5). Bolt instead describes knowledge as a sort of "'intra-activity" – as *action*, and as something that "emerges" through both social and material interactions (Barrett & Bolt, 2014, pp. 5–6). In this sense, too, knowledge is not so much an end-product transferred from individual to individual as that it is an activity, and is "co-created".

Visual and installation artist Anne Douglas and design researcher Melehat Nil Gulari reiterate these ideas in an article on experimentation and improvisation in creative research, and establish a link between this approach to knowledge, and John Cage's approach to composition (which I return to later in this thesis): one of Cage's aims was to set up conditions for improvised musical performance that rendered the performed piece not as an object to be "traded", but as a process that the audience bore witness to (Douglas & Gulari, 2015, p. 401). Indeed, in his lecture series, "Composition as Process", Cage describes a process-oriented piece with an arbitrary duration: its beginning and end do not mark the top and tail of a predetermined arc, but form the boundaries of a forum for a collaborative improvisation in which the performers discover even as they play (Cage, 1961, p. 39).

In a similar way, the three-to-four-year timespan of my PhD functioned as a boundary to circumscribe and focus a process of discovery. The insights my research produced are context specific, often unable to be proven with the precision of mathematics, and are intended to contribute to new and as yet unpredictable knowledge-processes when they are taken up by fellow and future researchers.

## Research as driven by an "enthusiasm of practice"

We can establish a connection between this approach to knowledge as *process*, and Brad Haseman's observation that unlike other forms of quantitative and qualitative research,



which are problem-led (that is, structured around a central thesis question or problem to be solved), practice-led research is often driven by an "'enthusiasm of practice' – something which is exciting, something which may be unruly, or indeed something which may be just becoming possible as new technology or networks allow" (Haseman, 2006, p. 100). Haseman explains,

"Practice-led researchers construct experiential starting points from which practice follows. They tend to 'dive in', to commence practicing to see what emerges. This is not to say that these researchers work without larger agendas or emancipatory aspirations, but they eschew the constraints of narrow problem-setting and rigid methodological requirements at the outset of a project". (Haseman, 2006, p. 100)

Here an attentiveness to what feels sensuous or exciting to pursue is valued – and this is another example of how practice-led research builds on the understanding that an affectively and emotionally charged knowledge is not necessarily less valid, or sound. Other researchers from various backgrounds also understand research as a sensuous, even desire-driven process. Psychology researcher Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and architect Juhani Pallasmaa have both argued for better recognition of the affective dimensions of problem solving (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/2014, p. 156; Pallasmaa, 2009). Creative practice research expert Carole Gray breaks down the word "philosophy" to remind us that its subparts mean "love" and "wisdom" – "love of wisdom" (Gray, 2007). In a similar spirit, film theorist Laura U. Marks describes a form of criticism driven by desire and cherishing, and writes that her book, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, was penned from her "uncool, nose-against-the-glass enthusiasm" (Marks, 2002, p. xvi).

The idea that research might be driven by an emotionally infused "enthusiasm of practice" is foundational to my own research method. Rather than setting out with a predetermined sense of what I would contribute to knowledge, or what methodology I would employ, I too "dived in" with an enthusiasm for key aspects of creative practice and aesthetic experience, and set about establishing "experiential starting points", thus multiplying methodological possibilities, as I detail later in this chapter. Joy, desire and enthusiasm all played a significant role in my own research. They also posed questions (for example, does enjoyment necessarily indicate that one is moving in a helpful direction in research? Perhaps not), and I take up a more extended discussion of the value of joy in research in Chapter Two.

## Articulating insights that emerge from practice

Many writers on practice-led research say that it is not only emotionally infused, but also profoundly *materially* infused – or, more specifically, that the most valuable insights gleaned from practice-led research are those that emerge from interactions with the materials of practice. Barbara Bolt makes a strong and evocative case for the ways

knowledge emerges from a "struggle" with the materials of one's research environment. These materials, she notes, possess a logic and agency of their own which may confound the researcher's prior theoretical assumptions (Bolt, 2010).

Interacting with the materials of creative practice facilitates the emergence of what Bolt terms "praxical knowledge" – that is, those insights that emerge from doing and that we apply tacitly in practice. She draws a connection between praxical knowledge and Levinas's use of the phrase, "originary understanding" – originary meaning, "a way of understanding that derives from, or originates in and of the thing in question" (Bolt, 2010, p. 30). The "thing in question", here, is practice in its material context. This kind of understanding is necessarily arrived at by surprise, and is neither "the representation of an already formed idea" nor the result of a "conscious [attempt] to be original" (Bolt, 2010, p. 30).

Importantly, praxical knowledge involves the identification and articulation in words of what one knows about practice. Without this articulation, Bolt asserts, we are just talking about practice itself. The exegesis plays a key role here: it is where the researcher articulates "what has emerged or what has been realised through the process of handling materials and ideas, and what this emergent knowledge brings to bear on the discipline" (Bolt, 2010, p. 34). This is also the definition of the term "exegesis" that I took forward through the project, and that leads me to call this piece of writing an exegesis (although the term appears to be understood differently internationally).

As the following chapters will show, the insights I contribute to the disciplines of dance, filmmaking and practice-led research emerged from a practice that took place in a specific material context. Often I came to insights that other practice-led researchers had had, too, but the specific context of my research gave rise to a re-articulation of the same idea in different words. In her work on research as "intra-action" (mentioned above), Estelle Barrett suggests that practice "produces changes not only to the material environment and iterative adjustments to the process of making, but also to language itself. These changes are [...] a re-configuration of language that produces unexpected and surprising transformations in consciousness" (Barrett & Bolt, 2014, p. 6). In my work, as in others', the re-articulation of known problems in new contexts (and thus in new language) can produce useful insights and shifts in how we might think of an aspect of creative practice – an example of how knowledge flourishes between or across researchers and material contexts.

## Process-orientation and goal orientation in dialogue

Much of the writing on practice-led research cited thus far emphasises what is "emergent". Smith and Dean suggest that paying attention to what is "emerging" at any given time is characteristic of a "process orientation", and that the process-orientation of much

practice-led research often exists in a productive tension with goal setting. Researchers move between the two in an "iterative" or cyclical way – and also in a way that is unpredictable, messy, and "rhizomic" (Smith & Dean, 2009, pp. 22–24).

Smith and Dean, as well as Dallas J. Baker in his paper on queering practice-led research, have developed diagrams that propose cycles of activities that a researcher may move through in enacting a reflective, iterative methodology (Baker, 2011, p. 38; Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 20). In the cycle of research/practice activities that Smith and Dean propose, there is always room for the researcher to double back, to vacillate, or to jump across to a different point in the cycle. They seem to embrace the inherent unpredictability and messiness of the research process.

Haseman and Bolt agree that practice-led research is often messy, seemingly unorthodox, and idiosyncratic (Bolt, 2010, p. 29; Haseman, 2006, p. 101). And maybe some of this has to do with the fact that, as Douglas and Gulari put it, "artistic research, like anthropology, encounters the world in movement" (Douglas & Gulari, 2015, p. 398). The findings I contribute to knowledge are also sometimes a little messy, rhizomic – they emerge in perhaps unanticipated places throughout the exegesis, which describes a process of struggling with materials and which seeks to articulate the praxical knowledge – the insights – that emerged from that process.

## Repetition or iterative practice

Interestingly, Smith and Dean also suggest that these unpredictable research cycles are a valuable tool for whittling down the vast array of methodological possibilities available to a researcher, to arrive at a narrower focus (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 22). Through repetitions that also contain variations, researchers can identify what options are preferable to them, and either discard or temporarily set aside others. In my own research, iterative practices were useful for both honing or narrowing my focus in a goal oriented way, and for maintaining an attitude that was open to multiple possibilities (and that thus remained attendant to what was emerging). These uses of iteration were described in new terms that emerged from the specific context of this research. I will unpack them now.

## Repetition as a "working towards..."

A chance conversation with a fellow PhD student early in my candidature introduced me to the work of Donald Schön. His book, *The Reflective Practitioner*, explores "theory-in-action", and seeks a deeper understanding of what is going on when we say we are "thinking on our feet", or "getting a feel for something" (Schön, 1983, pp. 54–55).

One particular anecdote from Schön's book buoyed me in the pursuit of an iterative approach to experimentation, and provided an embodied sense of what it might mean to *work towards*, or *refine* a theory, through repetition. It describes an instance of research in which repeated trial and error are engaged to work towards a desired outcome. While the research aims at a specific achievement, it pursues it by welcoming failures, by pausing to reflect, and by developing working hypotheses that remain open to change. Schön describes a research exercise conducted by Barbel Inhelder and Annette Karmiloff-Smith in 1974, in which a group of children aged six to eight were presented with the task of balancing wooden blocks on a metal bar. Although they were all symmetrical in shape, some of these blocks were unevenly weighted, meaning that their centre of gravity was not aligned with their geometrical centre. This conflicted with the children's theory that things always balance "in the middle" (Inhelder & Karmiloff-Smith, 1974, p. 203). The researchers grouped children's responses to the task into two categories. Some children, when unable to balance the unevenly weighted blocks, went on trying to balance them *without* revising their theory of balance, and eventually declared the task impossible. Other children started to try out different ways of balancing the blocks, using each failed attempt as data that contributed to their own rapidly evolving theory of balance. As their working theory began to evolve, they proceeded towards being able to balance the blocks through a series of considered corrections. The children paused frequently, and would eventually pause to weigh the block and assess where its centre of gravity was *before* balancing it, evidencing a new theory-in-action: that blocks balanced at their gravitational centre, not their geometrical centre.

Schön suggests that the children who succeeded at balancing the blocks did not so much embody a "success orientation" as a "theory orientation" (Schön, 1983, p. 58). I sought to maintain a similar "theory" orientation in research, and drew regularly on the vivid, embodied metaphor for such an orientation that Schön's anecdote provided. The method of trying, failing, reflecting, and working with tenuous hypotheses, was essential in narrowing down the variables for experimentation until about three years into the process, when I finally began to improvise according to the same method (or "score") for camera movement repetitively, with less of a view to evolving it further.

Once I arrived at this relatively stable method, and began to envision the final creative product, *Washing Lines*, the challenge of repetition changed. It became: how to keep each repetition alive? Curious? Open to questioning? How to experience each repetition as new and unique?

## Repetition as "opening up"

As many scholars have noted, repetitions are always variations: every return is necessarily a return with a difference (Frost & Yarrow, 1990; Latour, 2009). In my repetitive

improvisations with a video camera, the fact that no moment could ever be experienced (or recorded) twice produced a sense of heightened stakes. There was only one of this or that moment, only one chance to seize an opportunity in precisely this or that way. At various points, these video-based improvisations were charged with a hope that *this* improvisation would perfectly express my research interests; that on *this* occasion, everything would pan out as I had hoped. Deciding *not* to prioritise the attainment of a "perfect" result would allow me to appreciate that repetition, because of the variations it brings into being, has the potential to be endlessly revelatory.

The potential for repetitive processes to instantiate variations has been explored in a range of arts and performance practices, some of which I address in Chapter Four. Some of my most profound experiences with repetition have occurred in relation to the dance practice of Sydney-based choreographer Rhiannon Newton. Observing and, later, participating in Newton's work would give me an embodied understanding of how, in practice-based research, repetition can be used to open up possibilities, such that each iteration is experienced as new, as strange, as a question, a point of bifurcation and potentiality – as a "singularity", to invoke André Lepecki's use of the term (Lepecki, 2016, p. 15).

Of her solo work, *Assemblies for One Body*, Newton writes, "My proposition [...] is to watch what repetition does to dancing. I begin by improvising for one minute. I then attempt to repeat this dance. In many ways I fail, but something remains between your memory and mine." The process of repeating something is, as she notes, "riddled with imperfections", but achieving perfection is not really the point. "Perhaps," she writes, "repetition instead provides a way for us to stay together, for paying attention to the smaller processes of emergence, loss and transformation, happening in the dance and our attention" (Newton, 2015, unpaginated).

I experienced Newton's process first-hand when participating in the second phase of development for her group work, *Bodied Assemblies*, in July of 2016. I had previously worked as audio-visual documenter, recording video and taking photos, during the first phase of Newton's research, and took a great interest in it. Along with a handful of others I was subsequently invited to partake in a series of half-day "open sessions" during the work's second phase of development, in which Newton shared her process with a wider group.

During one of these "open sessions" we did an exercise that gave me an embodied understanding of how one might remain curious and open to change when working repetitively. To begin with, we (the participants) started moving freely, using movement experiences from an earlier set of warm-ups as stimuli to guide our improvisation. At some point during this free-form exploration we were to settle on some small movement, and to start repeating it. It might have been a small wave of the arm, a twist of the torso, a trajectory of the knee through space. We were asked *not* to repeat the movement with a sense of certainty or determined precision. Instead, we were to keep it soft, open, alive, to

ask ourselves at each return what this movement is, and what it could be, to allow for shifts, for unexpected slips or swerves – to allow our desire, even, to inform the movement.

These questions, "what is happening now" and "what *could* happen now", exemplify an approach to repetition that acknowledges its live, shifting nature. They propose a way of proceeding in creative practice in which repetitions are not so much a way of perfectly reproducing or demonstrating something, but are a way of breaking something open again and again, recovering its *singularity* (its strangeness, its potential).

I wrote in my journal later that day,

There is a soft, uncertain quality about these repetitions.

There's not a sense of having to *achieve* something, or *crack a code*...

there's a constant sense of asking my body what the movement is, and this asking is open-ended.

What could this be?

What could this be?

What is happening here?

What is happening here?

not,

Am I achieving it?

Am I achieving it?

Am I achieving it?

Am I achieving it?

(Journal Entry, 20 July 2016)

This approach to repetition would become especially valuable when I began to dig deeper into one particular area of research, working repetitively within relatively consistent parameters, with a view to developing a final creative work to submit for examination. It would help me to stay relaxed in the repeated improvisations (which otherwise might become anxious, in pursuit of perfection), and to prolong a sense of experimentation – as Stuart Grant has put it, "to stay in the passingness, in the openness towards a possibility, the avoidance of the overdetermination of the 'this is'" (S. Grant, 2014, p. 141).

Besides pointing to the value of repetition in practice-led research, these perspectives are also an example of the ways specific research contexts may give rise to new language for known issues, and the ways this new language produces "transformations of consciousness" and new insights about practice (Barrett & Bolt, 2014, p. 7). In particular,

these two approaches to repetition offer distinctly embodied renderings of the concept of "iterative practice", inviting researchers to tap into embodied understandings of repetition that are congruous with the embodied and material aspects of creative practice.

## Repetition as a way of spending time in the "doing"

There is another way in which repetition might serve practice-led research, and that is that every return to the canvas, camera, studio, or dance floor, offers another opportunity to immerse oneself in the *doing* – in the struggle with the materials of practice, which is inevitably fleeting and temporary. To let insights emerge from practice, one has to spend *time* practicing. So repetition, besides narrowing down or opening up possibilities, is also simply a way of allowing for a sufficient amount of time spent inside that essential, ephemeral space of doing, to allow those valuable "originary" insights about practice to emerge.

## Trying, Failing, and Non-Mastering Research

A final characteristic of some practice-led research that I would like to draw out here is the emphasis on the *attempt*. Here it is useful to return to the work of Barbara Bolt, who gives an evocative account of her own attempt to paint landscapes in Kalgoorlie, at the edge of the desert. Here the light was so bright it "fractured the landscape" in ways she had not anticipated. This intense light rendered useless the theories of "linear and aerial perspective" she tried to apply, so that she found herself at a loss in the face of her material surroundings (Bolt, 2010, pp. 32–33). Yet her "failure to realise a painting" did not equate to a failure in research. Instead, she notes, it led her to write an exegesis which, in reflecting on this experience, developed a new (and "originary") understanding of art. Bolt's experience provides a wonderful example of how *trying* can be enough, and how allowing oneself to try and fail to describe a landscape with a set of theoretical tools (in Bolt's case, principles of linear and aerial perspective) might in fact be a way of letting the material particulars of that landscape be. Just as the light fractured the landscape visually, Bolt allowed the material of the landscape to fracture her working theories, and – importantly – not the other way around. And these still contributed valuable experiences to the exegesis.

Bolt takes what I would call a "non-mastering" approach to the subject of her research. Establishing a non-mastering relationship to the landscape of my research has been an ongoing aim throughout this project. In Chapter Two, which interprets my research methodology as playful, I arrive at the realisation that even the most playful researcher who takes ideas from different contexts and puts them together to see how they might interact, must remain aware of the fact that they operate in a landscape with a political

history that extends far beyond the boundaries of their research interests, and that they will never be able to master this landscape fully. As Paul Carter says, in contrast to the dominant "northern" (or colonialist) understanding of a landscape as something fixed that one can fully fathom and carve a path through, a more accurate and respectful understanding of the research landscape is one that acknowledges its inherently shifting, agentic nature. Entities in the research landscape may "walk straight up to [me]" (Carter, 2013, p. 16) – but they may also hide their faces. They may not give themselves over to easy manipulation or re-contextualisation – or, if they do, they may lose important sources of meaning and power (and here I refer to ideas as well as materials, people and other sentient beings).

If knowledge is co-created, and emergent between different researchers and across different contexts, then one could say that I am adding to a growing tradition of research that seeks not to master its object, but to listen to it, and to let the shape of what is written follow accordingly. My emphasis on *trying* contributes to this larger development in academic creative practice, even as it frames my own fragmented, context-specific and sometimes tentative insights as valid.

## Performance-Based Approaches to Enquiry

In addition to Rhiannon Newton's work, I drew on several other performance practices throughout this exegesis, including BodyWeather, Contact Improvisation and Taiko drumming lessons. I will now give a preliminary introduction to BodyWeather and Contact Improvisation, as they have been especially useful to me.

While BodyWeather is often used to produce pieces for public performance, and Contact Improvisation is very occasionally performed in theatrical settings, enquiry is central to both practices. They have contributed many things to my methodology. Throughout the research process, they have contributed vocabularies (specific words and phrases) that helped to elucidate dimensions of creative practice, they have provided embodied and affective contexts for the exploration of certain methodological principles, they have informed my use of "scores" for handheld camera movement (as I describe later in this chapter), and they have provided me with ideas for creative exercises to explore the concerns at the heart of the thesis.

When I refer to these practices in this exegesis, I often draw on discussions and experiences that took place in the dance studio, in the middle of a class, course, or training session. Often I quote other people (usually teachers or facilitators), who spoke during these sessions. The ephemerality of in-studio experiences, and the primarily oral and corporeal ways in which BodyWeather and Contact Improvisation are taught, explored and kept "alive" as practices, differentiates them from the written resources I cite in this



exegesis, which are more formally "authored" and "published". Although I have done my best to accurately attribute observations and ideas to the peers, teachers and predecessors who first proposed them, my accounts of in-studio experiences are unavoidably partial. They often rely on memory, and on notes scribbled during or after the experience in question. I do draw on the bodies of written literature surrounding these practices, however in-studio experiences and discussions provided particularly valuable insights – largely because, in the studio, ideas were accessed in an embodied, affective context. Following the lead of many of the creative practice researchers cited in this exegesis, I therefore often foreground these in-studio experiences, and consider them "authored" and valid in the same way as the written texts cited.

## BodyWeather

BodyWeather was founded by Butoh dancer Min Tanaka in the 1970s and developed with his Mai Juku company on his farm in northern Japan.<sup>3</sup> International members of Mai Juku would go on to establish the approach in other countries, and it is now practiced in several countries around the world, including in Australia, where it was pioneered by Tess de Quincey. I have trained in BodyWeather since 2009, learning from practitioners Victoria Hunt and Linda Luke in weekly guided training sessions, participating in free-form group training sessions, undertaking short performance development mentorships with Linda Luke and Tess de Quincey, and attending several site-specific BodyWeather intensives in remote parts of Australia with former Mai Juku company member Frank van de Ven.

BodyWeather is interested in what happens when one seeks to be "moved by" one's environment; when an environment animates, or "dances," the dancer. Tess De Quincey has contrasted this ethos to that of much modern dance. "If I see a modern dancer the arm will cut through space and the identity of the person becomes apparent, like self expression," Edward Scheer quotes, "[w]hereas in the butoh world it's the opposite: you are being danced by the space" (De Quincey as quoted in Scheer, n.d., p. 2). UK-based practitioner Rachel Sweeney similarly locates the human body in BodyWeather as "an open vessel, constantly changing like the weather", and notes the degree to which BodyWeather was shaped by Tanaka's relationship to his rural surroundings (Sweeney, 2009, p. 94).

Environments that move the BodyWeather practitioner can be physical or imaginatively conjured. As Australian performance theorist and BodyWeather practitioner Peter Snow also notes (2003, p. 53), the "Weather" in "BodyWeather" can be taken to refer to a

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<sup>3</sup> While BodyWeather shares a cultural lineage with Butoh dance and Min Tanaka calls himself a "pupil" of Butoh co-founder Tatsumi Hijikata (Vermeersch, 2001, unpaginated), the nature of the relationship between these two practices is an ongoing and variously interpreted topic of discussion.

physical climate (wind, rain, ash), but also to imagined and surreal states (a knee-deep current of loose feathers; incense burning at the base of the skull). "Weather" moves around, through, and within bodies, and bodies are themselves experienced as landscapes. The imaginary and corporeal are profoundly entangled and the individual body/mind is understood as a porous entity enmeshed in a larger ecology.

Because of its inquiry into how environments may move a dancer, BodyWeather is perhaps ideally experienced in outdoor, site-specific training contexts. However, in Sydney's inner city, BodyWeather training is often conducted in rehearsal spaces or dance studios. The training includes several different components, including the "MB" (which stands for Muscle/Bone and also for Mind/Body), a series of repetitive and physically demanding movement exercises that Stuart Grant and Kristina Harrison have evocatively described as "a series of increasingly high velocity, increasingly complex stretches, imagings, aerobic breathings and co-ordination exercises, designed to heat, speed and liquefy [the body]; singly, in pairs, in rows, as a group" (S. Grant, 2003, p. 2).

BodyWeather training also includes "Manipulations", a progression of seven different movement sequences conducted in pairs, in which one person lies down and releases their muscular tension and the other person manipulates their body in a range of ways, working in time with their partner's breath. Finally, BodyWeather training involves "Groundwork", also sometimes called "Sensitivity Work". This is a widely varying and open-ended range of activities designed to foster responsiveness to stimuli (internal / external / physical / imagined), such that one is "moved by", or "moving with" those stimuli. Here weather states and environments often form the impetus for movement. Where such environments are *imaginary*, they are (in my experience) often referred to as "images", and communicated between practitioners through verbal exchanges. Anyone can propose an image. Certain "images" recur, are passed on from person to person, or are even notated, reflecting their use as a "score".

## Contact Improvisation

Contact Improvisation facilitates a playful experimentation with one's body-mechanics in relation to gravity, giving rise to various improvised compositional possibilities and producing kinaesthetic sensations similar to floating or swimming.<sup>4</sup> It was developed by Steve Paxton in the U.S.A. in the 1970s, with the initial intention of exploring non-aggressive physical pairings between men (Banes, 2015, p. 135). It quickly became a "gender-integrated" form, and is now practiced around the world. I started learning the form in early 2014, embarking on a series of Contact Improvisation courses taught by

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<sup>4</sup> Composition here refers to a creative and aesthetically-minded arranging or combining.

Alejandro Rolandi and Lee-Anne Litton, and engaging regularly in self-led training through weekly open improvisation sessions (called “jams”) in Sydney.

A Contact Improvisation dance can be sustained for any length of time, and it is supported – and focused – by a number of principles. I will try to describe a few principles here, which I hope will give a sufficient impression of the form. A key underlying principle of Contact Improvisation is the “rolling point of contact”, where two (or more) people make a physical point of contact (one person’s elbow to another person’s lower back, for example), and try to roll that point of contact across the surface areas of their respective bodies, rearranging their limbs and shifting their weight as necessary. This rolling is combined with a principle of mutual falling, so that the partners “fall” or “lean into” each other, literally supporting each other’s weight. As these two bodies “roll” around and fall into each other, they may enter into a series of weight exchanges, where both move between pouring some or all of their weight onto the other person, and receiving weight.

These exchanges facilitate a play with gravity and bodily mechanics that is further enhanced – and made physically safe – through a range of techniques involving efficient placement of the skeleton, circular and spiralling movement patterns, and an alternation between engagement and release of muscular tension. These techniques also allow for seemingly strenuous or precarious movements to feel fluid and effortless, so that someone half my weight and size could, for example, use their hips to lift me from the floor and swing my body around in an arc.

In addition to “mutual falling”, the form depends on a principle of mutual sensitivity and listening, so that neither partner would seem to be leading or following – although, of course, one can experiment with this by playfully insisting on, resisting, or fully submitting to particular decisions relating to the course of the dance.<sup>5</sup>

Because it is often a partnered dance involving close bodily contact and mutual “listening”, Contact Improvisation has the potential to facilitate feelings of emotional catharsis and interpersonal bonding. While this cathartic/bonding dimension is central for some contact improvisers, I appreciate Rolandi and Litton’s teaching approach because it eschews this aspect of the form. In their classes, Rolandi and Litton foster an emotional/interpersonal dynamic characterised by *curiosity* about physical gravity, compositional possibilities, embodied thinking and creative strategy. I also appreciate Litton’s and Rolandi’s teaching approach for the lucidity with which they convey techniques within the form.

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<sup>5</sup> Rudi Laermans writes that Contact Improvisation aspires to a dated, late-1960’s utopian notion of “harmony”, in which there is no room for conflict (Laermans, 2015, p. 58). However, this critique overlooks the ways in which Contact Improvisers constantly engage resistance, submission and indeed conflict as avenues for experimentation in the dance.

In addition to Contact Improvisation and BodyWeather, Taiko drumming lessons (commenced in early 2016) also produced some insights about creative practice that were relevant to my research. I give a brief introduction to Taiko in Chapter Three.

These performance practices both inform, and are informed by, a cinematographic and screen production practice that I have been developing since 2008 through undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional work. Working in various roles on a range of projects over the years has allowed me to develop skills in cinematography, video post-production, basic sound recording, and planning and writing for video. The inter-relationship of these practices becomes apparent in the following section of this chapter, in which I chronicle the development of a specific creative-practice approach to my research concerns.

## Early Experimentation

In the early phases of my research I set out to approach the intersection of affect, place and audio-visual mediation from a range of angles, and to postpone the determination of a "vision" for the thesis's final creative component for as long as possible. Drawing on my training in several aspects of video production (I was a confident camera operator and video editor) and my experiences in dance and performance practices, I came up with a series of creative exercises that I called "activities".<sup>6</sup> The activities were designed and then attempted one by one, over time, and were interspersed with reading and written reflection. Each new design for an activity drew on ideas from literature I was reading at the time, as well as on previous activities and what these had revealed.<sup>7</sup>

Early activities explored affect and mediation in relation to Greater Sydney, specifically. I engaged several participants, none of whom knew each other, but who I knew from various parts of my life, and whose ways of expressing themselves and responding to situations engaged me affectively. I began by recording an interview with each participant in which they spoke at length about their relationship to Sydney as a city, reflecting on its sensory qualities, its role in their personal lives, and the ways it appeared in their memory and imagination (see Video Appendix A). I then asked these participants to draw parts of

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<sup>6</sup> Years after settling on the term "activities", I learned of an important precedent to my use of the term. Allan Kaprow used the same word to describe his improvisations, which he "choreographed" using verbal "scores" (as I would also come to do). Anne Douglas explores Kaprow's use of scores in depth (see Douglas, 2012, p. 3).

<sup>7</sup> The idea of working with discrete activities, and of braiding them together with written reflection and reading, grew from a spontaneous video shoot in early 2014 that turned out to have strong connections to ideas I had been reading and thinking about. Reflective writing played a crucial role in revealing the value of the shoot. A subsequent conversation with my supervisor about the value of this process – reading, shooting, and then writing reflectively – led to the decision to start conducting the creative research through discrete activities interspersed with reading and writing.

Sydney from memory with their eyes closed, using felt tip pens on paper, and recorded this process with two cameras – one capturing their faces, another capturing the white page upon which their renditions appeared (see Video Appendix B). I grouped these activities together under the title, "Activity 1".

Some weeks later I asked participants to take me to one of the places they had described in those initial interviews – a place close to their hearts – and to show me around. I gave the participant a camera to capture the place as we moved through it, and attached two small microphones to their body to capture the sounds of their walking, breathing and talking. I was taken to childhood homes, on a public transport route to school, to a rocky outcrop an hour north of Sydney, and was shown around two participants' local neighbourhoods (see Video Appendix C). This was "Activity 2".

For "Activity 3", I developed a series of creative exercises that explored the relationship between listening and the imagination, and took a group of four participants to a stretch of concrete on the outskirts of Sydney Airport, where we conducted these activities on a sunny winter morning (see Video Appendix D).

The partner of one of my participants attended this activity. She was a lover of history, and subsequently invited me on a personally led walking tour of Millers Point, an area of the inner city of Sydney whose history she found particularly interesting. I used this walk to explore the acute challenge of recording the present moment while remaining fully present to it, and did half the walk with a camera and microphone, and half without. This became "Activity 4".

Throughout the process of conducting and reflecting on these activities, I listened out for signs that the research was heading in the "right direction". Signs included compelling and recurring ideas that related to affect, mediation, place or research method; they also included affective experiences of the sort that I was hoping to create and explore in my videos.

## Narrowing and Deepening

From Activity 5 onwards, the research became a more sustained exploration of one particular avenue of enquiry. The basic design of Activities 5, 6 and 7 was that I would film participants while they engaged in activities that brought them into an affective engagement with place, in the hope of staging opportunities for viewers to empathise kinaesthetically with the subjects on screen.<sup>8</sup> The activities participants engaged in

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<sup>8</sup> As I explore in more depth in Chapter Three, kinaesthetic empathy is a corporeal mimicking of movements and sensations perceived in others such that a body-to-body transference of experience and affect takes place (Foster, 2011; Gallese & Guerra, 2012; Raz & Hendler, 2014).

included household routines (which, in my experience, fostered an affective connection to place), and dance-based exercises. Throughout Activities 5, 6 and 7, the question of how to move the camera in order to somehow capture my participants' affective experiences, became increasingly important.

In Activity 5, participants conducted a daily routine of their choice while I filmed them. I filmed people eating breakfast, showering, packing their bag for the day, washing dishes, and trimming their lawn. However, their routine activity was altered by a choreographic parameter taken from a BodyWeather exercise: the parameter to move at a total body speed of one millimetre per second (the BodyWeather name for the exercise of moving at constrained speeds is *bisoku*) – so, to move so slowly that they almost appeared to be entirely still. We used a timer that was set to beep once a minute, and from minute to minute the participant would alternate between moving at their "natural" pace, and moving at one millimetre per second. My hope was that this radical slowing-down of movement would allow for the dilation of an otherwise easily overlooked moment in time, allowing sensation and feelingful associations to flood in. The question of how to move my camera came up for the first time in this activity, where there were initially no parameters for camera movement in place. I began experimenting with a "score" for camera movement.

In Activity 6 I filmed two participants while they engaged in a series of dance-based, improvised exercises in sprawling outdoor locations. These dance exercises were chosen because, in my experience, they fostered a heightened attentiveness to place and to one's own physicality, and thus produced affective experiences. I did this on two separate occasions, in different places – once on the ANZ football stadium forecourt in the Sydney Olympic Park, and once in the sand dune system on the Kurnell Peninsula in Sydney's south. The question of how best to move the camera persisted, and I continued to experiment with scores for camera movement, testing, evolving and discarding different approaches in pursuit of a method that felt "right".

Finally, for Activity 7, I returned to a domestic scenario and filmed participants doing one specific domestic routine in their own homes: hanging out their laundry to dry. I soon came to a score for camera movement, as well as an overall design for the activity, that would go on to sustain my iterative process, and that would shape the videos in *Washing Lines*. As I have already noted, here the value of repetition in reviving curiosity and availability to new experiences became especially important.

My interest in developing a score stemmed partly from a four-week Contact Improvisation course I had taken not long before these shoots, titled "The Extended Phrase". This particular course focused on the compositional dimension of the form, emphasising improvisation as an act of "real-time composition" (as Litton and Rolandi described it). While a Contact Improvisation dance can traverse a great variety of movement qualities and pathways in a short amount of time, this course explored the challenge of committing

to a particular task or set of rules (i.e. a score) while dancing, in order to engage in more narrowly focused enquiry. By working through the discomfort and constraints that the score might seem to impose, new movement pathways could be discovered. Rolandi and Litton also flagged that sometimes it is generative to break the rules imposed by a score, so we entertained the question of when it is more interesting to break the rules, and when it is more helpful to honour them. This question (of when to bend or break the rules) would continue to come up throughout my handheld camera improvisations.

## Defining the "Score"

Experiences in Taiko, BodyWeather, Contact Improvisation, and participation in Sydney-based independent dance research lead me to understand the score as a set of pre-determined reference points that guide creative decision-making in composition. This is premised on the understanding that improvisation and composition form part of a singular spectrum, as Hazel Smith and Roger Dean have also noted. Instead of differentiating between improvisation and composition, Smith and Dean differentiate between "pure" improvisation, where the work is conceived as it is performed, in a fixed time frame, without revisions, and "applied" improvisation, where improvisation is used to generate material for a composition/work that will later be presented to an audience in a more fixed form (Smith & Dean, 1997, p. 27).

Both "pure" and "applied" improvisational processes contain on the one hand structures that circumscribe creative decision-making, and on the other hand openings that create opportunities for interpretation and creative decision-making. As Australian performance maker and academic Clare Grant writes, the paradox in improvisation is that the greatest freedoms exist within the "most highly structured of situations" (C. Grant, 2015, p. 353). She gives as an example a Commedia Dell'Arte workshop with Heather Rob that she attended in New Zealand. "In Commedia," she says, "it is the so-called 'string of pearls', the series of pre-determined narrative landing spots, that create the conditions in which the performer can conjure her riffs of action 'live'; that is, in a moment of action created in the company of an audience. The more refined those pearls, the wilder the flights of the unexpected" (C. Grant, 2015, p. 353). The "structures", or "pearls" that Grant refers to, are what I understand as a score.

Scores may take many different forms. One well-known form is that of notes on a stave in Western music notation. Here codified marks on paper function as a set of predetermined reference points that guide musicians through performance in several ways: (1) they provide stimuli and/or incentives for creative action; (2) they set boundaries, circumscribing the range of potential choices available, so that decision-making becomes easier; (3) they provide a group of potentially diverse performers with a common

vocabulary; and (4) they exist as a resource, or safety net, that a performer can return to when they feel "stuck" or have "lost their way".

Musicians Cat Hope and Lindsay Vickery describe a number of experimental music scoring practices that depart from Western notation traditions.<sup>9</sup> Composers working with experimental scoring practices may employ different media, including time-based media, to disseminate scores to performers – for example, revealing a score to performers through video projection, in tandem with the unfolding performance. They may develop modular scores – i.e. scores that contain discrete components which can be rearranged freely during performance. They may also explore the capacities of different objects and sign systems to work as scores – using a live-action film or a computer-generated visual pattern as a score, for example. Hope and Vickery note that such scores often aim to create opportunities for idiosyncratic interpretation and real-time decision-making, more than that they aim to convey precisely what should be played, and how. The "existing ambiguities of musical notation" are "amplified", inviting performers to interpret the score in a broader range of ways (Hope & Vickery, 2011, p. 5).

A broad range of scoring approaches, from the highly prescriptive to the profoundly open-ended, is also used in dance. A dance score may be called "choreography" – and this is another word that can refer to both open-ended and more determinate plans for what will be performed. Choreographer William Forsythe describes choreography as an "elusive, agile and maddeningly unmanageable" term, but also proposes, as a loose definition, that it has to do with the "potential instigation and organization of action" (Forsythe, n.d., unpaginated).<sup>10</sup> Long-term improvising dancers Simone Forti and Anna Halprin distinguished between "indeterminate choreography" or "open choreography", which referred to open-ended structures in which improvisation or "in situ composition" could take place, and "closed choreography", which referred to a more determinate dance (Banes, 2015, p. 135). Choreographer Miriam Van Imschoot suggests that in many improvisational practices, scores provide dancers with a set of pre-determined tools to "choreograph the performance activities on the spot", and writes that in such cases, "following a score [...] resembles more a process of learning and enacting the 'rules' of a game than following a unilateral and linear set of directions" (Van Imschoot, 2005/2010, unpaginated).

We can thus think far beyond notes on a stave when imagining a score: a picture of a bird may function as a score; a set of rules circumscribing otherwise free choices may function as a score ("avoid facing the northern wall of the room", "play your instrument in a pentatonic scale", "don't give in to her"); a cluster of words may indicate a palette of

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<sup>9</sup> The term "experimental" is here, as in the rest of this exegesis, intended to describe an orientation towards experimentation, and not a musical or artistic genre.

<sup>10</sup> In the same article, Forsythe describes the musical score in similar terms: as something that "represents the potential of perceptual phenomena to instigate action" (Forsythe, n.d.).



compositional options that collectively function as a score ("opening", "closing", "emptying", "expanding", "hunting"); a score may take the form of a loose plan that is discussed prior to performance.<sup>11</sup> Such open-ended or experimental scores serve the same functions as linear western musical notation does. They provide incentives or stimulus for action, they circumscribe decision-making by imposing boundaries, they provide a common vocabulary for a group of improvisers (or between improviser and audience), and they function as a safety net, or emergency resource.

## The Score as Research Tool

In addition to the functions described above, we can identify three more functions of the score that relate to its value as a research tool. Firstly, a score may be used to effect a disruption of one's usual compositional habits. By placing constraints on an improviser, a score may prompt them to find non-habitual pathways through a situation. In BodyWeather practice, the task of being "moved by" one's environment (which functions as a score) is intended to disrupt habitual movement patterns: to help the dancer "unlearn", or at least temporarily shake off, the years of training that have produced their "socially acceptable" or "dancerly" bodies, in order to access a broader range of bodily states and movement qualities. Similarly, for improvising dancer Rosalind Crisp, certain scores are specifically engaged to "interrupt movement habits" (Crisp, 1998, p. 18), and to produce a critical and curious alertness – an "awakeness" – to what her dancing body is experiencing, as she explained in a two-day workshop I attended in August of 2016. Visual artist and researcher Anne Douglas, who writes extensively on improvisation and scoring, describes performance artist Allan Kaprow's use of scores to throw participants' assumptions into question and prompt a sensitive, attentive negotiation of the terms of creative practice. Reflecting on her adoption of a Kaprow score for a group improvisation in 2010, Douglas describes the way the score's constraints created "dilemmas between [participants'] received positions on aesthetics and the demands of the project" and challenged them to work in ways they might not usually gravitate towards, thus allowing participants to "alter the fixed identity of [their] artistic /research personalities" (Douglas, 2012, p. 9). As Chapter Three describes, I, too, imposed temporary boundaries on participants' bodily movements and on my camera movement in video-based improvisations, in order to disrupt habitual compositional choices and aesthetic preferences, and to invite potentially novel relationships between camera, subjects and place.

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<sup>11</sup> A range of diverse, contemporary scores for dance can be viewed in the online publication *What's the Score*, at [http://olgao.oralsite.be/oralsite/pages/What's\\_the\\_Score\\_Publication/](http://olgao.oralsite.be/oralsite/pages/What's_the_Score_Publication/) (Van Imschoot, Van den Brande, & Engels, n.d.).

Following on from this, scores are helpful research tools because they provoke in the researcher a desired creative disposition, or way of being, in relation to their surroundings. In his book, *The Thinking Hand*, Juhani Pallasmaa cites the work of writer and neurologist Frank R. Wilson, to draw a connection between the development of specific tools in human history, and simultaneous evolutions in social complexity and language use (Pallasmaa, 2009, pp. 32–34). Pallasmaa suggests that the tools we use not only produce specific techniques, but also profoundly affect our subjective ways of being in the world. In my research, the score has functioned as a tool to help me develop a desired way of being in relation to my surroundings as a camera operator. Early versions of my score for camera movement (or, early versions of my research "tool") did not encourage an overall disposition, or way of being as a camera operator, that felt compatible with my aims. Through critical reflection and experimentation I eventually arrived at a score, and a disposition, that felt more appropriate.

Finally, a score is useful as an iterative research tool because it provides a vocabulary to consider what *has happened*, and what *may happen again* in research. Contact Improvisation co-founder Nancy Stark Smith developed an extensive scoring system called the "Underscore", which is used as a structuring device in silent group improvisations lasting up to and over two hours. This scoring system is communicated to participating dancers through graphic symbols that look like hieroglyphs, each accompanied by a simple name.<sup>12</sup> Together, these drawings and words indicate a range of options for what to do next, and for where to place one's attention while dancing. In interview, Stark Smith notes that the underscore serves a dual function: to "prescribe" what might happen in future improvisations, and also to retrospectively "describe" experiences in an improvisation that has already passed (Stark Smith, 2012). The score establishes intentions, and provides a framework for reflection. Anne Douglas and her collaborator Kathleen Coessens have similarly suggested that a score provides both a "trace" of what has been, and an "invitation" to experience something afresh – but always with a difference (Douglas & Coessens, 2011, p. 187). The prescriptive / descriptive relationship in scoring reflects the fact that improvisational scores often emerge from cyclical processes of doing, reflecting, and then doing again. Descriptions of what *did* happen give rise to prescriptions for what *may happen*, and these pre/descriptions become a score – or, a vocabulary that helps to articulate continuity and change in an iterative research process.

The scores for camera movement employed in Activities 5 through 7 served a similar function. They both prescribed what might happen in a given improvisation (determining

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<sup>12</sup> Stark Smith provides extended explanations of the Underscore's components in video interviews and in her book, *Caught Falling*, written with David Koteen (Koteen & Stark Smith, 2008).

when and how I could move with the camera), and provided a language to reflect on what had already happened.

## Some Notes on Vocabulary

The scores used in my research were verbal: *words* described the rules of play. These words had specific meanings that were informed by my personal experience and history of language use. In some cases, I used words that probably have different meanings for others, or whose formal dictionary definition differs slightly from my own understanding. As such, in Chapter Three I have tried to qualify what I mean by each word included in my own scores. Carole Gray suggests, citing Paulo Freire, that "the naming of the world, which is an act of creation and recreation, is not possible if it is not infused with love" (Freire as quoted in Gray, 2007). The historical functions of naming suggest that the impulse to name may also spring from very different emotions – from fear, for example. But for me, the choosing and revising of names for components of the score was certainly a loving act of creation and recreation.

The final score I used for the production of *Washing Lines* was comprised of five options for how to move the camera in response to moving bodies in my environment. These options functioned as a "palette" – not a palette of colours, but a palette of *ways of engaging with my moving surroundings*. One of these options was called "*hooking onto*" – this involved attaching myself to a body that moved through the environment, so that I might be able to travel with it. Another option, which followed on from "hooking onto", was "*catching rides*". This involved being "carried" through place by another moving body, much like piggy-backing, or surfing on the movement of something else. (The phrase "catching rides" is borrowed from Contact Improvisation, in which it refers to a weight-exchange that is very similar to what I describe here: allowing oneself to be physically carried through space by another person.) Yet another option was being "*left in the lurch*", which referred to the experience of being cast away from the centre of "action" (as I perceived it), and getting left behind somewhere as a moving body slipped away from me. Often this brought a sense of precariousness: it felt as though I was teetering on an edge, as though I might fall out of sync with movements of my surroundings if I wasn't careful. The fourth option was that of "*lingering*". This involved accepting where I was when "left in the lurch", and staying with that a while, in stillness, until some source of movement scooped me up again. A fifth option in the score, which developed later than the others, was "*unhooking*" – an active decision to detach the camera from a moving body, in order to linger in a place that caught my interest. I explain the development and the nuances of this score in more detail in Chapter Three.

The verbal nature of my scores meant that they provided a vocabulary for exegetical reflection in a very literal sense. In this exegesis, the words used to describe camera movements perform a descriptive and analytical function, but also *are* the sub-parts of actual scores. The vocabulary employed to describe and analyse camera movement in this exegesis is, therefore, not intended to propose a new and improved framework for thinking about all camera movements. It is used, firstly, because it corresponds directly to a series of scores that were employed as temporary and flexible focusing devices which helped me make sense of what I *hoped* to do, and what I *had done*, within a specific research context. Secondly, the specific vocabulary in the final score used for *Washing Lines* ("hooking onto", "unhooking", "catching rides", "lurching" and "lingering") was chosen because it fostered a haptic, non-mastering disposition in relation to my surroundings. As I explain in more detail in Chapter Three, I believe this was partly due to the fact that it contained words which evoked shifts of weight – *hooking*, *lurching*, *catching a ride* (which I liken to surfing) – and thus called up embodied memories of weight-transfer while dancing.

When I refer to "my score" or the "score for camera movement" throughout this exegesis, I am usually referring to the palette of five options for participation with my environment through camera movement, as developed in Activity 7. However, it should be noted that the parameters shaping the video improvisations in *Washing Lines* did not just extend to options for camera movement. A particular creative disposition was also shaped, for example, by the commitment to shooting in long takes (indeed, it produces a *committed* way of being in the improvised situation), and by the decision to improvise in the laundry-hanging scenario exclusively. I explore the relationship between long takes, affect and film in more detail in Chapter Five.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sketched the long-term evolution of my research process, provided a backdrop of key ideas in the Australian literature on practice-led research, introduced performance-based influences on my research, and defined some key terms – in particular, that of *the score*. Along the way, I have offered several insights that emerged from practice, and that may help future researchers in my field. These insights pertain, firstly, to iterative methods in practice-led research. Specifically, I unpacked two approaches to iteration – one (based on the work of Donald Schön) in which iteration was used to refine a working theory, and another (based on the work of Rhiannon Newton) in which iteration was used as a means to break open a question or an assumption anew in order to remain attendant to multiple emergent possibilities. What was distinctive about these approaches was their basis in embodied experience. In drawing this out, and in

highlighting the embodied nature of these approaches, I hope to offer researchers a body-based way into thinking about iterative methods.

Secondly, I offered summaries of the value of the score as a tool in both live performance and research. In the context of live performance, I suggested that the score works to guide performers through a performance by (1) providing stimuli and/or incentives for creative action; (2) setting boundaries that circumscribe decision-making; (3) providing a group of potentially diverse performers with a common vocabulary; and (4) offering a "safety net" that performers can return to when they feel stuck or lost. In the context of practice-led research I suggested that a score can work to (1) disrupt one's compositional habits, enforcing the exploration of new methods or lines of enquiry; (2) provoke desired creative dispositions, or ways of operating, in research; and (3) provide a vocabulary for reflection and goal-setting – for articulating what did happen, and what may happen again in some forms of creative practice. I hope that these syntheses are useful to other practice-led researchers and artists.

Chapter Two builds on this foundation to explore the playful nature of practice-led research and of my own working methodology. In doing so, additional facets of the research process will become apparent, providing a more complete context for the chapters that follow.



# Chapter Two

## A Playful Methodology

### Introduction

Encountering theories about play over the course of my investigations has suggested to me that my methodology is a playful one. In what follows I explore several different ways in which play might manifest itself in research and connect these to my own research process. I grapple, too, with the relationship between the exuberance of play, and its capacity to contribute to knowledge and speak to social and political realities.

### Play as Creative Repurposing

Walter Benjamin has written that children's make-believe play often involves gleaning processes, behaviours and language from the adult world, and connecting them in highly creative ways that adults may not predict or even understand. He calls this inventive repurposing an instance of "creative innervation", a process in which "receptivity and creativity are in exact correlation" (Hansen, 2004, p. 7).

I am reminded of the many afternoons spent playing alone or with a friend during childhood, when our make-believe games were furnished with whatever objects we could find. Not only were "adult" behaviours and roles taken on and personally interpreted in play (we became The Newspaper Boy, The Headmistress of The Orphanage, Baby and Johnny from *Dirty Dancing*), but household objects took on new roles, too. Bath-towels became robes, old curtains and chairs formed the walls and support structures of a fort.

Reading Benjamin, it occurs to me that what I did as a child with household objects, I now do with concepts and writings in my research field. When encountering a concept or a piece of theoretical writing, I am most interested in what it *might do* if applied to the situations my research attempts to understand. The mobility, or wider applicability, of the concept is what attracts me to it: how might it be transferred to other contexts and combined with other ideas? Resembling that of the child (or the artist) who works with

whatever is available, this approach uses what is at hand.<sup>13</sup> Various dance and performance experiences, though not undertaken to enrich the doctoral research as such, provided useful ideas and tools that I applied to my study. Even weekly Taiko lessons, which I engaged in to get out of the house and temporarily out of the thesis, became a trove of concepts elucidating aspects of the research.

A number of theorists have identified creative combination as a mode of play. In *The Fictive and the Imaginary* (1993) Wolfgang Iser engages the term "play" to describe a combinatory approach where a writer selects linguistic units (words or concepts), and lifts them out of their prior context to bring them into relationship with different units. In these new relationships, units are able to act "as if" they are something else, and are therefore able to do more (Armstrong, 2000, p. 214). "Combination emancipates elements from the limits of their prior situation even as it liberates them to join new relations," says Paul Armstrong, in an article that argues for the broader social and political implications of Iser's ideas.

According to Iser, the combination of different linguistic units occurs in the "imaginary" zone that sits between "reality" and "fiction". Crossing into both real and fictive terrains, the combinations and compositions of the imaginary draw on real world experiences, but are fictions in the sense that they are *staged* by the writer. Through creative combination, the writer "stages" possibilities – possible relations between things, and possible versions of things (Armstrong, 2000, p. 213).

Roger Caillois's mid-twentieth century writings on play make a clear distinction between the real and the unreal, and situate mimetic play in the realm of the "merely imagined". Here, the child who thinks they are a lizard is misled: unlike those species of insects whose bodies physically change to become the things they imitate, the child imitates by way of "contrived accessories" (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 20). Iser's location of playful combination in a liminal zone that sits *between* the "real" and the "imaginary" offers a more empowering perspective on play, as it does not imply that the player is mistaken. Many of the theorists cited throughout this chapter and exegesis would add that the categories of "real" and "imaginary" are impossible to separate.

Another angle on combinatory play comes from psychotherapists Russell Meares and Trish Coombes. Meares and Coombes write about "symbolic play", a mode of play occurring mostly before the age of five which they argue is essential to the child's development of a sense of self. Drawing on James Baldwin, the authors write that in "symbolic play" a child starts taking an object and calling it something it is not, thus "making [the] object for present and personal purposes, what it might be" (Baldwin as

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<sup>13</sup> To "act and feel out our way with whatever is at hand" is not only a characteristic of play, but also of improvisation, as Anne Douglas and Kathleen Coessens note in their work on improvisation in art-making and everyday life (Douglas & Coessens, 2011, p. 180). Similarities between play and improvisation emerge throughout this chapter.



quoted in Meares & Coombes, 1994, p. 61). They give the example of a child who takes a leaf and calls it a boat. In this early form of play, the objects children play with furnish their "selves" in a very direct way, and become "the terminus of a sort of interest which later on develops into that called 'syntelic' or contemplative [thinking]" (Baldwin as quoted in Meares & Coombes, 1994, p. 61).

I love this idea — that the repurposing or renaming of a thing facilitates a kind of attention that can later be identified as contemplation, and that play develops our contemplative faculties. We might consider the scholarly process of combining and repurposing ideas as a form of contemplation, too: as a way of appreciating the properties of the things we are combining, as a child might appreciate the properties of a leaf, or a boat.

Play is a variously understood phenomenon, and is wonderfully mobile as a concept. It will *do* a lot. So, rather than lock down its potential, in this chapter I stage possibilities for what play may mean. I am careful to position play "as" certain things, rather than to assert that it "is" those things invariably: "Play *as* Creative Combination", rather than "Play *is* Creative Combination". In the various sections of this chapter, the phenomenon of "Play" models or performs for us different aspects of a specific methodology which is not only staged as playful but is also, I believe, actually so.

## Play as Interested in the Properties of Things

In her article on play in the university context, Julianne van Loon describes a simple, repetitive game she engaged in with her son when he was an infant. It involved throwing a ball down the garden steps, tracing its journey into the bushes, and then chasing it and retrieving it to start again (van Loon, 2014). She describes the joy of this simple game, and notes that it is in fact a form of research that begins with the proposition, "What happens if...". What happens if I throw a ball down the steps?

In the combinatory research I describe here, a similar joy precipitates from actions fuelled by an initial "what if": what happens if I put this concept next to that concept? What if I turn this concept over, or turn it inside out? What if I pull this data through that lens? (I realise that there are potential problems with casting research as a manipulation of inert materials, and address these problems shortly.) Even though play, in the case of academic thinking, may occur with concepts – or with concepts in relation to a concrete world – it can still be materially interested, meaning that it is interested in the *properties of things*. In the same way that van Loon and her son explored the physicality of a ball rolling down the garden steps, and in the same way someone at play or engaged in a creative task might explore the capacities of a particular substance (of clay, of flour, of soap, of resin), playful researchers explore the specific properties and capacities of things, *including concepts*, such that concepts are approached as materials of a kind. I would add that materially

interested play often explores things *through construction*, attempting to organise the material: to create with it, or to enlist it towards particular ends.

Play theorist Johan Huizinga suggests that playing has an aesthetic and ordering impulse. He writes, "[play] creates order, is order," and suggests that "the profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play [...] seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics" (Huizinga, 1944/1949, p. 10). Caillois, writing shortly after Huizinga, similarly describes what sounds like a constructive, aesthetic impulse in playing. He distinguishes between *paidia* and *ludus*, *paidia* designating a free and exuberant play, and *ludus* designating a structured form of play that tends towards self-education, the accrual of skills, or the construction of something (Caillois, 1958/1961). Caillois's description of *ludus* hints at the intrinsic joy of learning about materials (including the materials of the body) by working with them. *Ludus* can be motivated by victory, but only rarely aspires to victory *over* another player: mostly, the victories it pursues are private, and to do with a personal sense of development.<sup>14</sup>

My own engagement with concepts is often influenced by an impulse to organise them, and to do so in an aesthetically pleasing way. It is from this experience that I extrapolate a materially explorative approach to reading (or writing) theory. A key feature of this approach is that ideas are selected for use based on their resemblances to other ideas – suggesting, importantly, that concepts (and academic writings) have a formal dimension. We may sense resemblances or common properties between ideas in the same way we sense them between material objects, leading us to explore their potential affinity, to test connections between them. Quite literally, this idea *looks like* that idea, or this idea *reminds me of* that idea, so what happens if I "stage a relationship" and put them together? Does it deliver any insight? I read Paul Armstrong and Paul Carter (whose ideas I come to shortly), and notice that they both express an interest in encounters between things, and in how to co-exist with difference (Armstrong, 2000; Carter, 2013). Not only that – the two Pauls, who coincidentally also share a first name, use some of the same words in their writing, and use them in the same way. And they are very specific words: *incommensurable*, *reciprocity*, *staging*. The writers' shared concerns and vocabularies suggest that staging a relationship between them will deepen my understanding of what they each explore.

Indeed, ideas have form, and may appeal to us for the "thinking style" or aesthetic that they express. Thus, another potential tendency in research is to select certain ideas for play that are aesthetically attractive. Roger Caillois's definition of "voluptuous panic", for example, attracts me on an aesthetic level, and inspires me to find a place for it in my research – even to persevere with it when it seems unlikely to work. Sometimes

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<sup>14</sup> Other earlier theorists have also explicitly addressed constructive play – van Loon cites several in her overview of play theory, including Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori (van Loon, 2014, unpaginated).

perseverance reveals that an idea cannot be successfully integrated, and it must be shelved, retaining a life in my broader thinking but not in the exegesis. (Unfortunately other mentions of "voluptuous panic" did not make the cut and were eliminated in a late draft of this chapter.)

Paul Carter also describes this playful approach to theorising in his recent book, *Meeting Place* (2013). He writes that scholarship is seeing a "tentative poetic turn that attempts to rehabilitate analogical thinking as a tool of heuristic enquiry", and addresses his book to "a reader who is no longer disciplined but evaluates writing instead by the abundance and ingenuity of the connections. New readers," he writes, "read less than they compose, juxtapose, and relate" (Carter, 2013, p. 13). However, his notion of the playful reader is embedded in a different understanding of research that enriches my understandings of playful methods and guides me towards some of the "bodily dispositions" I seek to cultivate as a filmmaker.

## Aside with Carter

In *Meeting Place*, Carter questions "northern" (mainly European and Anglo-American traditional) assumptions around the "meeting", and proposes as alternatives some understandings of meeting that emerge from "southern", and particularly Indigenous Australian, notions of self, society and environment.

Foundational to *Meeting Place* is Carter's desire to focus not only on the "spotlit" moment of meeting in isolation, but to contemplate the entire "landscape of encounter," describing the range of experiences that precede, follow and inflect any meeting (Carter, 2013, p. 11). These may include the anticipation of meeting; the approach, the narrowing distance between two entities; the glimpse of another from far away; the sense that someone is turning away from you, averting their face, or that they are turning towards you; the feeling of being lost in the landscape, and then, gradually, of being less lost than before. The sense of history in an encounter, too: what it is to meet someone you feel you've met before, or to stumble across a site you've seen before, but to find it somehow changed.

The landscape of encounter that Carter describes operates according to "southern" principles: it is not a neutral ground through which humans carve a path, but is *active*, and will sometimes reconfigure itself when we're not looking. Carter writes that this active landscape is a concrete experience for Indigenous communities like the Warlpiri, whose central Australian desert country shifts according to changes in climate, opening and closing off routes of passage at different times so that what was recently a short journey to a "nearby destination" is now a very long journey, and will later be a short journey again. "Many trees move around during the night," he quotes Cairns and Harney (in Carter, 2013, p. 10).

Carter hopes his book will emulate a landscape of encounter where entities slip in and out of view, "where conversations are broken off and resumed elsewhere", where paths are traced and then re-encountered under new circumstances, where objects in the distance shimmer ambiguously (Carter, 2013, p. 12). He aims, thus, "to present a more realistic picture of the world of ideas, to convey an impression of the crowding of thoughts, and of their capacity to magnetize and reorient one another, so inducing choreographies of association, societies of shared insights" (Carter, 2013, p. 18). Thus, where I have likened the texts and subjects that scholarship engages to manipulable materials in constructive play, Carter describes them as figures in a landscape. Depending on our speed and trajectory through the landscape, some figures will come close to us, while others will remain at a distance; some will allow us to linger with them a while, others will hurry on. Rather than, "I picked up ... and turned it over to see what it might do," the feeling is, "I was walking in the landscape and I chanced upon..."

The "landscape of encounter" is a powerful analogy for research. Without wanting to force the "southern" ideas Carter shares into consensus with my own experiences, they do help me to conceive of my research as a series of encounters in a landscape. (Importantly, Carter, too, is clear that these ideas function as "aids to epistemological reform" in his writing, hoping not to subsume them in a privileged "northern" view (Carter, 2013, p. 3).) The trees really do move in the night, in the sense that a good night's sleep brings me back to the same place in my research the next morning with the sense that something has shifted. Who re-pitched my tent while I was sleeping in it?

Carter's description of seduction and its relationship to the act of turning — where he says that seduction can take the form of a turning-away-from, or a turning-together — rings true for me, too. Ideas that turn away from me as I pass them seduce me in the sense that they make me want to draw closer, to learn more. Sometimes Carter himself describes ideas quickly and only partly, so that they appear as figures in a landscape who turn themselves away from me as I hurtle past them, leaving strong impressions and a desire to spend more time with them. *Turning* is, in fact, a recurring image in *Meeting Place*. There is a sense that some things will always remain turned away from my gaze, will never entirely reveal themselves, while others will "walk straight up to [me]" (Carter, 2013, p. 16).

Carter's writing on the "landscape of encounter" reminds me of the agency of the landscapes I move within as a researcher. The landscape analogy suggests that one can feel, as a researcher, powerless and lost in an environment, at the mercy of whatever is around you, benevolent though it may be. Carter's interest in turning also suggests that the ideas, things and subjects that populate one's research may not allow themselves to be

fully seen, even less give themselves over to experimental manipulation. The entities I encounter in my research reserve the right to turn away, to hide their identities from me.<sup>15</sup>

The landscape analogy also suggests that every meeting (of people, of things, of ideas), occurs in a context, against a backdrop of different histories. It reminds me that the ideas I pick up and turn over and press onto each other – or, the entities I encounter in research – *have histories*, some of them illuminating or troubled and complex, and that taking them out of context in order to "emancipate them" from their prior situation may actually strip them of an important source of meaning and power.

*Meeting Place* thus asks me to revise and evolve my use of "combinatory play" as a metaphor for research. Although an understanding of research as materially explorative and playful is fruitful in many regards, it is important to embed this model in a shifting, historical landscape. Carter's book also enriches my understanding of the video portraits that comprise *Washing Lines*, helping me to see each improvisatory environment (and each iteration of my improvised score) as a shifting landscape full of criss-crossing pathways, characterised as much by meetings as by non-meetings – characterised by anticipation, by oblique glances, by turnings-towards and turnings-away-from, and by varying degrees of (dis)orientation.

In revising my use of *play* as a metaphor for research, I attempt to bring the analogies of play and of landscape together.

"I was walking in the landscape and I chanced upon ... I picked it up and turned it over to see what it might do."

No. This still suggests that the entities I play with are inert, and without agency.

If I understand research as a series of encounters, it should be:

"I was walking in the landscape and I chanced upon ... I paused to see if we might dance together, and (after a conversation about the possibility and the scope) we did."

Or maybe there's another version.

"I hoped they would turn to face me, and they did... "

"I was walking in the landscape and I *think I saw*... "

These iterations move towards an acknowledgement of the subjectivity, agency and elusiveness of entities encountered in research, and support the creative dispositions I set out to develop as a researcher (articulated in the following chapter). They return a sense of anticipation and uncertainty to research, suggesting I am not playing alone in a vacuum

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<sup>15</sup> Carter explores this idea in depth when he describes 19th century Anglo-colonial attempts to count and name Indigenous Australian people in the state of Victoria, and describes the Tjapwurrung leaders' poetic subversion of this naming logic. He emphasises the potential value of remaining "in the shadows", of remaining unnamed (or, perhaps, of retaining multiple names), and shows the contrast between this perspective and the Northern tendency to equate transparency with virtue, and to pursue transparency at all costs (Carter, 2013, p. 4).

with a few toys, but am coming face to face with living things. In conducting research, I am not playing with objects, but am playing – improvising – alongside *subjects* of all kinds.

And of course, in this very instance of rephrasing a sentence to refine my thinking, I am playing: a version of the thing is composed and tried on, but no, it doesn't work, so it is cast aside and a new version is quickly composed. I am manipulating words on a page, accruing a series of word-arrangements, moving forwards by way of playful iterations. Play, it would appear, relies on the possibility of endless second chances, on being able to try again. This is one of the reasons why Walter Benjamin describes repetition as the "soul" of play (Benjamin, 1928/1999, p. 120).

## Play as the Possibility of a Second Chance

In her in-depth studies of Walter Benjamin's writings, Miriam Hansen describes his forays into playing – gambling, running downhill, smoking marijuana, erotic experience – and his attempts to theorise them in relation to film.

Benjamin's thinking about play was embedded in a broader critique of late industrial capitalism, and in his belief that mid-twentieth century societal developments were anaesthetising people, robbing art of its depth, and reducing politics to propagandistic theatrics (Hansen, 1999). Within this framework, he distinguished between two kinds of technologies. The "first" kind of technology relies on human effort to activate it, and it is characterised by a sense of having only one opportunity to achieve something: by a sense of "once and for all". The "second" type of technology is able to function almost entirely without the help of human effort, and is characterised by a sense of infinite repeatability and experimentation. This distinction brings to mind the difference between a typewriter and Word Processing software, the latter allowing for endless revisions and involving many automated processes. Benjamin places film firmly in the second category – he even writes that the "space for play [...] is widest in film" (Benjamin, 1936/2008, p. 49).<sup>16</sup>

Benjamin associates second technologies, including film, with the alienation and mass-anaesthetisation of which he is so wary. Film, he writes, contributes to a media environment that makes itself felt by way of numbing shocks to the nervous system, and

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<sup>16</sup> Some aspects of Benjamin's distinction between first and second technologies are confusing. For example, in calling film a "second technology" he suggests that filmmaking requires minimal human input to function. And yet films absolutely require human effort to come into being. It may be that, as the passionate critic of capitalism he was, Benjamin was trying to come to terms with the idea that second technologies (films, cars, toasters), through their capacity for automation, *make it easier to forget* the humans who were essential to their creation, and who are still essential to their functioning. Indeed, writing about Benjamin, Michael Taussig suggests that it is this forgetting of the kinetic and relational energy contained in things, that robs something like a film of its "particulate sensuousity" (Taussig, 1993, pp. 22–23).

lends itself to governments' immoral political theatre. But Benjamin is also appreciative of second technologies, seeing in them a solution to the same anaesthetisation that they encourage. The way to get back to depth and feeling is not by boycotting new technologies, but by harnessing them, and the uniquely powerful thing about second technologies is the room-for-play they permit: the ability to do something over and over again and, so, to experiment freely. Besides their playfulness, films are also able to move us deeply, to bring us into modes of experience which are not characterised by numbing shock and sensationalism, but are laden with memory and with a sense of the passage of time (Hansen, 1999; Rutherford, 2006, p. 161).

But what is particularly interesting about this piece of Benjamin's thinking is the connection he makes between film, play and repetition. He writes that the playfulness of second technologies rests in the "repetition and iterability [they enable], as both an internal principle and the *modality of imagining a second chance*" (Hansen, 1999, p. 324, emphasis added).

As the previous chapter explained, repetition formed a structuring principle in my research. An approach to improvising with a handheld camera was developed through iterative video shoots, with each return to the same material producing new questions and new insights, while also butting up against familiar habits, challenges and joys. Just as important as actually doing repetitive film shoots, however, was the imagination of a "second chance".

As I moved deeper into the final iteration of my research ("Activity 7") and began recording videos with the intention of eventually showing some of them to an audience and to examiners, a sense of "once and for all" became difficult to avoid. As I alluded to in Chapter One, the hope that *this* recording would be "good", would be useable, would be without "mistakes" as I defined them, was often present to some degree. Additionally, recording an *improvised long take* produced feelings of "once and for all". I was aware that there were no options for revision – or at least, none that would go unseen if I were to reveal the entire take to an audience. As each take grew in length, and particularly as a take began to feel good – to produce feelings of immersion and a sense of serendipitous success – the stakes became higher. This sense of "once and for all" was compounded by fact that I had put time and effort into planning a shoot, had prepared mentally and sometimes travelled across town for it. And it was compounded again by the fact that, initially, I had only scheduled one shoot with each subject, allowing myself just one opportunity to get a "good" take.

Part-way into Activity 7 it struck me that the most successful improvisations were those in which I felt most relaxed, least concerned with getting it "right". These were usually the "practice" shoots I did at home, with my partner. During these shoots it was easier than otherwise to attend sensitively to the score, and to experience the movement entering the camera frame as a constant process of discovery. I was able to hold multiple agendas in my

attention with a distinctly reduced amount of stress. I felt at ease at home, and knew I had endless second chances: I could always ask my partner to participate again, knowing that they would happily oblige.<sup>17</sup>

I took steps to retain a feeling of leisureliness and "second chances" while shooting away from home, with other participants. One way of accessing this relaxed immersion was to ask other participants if I could film with them not just once, but a handful of times. Although I had initially hoped to only conduct Activity 7 once with each participant, it became apparent from watching the resulting footage that I would have to return to my subjects' homes to film again. This became a reminder to recover the iterative nature of the research, which I realised might free me to relax and become bolder in my exploration, in the knowledge that there were second, third and more chances. So I set off on a second round of shoots, this time having agreed with participants that I would visit and film them several times.

Besides restructuring the concrete parameters of the video shoots to enable second chances, I also tried to change the way I thought about the videos, and to worry less about recording a "perfect" take. Rhiannon Newton's approach to repetition was a valuable resource here. I tried to revive in my mind-body the experience of continuously repeating short phrases of movement during the open sessions of Newton's "Bodied Assemblies" research residency (as I described in more depth in the previous chapter). Here, every iteration of the movement was treated as a question, as a means to observe what was presently happening and what might still happen, rather than as an imperative to (re)produce the movement perfectly. The coincidence of doing this exercise with Rhiannon and, a few days later, reading the opening chapter of Andre Lepecki's *Singularities*, brought me to an embodied understanding of repetition as something that varies, that slips off-course, that does not seek an essential version of itself.<sup>18</sup> Each return is not "once and for all" as Benjamin has put it, and it is not after "the one thing we were looking for". Instead, it is interested in "the hundred things we were not looking for, but stumbled upon".

Closely related to this mental strategy of "imagining second chances", was the strategy of pretending – or, rather, *insisting* – that these iterative shoots be instances of training, rather than demonstrations of a skillset. What I would have to show at the end of the research could be a series of samples from ongoing training (or, ongoing research), not a set of pieces that were "perfect", or that reflected a single, conclusive position on the themes I discuss throughout this exegesis. While the stakes are raised in many

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<sup>17</sup> My partner is non-binary transgender. As such I use the gender-neutral pronouns "they"/"them", instead of "he"/"him" or "she"/"her". Throughout this thesis, I use "they"/"them" pronouns for all non-specific third-person references (e.g. "the filmmaker", "the viewer"). Specific people are referred to by their preferred pronouns, to the best of my knowledge.

<sup>18</sup> In this chapter Lepecki defines the "singularity" as a "bearer of strangeness", "multiplicity" and "bifurcations" (Lepecki, 2016, p. 15).



performance contexts, producing an overwhelming sense of "once and for all", training welcomes trial and error, on the basis that every "error" will contribute data to an evolving "theory-in-action" (Schön, 1983, p. 58).

## Play as Co-Immersive

Csikszentmihalyi and Huizinga, among other play theorists, suggest that a key feature of play is the experience, for play-participants, of being privy to the same alternate reality: being subject to the same set of unique and temporarily applicable laws, or being, as Huizinga puts it, "apart together" (Huizinga, 1944/1949, p. 12). For the purposes of a playful improvised research methodology, it made sense, therefore, to cultivate for my participants a sense of co-immersion in the "score".

In the final iterations of the video shoots, I developed the parameters so that my subjects were more aware of, and included in, the camera movement score. Several of the participants had already developed a vague sense of the rules I was operating within throughout our earlier shoots, but in these final iterations I explained the score explicitly in terms of its four basic "options for engaging with the motion of entities in the environment", and invited participants to engage with it in a more formal way. They did not have to do anything different from they had in the past but, having been informed of the score for camera movement, were invited to play with that score, and to actively "co-compose", the shot.

I explained that, while recording, I would retain the right to occasionally negate signs of their specific intentions, as they too retained the right to negate what they perceived to be my intentions, but suggested that we exercise this right according to what we thought would be most helpful for the overall improvisation, which was now a *collaborative* project.

The decision to include participants more explicitly in my movement score was born from a realisation that, up until that point, my participants and I inhabited very different subjective spaces: while I was deeply immersed in a web of compositional parameters, my participants were not. This research partly explores the capacities of audio-visual media to produce shared subjective and affective states between subjects, filmmakers and audiences. As such, it made sense to cultivate a shared immersion in the score. Although our experiences would always be different to a degree, I hoped that a shared immersion in the score would create some opportunities for shared affective and aesthetic experiences during the video shoots.

I also anticipated that including participants more intimately in the score would spread the load of creative decision making across both of us. This is one key aspect of

improvisation — its collaborative, co-transformative aspect (Smith & Dean, 1997, p. 21) — that I was, up until that point, not utilising. Allowing the composition to be affected by participants' active choices as co-composers would allow for greater transformation on my part, and vice versa. It would make the "dance" of these improvisations a two-way process: the camera not just dancing *around* its subjects, but dancing *with* them.

Of all my participants, Gideon responded to the score, and to my invitation to play with it, with the most enthusiasm — possibly due to his familiarity with such scenarios as a professional performance artist. There were several points during the recording of his portrait where, as he later reported, he was actively playing with me, was mindful of my needs as a camera operator, or was co-composing. The entire take with Gideon lasted forty minutes — much longer than most takes — and included several laundry-based activities that he had suggested in lieu of hanging out washing, which his studio apartment did not allow him to do. I chose an eight-minute excerpt of this take for inclusion in *Washing Lines*. Early in the recording he noticed my "lingering" camera (as I hovered in the middle of his apartment, pointing the camera at a window) and stepped into frame with a waterglass in hand and keys dangling from his fingers. He said he did this for the camera, imagining that the image of a backlit waterglass and dangling keys would look beautiful. Later, he was excited for some of the things he thought I might be seeing, like the long hallway outside his front door as he held it open to let me through on our way down to the shared laundry facilities in the bottom of the building (this is where the eight-minute excerpt for *Washing Lines* begins). He occasionally tested me — for example, by running an armful of laundry down the fire stairs two steps at a time, making me run with the camera. And when he rinsed and wrung out his massage table covers under the shower head (he is also a trained massage therapist), he said he was constantly aware of the gusts of steam and water, and how these might be a hazard for the camera — how they might even fog up the lens. I remember appreciating several of the conscious compositional choices Gideon made as they were happening, thinking to myself that this particular section of the footage would probably be interesting or beautiful to watch later.

Yet the degree to which this co-compositional dynamic emerged varied from participant to participant. Some participants said they forgot about the score, and even forgot about my presence at times (Ashleigh, for example, said she forgot I was there at several points during the recording of her portrait with Indiana, Becky and Daisy). Others said they felt increased pressure at the prospect of having to co-compose these videos or interact playfully with me, and said they would feel more at ease going about their task without this added responsibility. I always encouraged them to do whatever they felt comfortable with or most interested in, deciding that it was important for the participants to feel in control of their part in this video. They had been informed of the camera's movement parameters, and they were free to decide how they would respond to that. Further, the decision to continue hanging out washing "as usual" was in itself a *choice* regarding how to

interact with my score. It was the adoption of a different rule, namely to continue on "as if" they had not been informed of the score's parameters, and this rule may also have produced feelings of immersion and cooperation.

## Play as Enclosed and Resisting Enclosure

In his article on Wolfgang Iser's ideas about play, Paul Armstrong notes that play contains two opposing but mutually reliant tendencies: on the one hand, the tendency of play to be "free", open-ended and self-perpetuating, and on the other hand, its tendency to move towards closure, or a determinate outcome. Apparently Iser calls this latter aspect of play, which has a particular end in mind, "instrumental play". Armstrong summarises,

Keeping the to-and-fro [of play] in motion and aiming to establish a particular result are in a sense two aspects of play which may contradict each other, but they also depend on each other. [...] Free play and instrumental play are inextricably intertwined in the games texts play as they range between open-endedness and closure. (Armstrong, 2000, pp. 216–217)

What Armstrong says about the playfulness of literary texts is also true of improvisation, where, as I noted in the previous chapter, structure aids "flights of the unexpected" (Grant, 2015, p. 353). Anne Douglas makes a similar connection between improvisation and play, suggesting that both are characterised by a tension between "perpetual [...] mobility" and "determinacy", or "going from one [fixed point] to another" (Douglas, 2012, p. 1).

I would add that in many games and in much improvisation, the element counterbalancing free play is not only experienced as closure, but also as *enclosure*. In *Washing Lines* and in my experiences of improvisation in dance and music, free play is partly structured by the "particular result" we have in mind — for example, to produce a performance that is enjoyable for audiences — but is also structured by our observance of and experimentation within the enclosure created by the rules we set ourselves (which I often refer to as a "score"). Experimenting within *enclosures* can lead us towards *closure* in ways we might not have anticipated, and may even produce entirely different endings than we had in mind.

Armstrong suggests that the coexistence and mutual enhancement of these two forms of play provide us with a model for how to coexist productively with difference on a broader social level. The differences between free play and instrumental play are irreconcilable but productive; their relationship is reciprocal, but does not require consensus. They are "incommensurable opposites" whose incommensurability does not cancel out the possibility of generative and generous coexistence (Armstrong, 2000, p. 218).

Armstrong's emphasis on reciprocity without consensus reminds me that when grouping concepts together based on their resemblances, we need not force them to be in agreement with each other. Two things that look alike may suggest some kind of pattern, but are not therefore the same thing, and their difference may be productive. The notion of reciprocity without consensus also evokes Paul Carter's contemplation of the possibility for a crowd to act together, without acting as one – one of the social models, borrowed as "aids to epistemological reform", that Carter encountered in several Indigenous Australian cultures (Carter, 2013, p. 3). Ideas may act together without acting as one – and maybe, too, the portraits in *Washing Lines* act together without acting as one.

The mutual reliance of openness and closure also appears in Caillois's work on play, where he opposes *paidia*, which is tumultuous and exuberant, to *ludus*, which is structured and based around the accrual of skills.

A basic freedom is central to play in order to stimulate distraction and fantasy. This liberty is its indispensable motive power and is basic to the most complex and carefully organized forms of play. Such a primary power of improvisation and joy [...] I call *paidia*. (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 27)

*Ludus* [...] is complementary to and a refinement of *paidia*, which it disciplines and enriches. It provides an occasion for training and normally leads to the acquisition of a special skill, a particular mastery of the operation of one or another contraption or the discovery of a satisfactory solution to problems. (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 29)

Caillois also writes that the play world turns on *rules*.

The game consists of the need to find or continue at once a response *which is free within the limits set by the rules*. This latitude of the player, this margin accorded to his action is essential to the game and partly explains the pleasure which it excites. (Caillois, 1958/1961, p. 8)

Csikszentmihalyi agrees that rules help to produce the pleasure of play, as they narrow the field of possible responses to situations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975/2014, p. 142). He suggests that the enjoyment of play is partly produced by the feeling that one is able to meet specific and clearly established demands for action and by clear and timely feedback on the value of one's actions. Prioritising and decision-making in the context of play, while still requiring skill and resulting in mixed outcomes, may feel easier than in "real life". Social interactions are also often regulated by the rules of the game, meaning that the player is able to leave their "self-construct" (that is, the mediating façade they learn to interpose between social stimuli and response) at the door when they enter the play-space. Although outcomes are uncertain, *demands* are clear, and the player is able to focus on the tasks at hand with relative ease. Csikszentmihalyi defines this zone of enjoyment and immersion as a "flow" experience, where "action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975/2014, pp. 136–137).

These perspectives on the relationship between openness and (en)closure in play suggest its close resemblance to structured improvisation. As I described in Chapter One, the feeling that I needed a structure to circumscribe "free play" in video-based composition was what led me to develop a score for camera movement. This score produced a set of rules *within which* my subjects and I could still act somewhat freely, could still be expressive; in which decision-making felt simpler and more enjoyable.

And yet there continued to be a doubtful element about the improvisations throughout Activity 7. The "rules of the game," being a point of critical inquiry, remained tenuous, remained *open to questioning*. Further, while the score provided me with a relatively clear incentive, the larger task of making a series of video portraits for an audience created additional incentives that vied for my attention (as I explain shortly). Prioritising was not always easy, and I often shifted *out of* sensuous immersion, and into an uncomfortable awareness of my own decision-making, in which action did *not* seem to follow logically upon action.

But arguably, such moments of doubt and discomfort — questioning what is actually meant by a rule or an aspect of the score, entertaining multiple possibilities, working in the tension between incommensurable opposites — are a necessary part of critical inquiry. As Csikszentmihalyi writes in his paper on cognition and problem solving, original thinking is characterised by the *discovery* of problems, not just by their solution, and the discovery of problems may benefit from a sceptical attitude (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/2014, p. 157).

Two additional, potential characteristics of research-as-play thus present themselves for discussion. One is the liminal nature of play. Another is the joy of play which is, according to many theorists, the main motivator for playing. Attached to the latter characteristic is a question: should we, as researchers, be in pursuit of joy when we play (i.e. when we conduct our research)? What different positions in relation to *joy* or *flow* might we inhabit as researchers, and what is their value?

## Play as Liminal

In her article on academic research and play, Julianne van Loon invokes Donald Woods Winnicott's oft-cited concept of potential space. Potential space is a zone of invention and imagination in play, in which the daily strain of relating "inner" and "outer" realities is temporarily eased. It is enabled by a distance between parent and child: the child needs to be left alone with minimal stimulus from time to time, needs to be given the opportunity to invent, imagine and take risks in privacy. Interestingly, Winnicott writes that analytical practice can also be experienced as potential space: that analytical practice is a compositional space in which (im)possible structures, relations and meanings can be

invented (van Loon, 2014, unpaginated). As I will explain, paradox and liminality are key characteristics of potential space, making it a useful framework for contemplating liminal experiences in improvisation and research.

Jeanette G. Simmonds addresses Winnicott's notion of potential space in her article on psychotherapeutic practice and the Tibetan Buddhist concept of *bardo*. This article discusses the reporting of spiritual experiences in therapy sessions by patients, and the challenge of holding this space for patients as a therapist. Simmonds understands the spiritual experiences that patients report in therapy as temporary openings onto potential space, and argues that this concept is enriched when understood in relation to *bardo*.

Potential space, she explains, is not only a place where inner and outer realities might be related to each other, but is also a transformative and transitional space. It is an intermediate space, *inter* stemming from the Latin word "among", and *mediate* stemming from the meaning, "holding the middle place or degree between two extremes" (Simmonds, 2014, p. 3). As this etymological root suggests, potential space is characterised by paradox.

Similarly, the Tibetan Buddhist concept of *bardo* describes an "'intermediate state' or 'between state'". It refers most commonly to the zone between death and rebirth, but also describes certain states in life. Simmonds quotes Chögyam Trungpa: "Bardo means gap; it is not only the interval of suspension after we die but also suspension in the living situation" (1975/1987, p. 1-2 as quoted in Simmonds, 2014, p. 3).

Both *bardo* and potential space can thus be taken to describe a liminal zone that is alive with transformative potential. Reflecting on how best to support patients who report experiencing spiritual encounters in therapy, Simmonds suggests that it is the role of the psychotherapist to hold a liminal, or in-between space in a therapy consultation: to sustain an environment in which the "experiencer" is able to contemplate paradoxical experiences with an open mind. She describes the construction of a liminal space in therapy as "setting aside a special place, time, or space, outside usual convention", and providing "structures that support the experiencer in tolerating ambivalence and anxiety when entering into a state that is free of these 'usual constraints'" (Simmonds, 2014, p. 4). The therapist seeks to foster conditions in which the experiencer, or patient, is able to prevent themselves from "'playing the usual assumed role in life and from resorting to or relying on well-rehearsed scripts, automatic behaviors and self-imposed limitations'" (Cernovsky as quoted in Simmonds, 2014, p. 5). Just as the patient tries not to resort to "well-rehearsed scripts, automatic behaviors and self-imposed limitations", the analyst should try to be "'undefended by knowledge'", to be as if "without 'memory and desire'", avoiding "'premature' interpretations [which] 'produce compliance'" (Simmonds, 2014, p. 6). Simultaneously, however, the therapist should be able to discern when a return to "consensual reality" is necessary. Holding a liminal space thus involves challenging the experiencer to think and feel beyond what is familiar, but also to circumscribe that

experience; to make the explorative space safe, and to eventually encourage a "return to consensual reality" (Simmonds, 2014, p. 6).

The liminal space that Simmonds describes bears many resemblances to the creative space of improvised research. Scores for improvisation designate zones "outside usual convention" where the improviser (in my case, me, the camera person) must identify and become un-welded from "rehearsed scripts, automatic behaviors and self-imposed limitations". Indeed, my camera improvisations are research by virtue of their attempt to remain awake to "rehearsed scripts" — not necessarily resisting them, but *noticing* them — as they occur. This is, too, what Rosalind Crisp intends in her improvised dance research, which aims at keeping the dancing body-mind awake to the familiar scripts, automatic behaviours and self-imposed limitations it encounters.<sup>19</sup> (Of course, it must be noted that such scripts can be incredibly valuable in creative practice, and well-oiled grooves — familiar riffs, oft-rehearsed compositional patterns — can be deeply enjoyable to return to in real-time composition.)

Simmonds also invokes a "falling" metaphor for potential space, pre-empting some of the images that will come up later in this thesis in relation to improvisation: images of leaping, of the dilating interstices between what is already existent and what is emergent. As in therapeutic reporting of spiritual experiences, the "fall" or "leap into futurity" characterising improvisation is focused and supported by an enclosure — by boundaries which may be referred to as a score. For a patient in therapy this enclosure is provided by the awareness and the input of the therapist; for me it was provided by requirements and people in my research environment (by deadlines, output or publication specifications, mentors, supervisors), and by the improvisatory scores and methodology I chose to work within. And in the same way that a person in therapy may return to "consensual reality" at the end of a period of sustained liminality, I took pause from the video-based improvisations intermittently to "take stock" and to integrate recent findings with the rest of my knowledge.

Finally, the play-space of improvised research resembles the liminal settings Simmonds describes because both produce feelings of "ambivalence and anxiety" that must be tolerated. Researchers entertain incommensurable opposites, accommodate conflicting agendas and often work in a zone where research questions are only just beginning to be formed, or are in the process of being transformed. As Csikszentmihalyi notes, discovery in research only rarely comes with a feeling of blinding certainty (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/2014, p. 158). As I gained a more multi-dimensional understanding of my video improvisations, I became more concerned with learning how to work between opposing intentions, how to endure the lack of certainty this often produced, and how to be agile —

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<sup>19</sup> Crisp explained this aspect of her practice during a two-day workshop-seminar I attended in August 2016, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

even comfortable – in relation to it. In the videos that comprise *Washing Lines* I worked in the tension between the incentive to produce videos that treated all matter as equally "vibrant", and the incentive to produce videos that contained narratives or meanings that were recognisable to humans (as it was humans who would ultimately engage with these videos when they were completed). I worked between the desire to return to familiar and aesthetically pleasing pathways through the laundry-hanging environment, and the desire to find pathways that were *unfamiliar*, surprising, and perhaps truer to the score. And I worked, too, with a simultaneous awareness of the camera's settings – aperture, focus, shutter speed, audio levels – and its movement-based dance with other bodies in the environment. The now vague, now acute, anxiety of not-quite-knowing, or of not-quite-being-able-to-oversee, became a familiar companion.

Drawing on the concepts of potential space and *bardo*, we can say that liminality describes a zone of creative possibility in research that is suspended between what has already emerged, and what is presently emerging. We can also say that liminal experiences involve the accommodation of paradoxes, of incommensurable opposites, which require a high tolerance for uncertainty.

Julienne van Loon rightly argues that it is important for researchers to have more access to "potential space" in their work – that is, to a space designated for play and for unknowns. She notes that the frequent requirement in universities to be able to pin down the outcomes of a research project before the research has even begun, overlooks a central characteristic of innovative research: that it does not always know where it is going. van Loon reflects that some of the most innovative research she has seen was marked, "legitimized", by its very indeterminacy (van Loon, 2014, unpaginated).

## Play as Joyful

Although playful research contains paradoxes and must tolerate anxiety and ambivalence, the theorists cited throughout this chapter are more or less unanimous in agreeing that play is primarily motivated by enjoyment. Csikszentmihalyi, in his extensive research into play, acknowledges that some instances of play are more enjoyable than others. As I alluded to earlier, he writes that play is especially enjoyable in circumstances where one's stimulus field is limited, where one is able to use one's skills to meet clear demands, where one feels some control over the environment, and where one can also forget the "separateness" of one's identity, producing a "transcendence of ego-boundaries" and a "psychic integration with metapersonal systems" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975/2014, p. 135). He calls this a state of "flow".

Improvising filmmaker Jean Rouch seems to have deeply valued "flow" in filmmaking. He argued that films should be made "with the heart rather than the brain", and identified an



almost trance-like state in his own filmmaking practice in which he felt deeply connected to his camera and to the events unfolding around him: what he called the "*ciné-transe*" (Yakir, 1978, p. 10). Rouch's *ciné-transe* might be a similar feeling to what filmmaker John Marshall describes when he says, "You have this feeling, 'I'm on; I'm on.' You know, 'I'm getting it. It's happening; it's happening'" (Marshall as quoted in MacDougall, 2006, p. 27).

In early iterations of Activity 7, when it seemed difficult and potentially self-jeopardising to zoom out and take stock of what was happening, the pursuit of feedback through flow felt most available to me. However, sometimes the footage I enjoyed shooting did not feel as successful upon review: it lent itself to interpretations I did not want, did not create the same feelings of immersion or surprise that I had felt while shooting, or it revealed ways in which the overall parameters of the exercise or the score for camera movement needed to be further developed. At other times the converse was true: the shoot was uncomfortable, but the resulting footage was immersive, or clearly reflective of the score, or interesting for other reasons.

As an improvising camera operator, what *does* a sense of joy, or flow, serve to indicate? As a researcher striving to make a contribution to knowledge, does "flow" necessarily guide me to meaningful contributions? Should we be in pursuit of flow as researchers? Or as artists, whose intention is research?

On the one hand I would argue that it is a researcher's job to tolerate moments that are not joyful or flowing, to be cognisant of them when they happen, and to try to articulate what is going on. We cannot assume that every pleasurable experience in research is leading us in the right direction, and equally we should not assume that every uncomfortable period in research is an indication that we are wasting our time. Indeed, discomfort may be a key factor in problem discovery, as the sense that something does not "feel right" might lead us to ask why not, and thus to formulate a provocative research question. Perhaps we can imagine creative practice research as a map with latitudes and longitudes, upon which we may inhabit all kinds of positions in relation to "flow", in relation to the production of interesting or beautiful material, and also in relation to the discovery and solution of problems. Our role as researchers, then, may be to articulate our positions in the topography of felt research experiences, and to grapple with the question of how to travel from one position to another.

On the other hand, enjoyment and satisfaction in research are what sustains many researchers through long and exhausting investigations, and may also be what leads them to original thinking. In an article on cognition and discovery in research Csikszentmihalyi differentiates between "presented problem solving" and "discovered problem solving". Presented problem solving is the solution of a problem which has already been formulated, and for which the relevant data have already more or less been collected. Discovered problem solving, on the other hand, is the solution of a problem which is

simultaneously discovered as being a problem in the first place (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/2014, p. 157).

Csikszentmihalyi argues that discovered problem solving is not merely "rational" (as his contemporary Simon Brown believed) but is emotional, memory-laden, intuitive and fuelled by personal motivations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/2014, p. 159). Drawing on the work of Ann Roe, he also wonders if discovering problems and arriving at original ideas might partly be the result of sheer perseverance: of spending enough time thinking about something. He suggests that joy is an important factor here. The researcher who enjoys the day to day work of establishing connections between ideas or articulating findings, who gets the same "intrinsic rewards" from research as a play-participant gets from play, is more likely to keep on keeping on, and thus to arrive at inventive interpretations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/2014, p. 164). So joy can be very helpful in research, and may involve the active pursuit of flow and intrinsically rewarding experiences.

A different perspective on the importance of joy in improvisation comes from Kent De Spain, whose interviews with improvising dancers lead him to the conclusion that, rather than pausing to ask oneself what may *not* be working well in an instance of live improvisation, a far more productive question to ask oneself is, "What is good?" What is working well here? What is particularly exciting about this moment? This question, with its positive tone, can help to draw a performer onwards when they are unsure of where to go next, and helps to produce clarity and trust in a live improvised situation (De Spain, 2014, p. 80). I have often employed the question, "What is good?", in moments of acute doubt during shoots. When committing to an aspect of the score that produced feelings of anxiety (something I explore in more detail in the next chapter), this question helped to seduce me back into a fuller commitment to the task.

## Play as Politically Engaged

Governments around the world continue to prioritise economic rationalist models and values, creating a culture in which rest and play are either explicitly or implicitly devalued as a squandering of time and kinetic energy — especially where they are difficult to monetise, or are not directed towards productivity and growth. As political theorist Wendy Brown writes, in a neo-liberal model "every single one of one's actions must be orientated towards profitable future returns, 'enhancing the self's future value'" (Brown as quoted in Lepecki, 2016, p. 19). This brings up questions about the political implications of playing, and of doing research playfully.

In his paper, "The Scholastic Point of View", Pierre Bourdieu associates scholarly practice with play, writing that the scholastic point of view is made possible by *skholè*, "an institutionalized situation of studious leisure" — what Plato has also called *spondaios*

*pazein*, "to play seriously" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 381). Bourdieu writes that this scholarly practice occurs in disconnection from the world beyond the academy, and that it therefore fails to engage with the world effectively.<sup>20</sup>

Bourdieu's description of scholarship as "studious leisure" is stimulating, and he makes some convincing arguments: he deconstructs the centrality of "reason" in the academy and questions many of the age-old university practices that live on today, forming a system of academic requisites and rewards that are at odds with much of the non-academic world. He is concerned with lack of universal access to education, and writes that the scholastic point of view is especially problematic because it is only available to those privileged enough to occupy a position of "studious leisure". However, in making this critique he implicitly reiterates the neoliberal idea that the playful element in research is frivolous and naïve. He writes,

*Homo Scholasticus* or *Homo Academicus* is someone who is paid to play seriously; placed outside the urgency of a practical situation and oblivious to the ends which are immanent in it, he or she earnestly busies herself with problems that serious people ignore — actively or passively. To produce practices or utterances that are context free one must [...] have this disposition to play gratuitous games which is acquired and reinforced by situations of *skholè* such as the inclination and ability to raise speculative problems for the sole pleasure of resolving them. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 381)

Bourdieu's implication that the pleasure of research is a non-productive self-indulgence belies a suspicion of pleasure that echoes neoliberal governments' sidelining of "non-essentials" like the arts, and that reflects a morally inflected proclivity towards abstinence — the residue of some idea that research is only virtuous if it is self-sacrificing. Further, in assuming that researchers aim to produce "utterances that are context-free", he overlooks the fact that, at his time of writing, research in many fields was no longer trying to be without context. Research was already interested in hybridity, self-disclosure, and a close listening to the shape of the life it sought to describe. Donna Haraway had published her article, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), which asked scholars to "situate" their knowledge in context. Theodor Adorno, in his earlier writing on the essay, had implored writers to let the structure of their writing follow the shape of the subjects it sought to describe, rather than forcing its subjects into compliance with an incompatible conceptual structure (Adorno, Hullot-Kentor, & Will, 1984, pp. 159–161). In assuming that play is divorced from "serious" and "practical" life, Bourdieu also upholds a binary akin to the distinction earlier

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<sup>20</sup> Bourdieu's critique appears to respond especially to the writings of his contemporary, Vuillemin, and to then-current practices in the field of sociology. However, Bourdieu insists that the practices he describes reflect a more general "academic vision", thereby sweeping the whole of scholarly practice into the purview of his discussion (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 380).

play theorists Caillois and Huizinga made between play and reality, and between the imagined and the material.

Bourdieu's paper arouses a defensive temper in me, possibly because a doubt about the social and political applicability of my own research has long weighed on my mind. And maybe this is with good reason. In a world where many fight daily for basics like food, shelter, the recognition of their identities and histories, the preservation of their homes, their right to *life* at all, what is it to engage in playful research around the act of hanging out laundry?

Is play apolitical, or unable to contribute to real change because it happens in a kind of "alternate universe" where, temporarily, the pressures of life are laid to one side? Is play unable to create change because it converses in a different language, works to an entirely different value system, from some of the regimes it would seek to unsettle? Is play a retreat from history?

Not per se. As many of the theories we have encountered so far demonstrate, play offers spaces to imagine promising new models of sociality. For example, while the "northern" approach Paul Carter describes sees consensus as a requisite for productive and peaceful coexistence, both he and Paul Armstrong warn that a pushing towards consensus may become a pushing into compliance. Instead, and drawing inspiration from the dynamics of play, Armstrong proposes a model of social co-existence where differences are valued in dialogues characterised by respectful reciprocity.

Further, some of the pressing issues that we face today — such as rampant greed among the financial elite, the mass evacuation of people from war-torn countries, and the deteriorating state of the environment due to the human pursuit of "growth" at all costs — suggest that emergent technologies and alternative social, economic and/or political systems may offer us a more sustainable and compassionate way forward than many of the systems currently in place. Designated spaces for playful experimentation, in which "second chances" abound and unforeseen outcomes are welcome, might provide a good context for the prototyping of such technologies, as well as for the prototyping of social, political and economic models that — although they build on what we know — support a more sustainable and compassionate way of living than our current frameworks.

And, of course, as a final thought towards the radical politics of playing and of joy, we can invoke Susan Leigh Foster's discussion of Randy Martin and his perspective on the radical exuberance of dancing. Foster writes, "Martin has identified choreography's capacity to summon together bodies whose exuberant expenditure of effort defies traditional economic theories and offers, instead, a new vision of what political mobilization might be" (Foster, 2011, pp. 3–4). The same can be said, I believe, of exuberant play.

# Conclusion

By exploring some of the things that *play* could be, I have attempted to explore the many things that *playful research* could be: repurposive, interested in the properties of things, repetitive, co-immersive, occurring in relation to closure and enclosure, liminal, enjoyable, and politically engaged. All these qualities of play run through my research methodology.

Several of these qualities have already been robustly theorised in the existing literature on practice-led research, as Chapter One indicated. What the "play" analogy contributes, however, is an attendance to the intuitive, desire-driven – or perhaps "enthusiasm" driven (Haseman, 2006, p. 100) – dimensions of creative research. It foregrounds and provides insights to the elusive *feeling-states* that imbue practice-led methodologies.

A key conclusion of this chapter is the understanding that any sense of "playing" in research must be balanced with the realisation that we do so in a landscape with a history, alongside subjects who we may not fully understand – and that we are not, and should not aim to be, master of the subjects our research engages. So while the unbounded exuberance of play forms part of its political potential, this must be an exuberance that does not lose sight of history. Perhaps this is yet another way in which playful research is liminal: we play exuberantly, enjoy ourselves "with total intensity" (Benjamin, 1928/1999, p. 120), but hold somewhere in our awareness a sense of the landscape that we may as yet lose ourselves in.

This marks the end of the two chapters of this exegesis that are dedicated to methodology. In the chapters that follow, I describe the gradual evolution of my understanding of improvisation, affect and handheld camera work. This began with a desire to find a haptic, non-mastering way of engaging with my surroundings as a camera operator.



# Chapter Three

## Soft Vision

### Introduction

In her Masters dissertation on improvised dance, Rosalind Crisp writes that “to alter our ways of dancing we may also need to alter our ways of seeing” (Crisp, 1998, p. 15). Chapter Three describes my attempt to learn how to “see differently” – to expand the ways in which I sense the world – in order to develop a “camera dance” that accesses the affective potential of places and bodies. This search for a different way of seeing was based on a growing conviction that cinematic affective experiences – for viewers, filmmakers, and all co-composers of a filmic work – can emerge from bodily resonances or mimics, and from a “haptic” vision in which a “mastering” looking is frustrated and the synaesthetic and kinaesthetic dimensions of looking are heightened (Marks, 2002).

As I explain in Chapter One, my process in attempting to investigate these concerns was iterative and experimental. After a varied series of “Activities” designed to explore the intersections of place, cinema and affect, I arrived at Activity 5, where I finally began to realise some of my ambitions. It was not until Activity 7, more than halfway into my candidature, that the guiding parameters for the creative production aspect of this project, *Washing Lines*, were definitively established. What began, in Activity 5, as an exploration of kinaesthetic empathy between humans, became a filmic search for shared resonances between humans and all kinds of beings and things, and an investigation of how the improvising camera might facilitate them.

The first section of this chapter introduces several key principles, thinkers and filmmakers that inform my understanding of a non-mastering, haptic way of engaging with my surroundings. The following section describes several “bodily dispositions” that are aligned with this way of sensing, and that I have tried to cultivate in myself as a filmmaker. In the final section of the chapter, I describe the iterative development of an improvised “score” for the camera, and explain the key components of the eventual score that was used while recording the video portraits that form *Washing Lines*. Throughout, I note the importance of movement practices including BodyWeather, Contact Improvisation and Taiko percussion in shaping this initial, yet important, phase of enquiry.

# Implications of a Non-Mastering Vision

In western culture, sight has become synonymous with knowledge, and specifically with a scientific-rationalist way of thinking that assumes humans can (and should aspire to) understand the material world exhaustively (Ong, 1977). The quest to see, or know, has also become a quest to “master” and, as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith notes, it has a history of violent outcomes (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). In her book, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura U. Marks describes a haptic way of seeing and writing that acknowledges the irreducibility of things, and that attends to their materiality. While Marks acknowledges the value of optical vision (which tends more towards interpretive mastery) and notes the interdependence of optical and haptic dimensions in affective cinematic experiences, she celebrates the haptic as an affective and politically important mode of engagement in both criticism and cinema. She describes and enacts from the outset a “haptic criticism” that does not master its object, but almost touches it: that brushes against it, preserving something of the “wetness of the encounter” (Marks, 2002, p. x). I am reminded of Trinh T. Minh-hà's note, at the beginning of her film, *Reassemblage*, that she “[does] not intend to speak about [her subjects], just speak nearby” (1982).

Relating Marks's ideas about hapticity to my own experiences as a viewer (and reader) has suggested to me that pursuing a non-mastering and haptic way of sensing in my filmmaking might enable me to foster affective encounters with places and subjects through video. In what follows I propose several implications of a non-mastering vision that have informed my attempt to develop such a filmmaking approach.

## Participation with Live and Operational Entities

A key understanding informing this work has been my sense that a non-mastering vision engages with entities while they are intact and operational in the world. In her dissertation on affect, mimesis and materiality in cinema, Anne Rutherford approaches this idea through the distinction between the *Körper* and the *Leib*, two German words for “the body” with very different inflections.

The *Körper* refers to the body as it is seen in anatomy and physiology. It evokes a body seen clinically, in terms of its “structural aspects,” and also evokes “the dead body or corpse” (Ots as quoted in Rutherford, 2006, p. 131). The *Leib* refers to “the living body, my body with feelings, sensations, perceptions and emotions.” The *Körper* can be seen into; its parts are laid out for close study. The *Leib*, on the other hand, is a dynamic whole glimpsed in its acute ephemerality. Not only is the *Leib* still intact, it also produces different insights from the *Körper* – the kinds of insights that psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and early Gestalt theorist Max Wertheimer also value.



Csikszentmihalyi writes about a wide field of topics, including the psychologies of creative practice. In an article about consciousness and attention he notes that, when consciousness emerged as a field of study, researchers quickly began to try to prove its existence in physiological terms. Before an understanding of *what consciousness was* had even been reached, and before the experience of *being conscious* had been properly explored, researchers were trying to “unravel its neurological roots” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978/2014, p. 2) – to confirm where it was located and what made it work. But, Csikszentmihalyi argues, “consciousness broken up into its physiological components [became] meaningless at the level it is most interesting; the level of integrated human experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 2). Consciousness as *lived*, as operational, is what interests Csikszentmihalyi. And it is what the early researchers overlooked, “[falling] prey to the reductionistic tendency of the scientific discipline aspiring to scientific rigor” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1978/2014, p. 2).<sup>21</sup>

Things are similarly valued in their ephemeral wholeness in early Gestalt theory, a philosophical model developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy. In an early 20<sup>th</sup> century essay introducing the approach, Gestalt therapy co-founder Max Wertheimer writes, “It has long seemed obvious – and is in fact the characteristic tone of European science – that ‘science’ means breaking up complexes into their component elements” (Wertheimer, 1938, p. 2). He explains how, in European scientific and philosophical traditions, entities are treated as conglomerates of sub-parts, and it is seen as the task of science to catalogue those sub-parts and understand how they relate to each other. Increasingly complicated apparatuses must be imposed or inferred to arrive at some “logical” explanation of how things work. The Gestalt method comes at things very differently: rather than trying to impose or infer relationships between sub-parts to understand wholes, it listens out for an understanding of the “whole” as it operates in lived experience, and tries to ascertain what the character or quality of that whole is. Parts, then, take their meaning from the quality of the dynamic whole, and any emerging logic does, too. The role of a note in a melody, for example, is most productively determined by trying to perceive the quality of the whole melody as it sounds in real time, and by considering the note’s role within it.

Wertheimer thus suggests that we engage with entities as they operate in lived experience. This means engaging with ephemeral wholes that are in constant motion, and that move within even greater wholes of intercorporeal experience, of which the theorist also makes up a part. While Wertheimer is interested in seeing things, in understanding them, the kind of research he proposes seems to accept a frustrated vision by necessity. Engaging with things that are alive and in motion leaves them *not broken up*, and as a corollary,

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<sup>21</sup> I do not intend to discount all natural-scientific contributions to an understanding of consciousness by using this quotation, only to point to the potential pitfalls of a particular impulse in research.

accepts their partial unknowability. This last thing – not being able to see all of an entity at once – is another key aspect of non-mastering vision informing the development of the creative work for this thesis.

## Unknowability / Partial Vision

David Abram's book, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), traces the genealogy of phenomenology from its beginnings through to its potential future in ecological thinking. In its second chapter, "Philosophy on the way to Ecology", Abram shows how phenomenology has proposed a model of reality in which humans are enmeshed in their surroundings – in which every thought about the “world” is necessarily permeated with its material context, with feelings and physical sensations. He agrees that the drive to “know” in the scientific or quantifiable sense is perhaps unrealistic, writing that “the everyday world in which we hunger and make love is hardly the mathematically determined object toward which the sciences direct themselves” (Abram, 1996, p. 32). Circling a clay bowl in his workspace, he observes that he can never see all of its surface at once, nor what is beyond or beneath its surface. To see the whole bowl at once he must to break it into pieces. The more he wants to see, the smaller the pieces must be. If he is to see the bowl entirely, he must trade his relationship with a whole bowl, partially seen, for a relationship with a broken bowl. He proposes an alternative: to “participate with” the unknowable things, softening his own corporeal boundaries to receive information about them. Or, rather than seeking a pervasive knowledge of things, to let things' qualities pervade *him*.

Dancer Paula Kramer makes a similar suggestion in relation to outdoor and site-specific dance practices. Her critique of a mastering vision emphasises the vibrancy and subjectivity of non-human subjects and objects, and emphasises their *right to remain unknown*, or *only partially known*. Non-human entities are “not exhausted by their relationship to humans or to each other”, she writes (Kramer, 2012, p. 84). Rather than “longing to [...] ‘fully know’ nature,” dancers should “work with the capacities of their bodies in the face of the autonomy of their surroundings” (Kramer, 2012, p. 84). Kramer paints a picture of a dancer in a landscape who cannot fully fathom its forms, but who is able to work with what they do know in the face of what they don't know – again, a sort of participation with unknowable (or only partly knowable) things.

Marks's work on the haptic also foregrounds the dynamic relationship between knowing and not-knowing. She suggests that haptic vision is an incomplete or partial vision that caresses the surfaces of things at close proximity, rather than plunging into depth (Marks, 2002, p. 8). It pursues sensing, rather than making-sense-of, and is often a response to situations where optical (or mastering) looking is frustrated. Indeed, a common trait of the video works Marks holds up is the relative illegibility of their subjects/objects. Due to conscious decisions made by the filmmakers, and often due to the lowered resolution of

these images resulting from the technological translations (or mediations) they have undergone, it is hard to see subjects/objects clearly. The video image is what Adrian Miles might call “obstinate” (Miles, 2015), refusing to give up an easy reading of itself, so that a viewer's gaze must linger on its surface.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Marks writes that haptic criticism is mimetic: that it aims to “[get] close enough to the other thing to become it” (Marks, 2002, p. xiii). Mimesis, and the permeability of body-boundaries that it implies, is another aspect of the filmmaking approach I sought to develop, and became an important consideration in the creative research from Activity 5 onwards.

## Permeability / Mimicry

When Abram suggests that participation with the world involves “an attunement or synchronization between [his] own rhythms and the rhythms of the things themselves” (Abram, 1996, p. 54), he draws in part on the phenomenology proposed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Abram notes that, “throughout Merleau-Ponty’s major work [...] the sensible thing, commonly considered by our philosophical tradition to be passive and inert, is consistently described in the active voice: the sensible ‘beckons to me’, [...] ‘takes possession of my senses’, and even ‘thinks itself within me’” (Abram, 1996, p. 55). The things *think themselves within us*. This phrase sketches a human not only pervaded, but animated, by otherness.

Anna Gibbs, like Marks and Abram, understands the spilling of properties from body to body as a kind of mimesis, and suggests that mimicry (of either a voluntary or involuntary nature) forms the very basis of communication across animal and non-animal life forms. Citing Foucault, Gibbs proposes that “mimicry is not a representation of the other but a *rendering* – a relation between things in ‘which, like a flash, similarity appears’” (Foucault as quoted in Gibbs, 2010, p. 193). This phrase sketches mimesis as a non-mastering phenomenon that does not require an exhaustive understanding of the other (nor a consensus) to take place, but that involves a momentary alignment, a momentary sharing of form, between two different and never-entirely-knowable organisms.

Sarah Pink, who has spent time filming people's laundry routines from what she has defined as a “sensory ethnography” perspective, also talks about “attunement” to the physicalities of others, and evokes a kind of mimesis when she describes her own and fellow ethnographers' practice of “(audio)visual sensory apprenticeship”. She gives the example of ethnographer Cristina Grasseni who, seeking to understand the practices of Italian cattle inspectors, used audiovisual media “to access, or attune herself to, the visual

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<sup>22</sup> In her later work on unfolding and enfolding aesthetics, Marks returns to some of these ideas: she suggests that where mediating technologies frustrate vision, they “thicken the mediating space, allowing the history of the image to speak” (Marks, 2014, p. 158). They also remind us that these mediating technologies have “unfolded” only a tiny part of an “infinite” world, most of which remains “enfolded”, secret from us.

(multisensorial) practices of the people whose understandings she was seeking to participate in – in her words, to learn to share an 'aesthetic code'" (Pink, 2009, p. 10). Adopting the looking practices of others through a participatory mimesis allowed Grasseni to understand things about their values and practices that she might otherwise not have. Laura U. Marks differentiates between the desire to understand the workings of the world through writing or filmmaking, and the desire to "caress" it, or to "rest on [its] surface" – undergoing a contact without full comprehension (Marks, 2002, p. 9). While understanding the values and practices of other people was not as central to my video practice as brushing up closely to them in the way Marks describes, Pink's reflections do tell us something about the power of mimesis to connect us to the consciousness of others.

In his seminal text, *Mimesis and Alterity*, Michael Taussig also associates affect with mimesis. He distinguishes between two layers in the mimetic process, the first layer involving a copying or imitation, and the second constituting "a palpable, sensuous connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived" (Taussig, 1993, p. 21). "The model [or the copy]," he suggests, "gains through its sensuous fidelity something of the power and personality of that of which it is a model", and is therefore capable of producing the same physical effects (and/or affects) as that original (Taussig, 1993, p. 16). Connecting Taussig's ideas to documentary film, Anne Rutherford describes this second aspect of mimesis as "a kind of contact—a mode of sensory, tactile perception that [...] closes the gap between the spectator and image, and generates a bodily response in the viewer, a kind of 'visceral experience' that is experienced as a 'porousness' between one's own body and the image" (Rutherford, 2003, p. 127). She also connects Taussig's work to Walter Benjamin's earlier writing on "mimetic innervation" – an affective, mimetic response to the external world where psychic experiences are translated into somatic experiences, and vice versa.

Miriam Hansen notes that, for Benjamin, mimetic innervation involved a two-way exchange of energies, so that the boundary or "rind" of the ego was less an armour, and more a "matrix or a medium — a porous interface between the organism and the world that would allow for greater mobility and circulation of psychic energies" (Hansen, 1999, p. 317). She writes that this concept had important implications for film theory because it described "a physiologically 'contagious' or 'infectious' movement that would trigger emotional effects in the viewer, a form of mimetic identification based in the phenomenon known as the Carpenter Effect" (Hansen, 1999, p. 318). The "Carpenter Effect" was one of the earliest references to what would later become known as kinaesthetic empathy, a phenomenon in perception where the perceiver's body mimics the movements or sensations observed in others' bodies, and thus shares in their kinaesthetic and affective experience through a set of lightning-fast and often involuntary physiological processes (Foster, 2011; Gallese & Guerra, 2012; Raz & Hendler, 2014).

The search for resonances between bodies of all kinds (animal, vegetable, mineral, liquid) is central to BodyWeather practice. Citing BodyWeather founder Min Tanaka, Peter Snow relays, “We had better regard our body not as an independent entity but as a medium resonating with the world with a rather complex and multilevel frequency” (Tanaka as quoted in Snow, 2003, p. 51). Marnie Orr and Rachael Sweeney, two BodyWeather practitioners who collaborate across Western Australia and the UK, similarly describe choreography as a *transfer of properties* between dancer and environment (Sweeney & Orr, 2011, unpaginated). To bring back Abrams, “things speak themselves” within the BodyWeather practitioner, and the theme that emerges from these quotations is a sense of the buzzing solubility of one's own boundaries as a dancer.

## Redistributed Competency

Another major aim that influenced the development of my score for camera movement, and that follows on from the ideas assembled here so far, was to decrease the distance between human and non-human beings with respect to their agency and perceived vibrancy in the video improvisations.

Citing the work of Jane Bennett and Graham Harman, Paula Kramer positions the site-specific dancer as “vibrant matter among vibrant matter” (Kramer, 2012, p. 90). This dancer is not engaged in a duet between themselves and the “world”, but in a multi-player dance involving all kinds of diverse materials, across which agency (or, the power to act) is more evenly distributed. Kramer calls this a “post-humanist – yet experiential – positioning, which invites shared agency between humans and non-humans, an overall blossoming of all kinds of materials (Bennett) [*sic*] and a decisive acknowledgement of unknowable and autonomous aspects of the world” (Kramer, 2012, p. 84).

A similar redistribution of importance, or competency, takes place in theories which break down common conceptions of the body that identify the brain as the epicentre of thinking, and the eyes as the sole site of seeing. A de-hierarchised sense of bodily functioning holds that thinking is a full-body activity, and that vision is deeply bound up with the other senses. Interestingly, thinkers like Paula Kramer, David Abram, Max Wertheimer, Laura U. Marks, Anne Rutherford, and others who will appear throughout this exegesis, flatten out hierarchies of agency and competency pertaining to both the functioning of the human body, and to the greater spectrum of bodies, species and materials. This dual movement, which treats the body as an integrated whole and submerges human agency in an ecology where deeply different and yet equally important modes of being and knowing intersect, is wonderfully summed up in swarm theory.

## Swarm Theory

I first thought closely about swarms in 2012, during a ten-day research residency in Sydney headed by Australian BodyWeather pioneer Tess De Quincey. The residency was titled “Swarm Bodies” and explored, through movement, how groups of non-human animals (birds, fish, larvae) *think together* at high speed, evidencing a distributed intelligence that hinges on communication between, and active participation of, all involved. It also investigated the human body as a potential swarm made up of millions of individual cells with a collective intelligence. De Quincey worked with a group of performers, most of whom had a background in BodyWeather, and I was involved as an audiovisual documenter, making video recordings during four of the ten days.

This residency was based partly on De Quincey’s previous movement research, conducted in three outdoor laboratories collectively titled “Triple Alice” in the Central Australian desert between 1999 and 2001. It was also significantly shaped by certain texts on swarms that her co-researchers shared with each other during this earlier research period. One of these texts was a paper by Danish bio-semiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer, “The Swarming Body”, presented in 1994 at Berkeley University.

Drawing on a background in biochemistry, Hoffmeyer shows how cells and molecules work together to constitute what he calls a “somatic ecology” that works in a “striking state of breakneck harmony” (Hoffmeyer, 1997, p. 938). He begins by explaining how swarms work in nature. A swarm is a set of mobile agents that stick relatively closely together, that communicate with each other either directly or indirectly (by acting on their “local environment”), and that engage in distributed problem solving.<sup>23</sup> Next, he introduces the concept of the body as a swarm of cells – a “swarm of swarms”, even, because unlike a bee colony where all the agents are very similar, the cells making up the human body vary greatly (Hoffmeyer, 1997, p. 938). He then considers the immune system which, with its mobile and communicative cells, plays a central role in drawing the body together into harmonious problem solving. Cells in the immune system have what he calls “semiotic competency”: they can read signals via receptors (neuropeptides) on their surface and weigh up how to respond to those signals based on their individual histories. They can then translate these signals into biochemical processes inside themselves. Besides reading signals and making decisions, these cells can also recognise what is native or foreign to them – this is how the immune system produces antibodies. In this way, the immune system actually *communicates with itself*, as well as with the nervous system, which has similar capacities. Hoffmeyer marvels,

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<sup>23</sup> Here I assume Hoffmeyer means that agents communicate with each other “indirectly” by conveying messages to their immediate neighbours, which then ripple outwards through the swarm (Hoffmeyer, 1997, p. 937).

Gradually a new image arises in which the brain is functionally integrated into the body [...] Swarms of immune cells interact with swarms of nerve cells in maintaining the somatic ecology. The view of a centralised authority in the brain controlling the ignorant body fades out of sight and is replaced by an interactive organisation based upon the distributed problem solving capacity of myriads of cell swarms working in parallel. (Hoffmeyer, 1997, p. 939)

This "new image" of the human body suggests that units (or agents) which may not usually be described as expressive or intelligent, in fact *are*. Hoffmeyer concludes that intelligence is thus better understood as something distributed across "decentralised units" (which possess "semiotic competence", just like "centred" or culturally prioritised units do), and that "subjectivity – or better 'subjectness' – is not an either-or but a more-or-less phenomenon" (Hoffmeyer, 1997, p. 940).

These conclusions informed the development of *Washing Lines* in two ways: first, they reinforced my sense that the body of the improvising cinematographer harbours a distributed intelligence, such that vision and thinking are not localised in the head; and second, in my filmic portrayal of domestic places and human routines, they reminded me to consider the potential subjectivity and semiotic competency of "decentralised units" – the vibrancy and intelligence of ankles, bees, spider webs, shadows.

## Desire

In many of the writings assembled so far, I sense a desire to press up closely to the material world – a "cherishing" of "things, people and moments [which] age and die and can never be duplicated" (Marks, 2002, p. xii).

I relate intensely to these feelings – to the desire to press up closely to the world, and also, specifically, to the desirousness of haptic cinematic experiences. Thus, one of the main reasons I seek to cultivate a haptic and 'non-mastering' sensibility in my camera work is because of how a haptic vision disarms me, both as a camera operator and as a viewer, flooding me with affects. I hope that developing video production techniques characterised by this sensibility will allow for the production of videos that bear audiovisual traces of this desire, and that these traces invite viewers into affective relationship with the places and subjects they see on screen.

I would like now to briefly discuss two films that I think invite a haptic, desirous engagement with place, and that exhibit an ethic of "non-mastery" by reducing the distance between human and non-human agency. The first is Tran Anh Hung's film, *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993). This film tells the story of Mui, a contemplative child employed as a servant in a household several years prior to the Vietnamese war. Mui takes delight in the sensory details of her work – the smell of the papaya tree, the crackle of the fire – and she looks after the house insects, who are either neglected or sadistically

tortured by other members of the household. The narrative is spacious, leaving room for regular close-up shots of ants at work, a frog in a pot-plant, a cricket. When following humans around the house, the camera is often side-tracked by non-human entities, or the human is swallowed up by the house, disappearing behind furniture, behind a screen or a wall. The film's sound design accentuates the texture and weight of objects and materials, and foregrounds non-human life – the sounds of birds, insects and frogs permeate every scene. In all of these ways, the film pays loving attention to the non-human presences and the sensory particulars of Mui's world.

Another example is Andrea Arnold's adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* (2011). It creates an enveloping, sensory world in which human activity is now prominent, now firmly sidelined. A lost and homeless boy, Heathcliff, is taken in by a hardworking family who live in a cottage dwarfed by the rolling, wet Yorkshire moors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Heathcliff develops an intense bond with his foster-sister, Cathy, but is never treated as one of the family's own. Developments in Cathy's life separate them, and change their relationship profoundly.

The sensory (or mimetic) immersion we experience in the film is such that the wetness of the remote Yorkshire setting can almost be felt as a dampness in my own clothes. When Cathy visits her horse on a sunny morning, I am acutely aware of the warmth of the light, of the hard metal of the horse's bridle; I can almost *feel* its velvety ears between my fingers. When Cathy and Heathcliff wrestle in a rainy paddock I can all but *taste* the mud in my mouth. Even when we are indoors in the film, the outdoors are somehow with us – water trickles and the wind wraps itself around the house. The weather seems to leak into everything.

Sound design plays a large part in creating these generous sensory encounters with weather and materials. Noises that would usually be at a low volume in a film sound mix – wind, boots scuffing over grass, the jangle of a horse's bridle – are foregrounded, giving a sense of the weight and texture of things. The infrequent human dialogue, on the other hand, is submerged in the film's aural tapestry, one thread among many.

The film's cinematography also contributes to a sensory and place-oriented aesthetic, moving between extreme close-ups that reveal the texture and volume of things, and wide shots of sprawling landscapes in which human movements are only just detectable. The video edit prioritises atmosphere as much as the development of a plot: shots that drive the story forward are interspersed with shots that thicken my sense of place and time. These shots revel in haptic details (the twinkle of a glass chandelier in the morning sunlight as Heathcliff presses Cathy to him after many years apart), and attend to non-human trajectories that occur around the human narrative (a flock of birds pulling through the sky; a yellow moth butting its head against a windowpane).



These two examples also point to the role that duration plays in fostering affective experiences. I discuss the relationship between temporality and affect in more detail in Chapter Five.

## Some Thoughts on Immersion

*Wuthering Heights* does something to me as a viewer that I aspire to do as a filmmaker: it produces a sensory immersion in a mediated place. The video improvisations that gave rise to *Washing Lines* were undertaken in the hope that attending to my own sensory immersion in place as a cinematographer might produce videos which invite viewers into a corporeally immersed relationship with the places and people I am filming.

In their chapter on immersion in new media performance, Rosemary Klich and Edward Scheer differentiate between cognitive and sensory immersion. Cognitive immersion involves a projection of the self into a fictive world whose processes of mediation have become transparent, such that a viewer feels they have immediate access to that world. Sensory immersion, on the other hand, occurs where media texts and performances draw attention to their own mediation, immersing the viewer in their present, real-time experience (Klich & Scheer, 2012). Where cognitive immersive experiences may invite viewers to forget where they are, sensory immersive experiences ask their viewers to remember where they are. Here Klich and Scheer draw on Bolter and Grusin's distinction between "immediacy" (mediation that makes itself invisible), and "hypermediacy" (mediation that multiplies and draws attention to itself).

Klich and Scheer write, "the difference between these modes of engagement can be envisaged spatially: [cognitive immersion] involves 'plunging into' an alternative space, whereas [sensory immersion ...] create[s] a sensory experience that builds on the immediate moment, and that does not require the forgetting of the self" (Klich & Scheer, 2012, p. 132). I am reminded here of Marks's description of haptic images that resist a "plunging into depth", so that the viewer's gaze might instead caress their surface (Marks, 2002, p. 8). Klich and Scheer suggest that works which emphasise the present moment of spectatorship through hypermediation provide increased opportunities for interactivity, and a heightened sense of embodiment. Yet they also note that performances and media works can aim to produce both kinds of experiences simultaneously, and that "cognitive immersion" may involve sensory experiences – in other words, that it *may still engage the senses*.

It is this dimension of cognitive immersion – its sensory dimension – that the improvisations leading to *Washing Lines* sought to explore from the outset. The development of this portrait series consistently proceeded with the underlying belief that cognitive and corporeal processes are profoundly entangled, and that experiences of "cognitive immersion" and "plunging into depth" are therefore always somehow corporeal.

It also proceeded with the belief that "immediate" or imaginative encounters with fictional worlds provide opportunities for viewers to be interactive, and that interjections from viewers' personal lives may imbue fictional, materially rich worlds with additional meaning.

Engaging with the thoughts of Marks, Klich and Scheer on surface and depth in media texts has helped to clarify how, specifically, I interpret Marks's term, the "haptic". I understand it as something that may be experienced in relation to the materials of the world mediated by a film, *and* as something experienced in relation to the materiality of the medium itself (and, as a corollary to this, the materiality of my body as I watch and listen). These ideas also reinforce my sense that, during the early development of a camera movement score, I sought to make myself invisible as a mediator in the hope of facilitating an "immediate" connection to the places and subjects I was making recordings of. It was only quite deep into Activity 7 (which consisted of many video shoots) that I would begin to explore hypermediacy – or, to consider letting an audience in on the creative process so central to this project. Moving past an initial emphasis on immediacy, I started to pursue a mode of portraiture that invited both a plunging into depth (an immersion in the world conveyed on screen), and an appreciation of mediation, sensing that this dual immersion might indeed produce "feelings of fullness, a satiety of experience" (Bolter & Grusin as quoted in Klich & Scheer, 2012, p. 134). Doing so, I believe, has expanded the sensory and affective potential of the videos comprising *Washing Lines*.

The "non-mastering" and "haptic" sensibilities described above can also be understood as a set of "bodily dispositions" that were cultivated during the various iterations leading to the production of *Washing Lines*. By "disposition" I mean an overall sensibility, a quality of attention and bodily engagement, a certain posture or comportment in relation to the world. The notion of a "bodily disposition" has something in common with Stuart Grant's understanding of the concept of "attunement" found in Heidegger's philosophical writing. Grant describes Heidegger's attempts to find not so much new philosophical ideas as new ways of *doing philosophy* that worked from a place of uncertainty. In order to do philosophy in a new way, Heidegger was in pursuit of "a fundamental manner and a fundamental way of being" that were "attuned" to a mood of uncertainty (Grant, 2014, p. 138) – a specific and as yet unfamiliar philosophical disposition.

Drawing on experiences in BodyWeather, Contact Improvisation and Taiko percussion, and drawing inspiration from the practices of documentary cinematographers who approach their camera work as a holistic movement schema, such as Leonard Retel Helmrich, I sought an affective and potentially novel way of engaging cinematographically with place by considering the disposition – or attunement – of the *whole* improvising handheld camera operator in the moment of site-specific improvisation. These dispositions were pursued throughout Activities 5 and 6, and were most successfully developed in Activity 7. As I discuss in later chapters, I would develop a more nuanced

perspective on some of these dispositions later on, but in their initial form they were valuable in laying the groundwork for the compositional approach taken in *Washing Lines*.

## Bodily Dispositions

### 1. Receptivity – 'Letting things arise'

I want to begin with what I feel is perhaps the most significant "bodily disposition" encountered while mediating *Washing Lines*, and that is a receptivity to the surrounding environment.

Paula Kramer draws on the work of dancer Bettina Mainz to differentiate between *reception* and *perception*. Mainz, she explains, defines perception as sending one's attention out into the environment intentionally, and reception as letting the environment seep into oneself. While the term "perception" may lend itself to many other interpretations (including receptive ones), the emphasis on loosening one's grip on specific intentions, *in order to better receive*, is valuable here. Kramer proposes that an awareness of what is happening around you, combined with a relaxed, receptive posture and quality of attention, can produce a dynamic in site-specific performance where "agents in our surroundings come towards us, thus 'arising,'" rather than a situation in which we "[have] to reach out, notice, pin down or – foreclosing even more information – understand all that is going on" (Kramer, 2012, p. 86).

Kramer's pursuit of a relaxed and receptive mode of attention, in which possibilities "arise" rather than being hunted down, reminds me of Rosalind Crisp's description of discovering, while conducting her Masters research, what she termed the "easy focus" that occurred when she resisted the desire to "force" her investigations. "Gradually, out of the bottom of my desire and interest \_ [sic] which is breath, which is the total absence of forcing and 'looking' for something, I come into an easy focus and follow things." (Crisp, 1998, p. 14)

Stuart Grant's definition of "attunement" as a "being moved by", or a "moving with", can also be applied to this idea of receptivity. We might understand receptivity as an "attunement" to the rhythms of another body, or to the mood of a place, that requires a willingness to "be taken over by" or "moved by", or to "move with", something else.

As I note in Chapter One, "moving with" and "being moved by" are key principles in BodyWeather practice. One BodyWeather exercise that makes the value of receptivity particularly clear to me is an exercise conducted in pairs, with a piece of sewing thread. One person is blindfolded and led around in space by the other person via the thread. Each person in the pairing holds one end of the thread between their fingertips; speech is

not permitted, so the thread becomes the sole conduit for communication between the leader and the led. One quickly learns that it is crucial in this exercise to maintain a relaxed muscle tone throughout the body (/mind), and especially in the wrist: relaxing it allows for the reading of much smaller, subtler cues through the thread. It is easy to forget this, and I often have to remind myself mid-exercise to loosen up. In the group discussions that often follow such an exercise, reports of a struggle to maintain looseness and receptivity are frequent, indicating that this "receptive" disposition requires intentional cultivation for many of us.

Although receptivity was a familiar experience in the context of certain dance practices, it was a great challenge to apply it to camera work. In particular, it was my habit to tighten up and become anxious about what events I may be missing while making the choices that I did. As I describe in more detail later, I would find myself "hunting" the scene for action, or for things I found beautiful to look at, and the psychic geography of this hunt would inform the camera movement more than what was unfolding around me.

This active searching was something I initially tried to eradicate altogether, in search of a pure receptivity. While this was an important phase in the development of an improvised camera methodology that would eventually support the rest of my enquiry, I would gradually recover the perspective that receptivity often exists in a productive tension with intention. In BodyWeather and Contact Improvisation and other practices that prioritise "receptivity", it is rarely expected that one would *only ever* let things arise. The task is to balance receptivity to one's environment with specific experimental intentions – to do two things at once: to let things arise, *and* to explore the possibilities within a given movement task or "score". Trying to find the balance is not easy, and the tendency is to push harder than is desirable (to start forcing things), or to become so immersed in what is arising that the ability to multitask and attend to my intentions is lost. The line goes slack, to invoke the BodyWeather exercise with the string. This is perhaps *the most* challenging part of receptive, improvised composition: striking a balance between receptivity and intentionality, between immersion and reflexivity, and the cognitive multi-tasking that it requires.

Another disposition that emerged in tandem with the development of parameters for improvised camera movement in *Washing Lines* was the ability to respond to the environment with the full range of my senses, and consequently to engage my eyesight in a softer, less fixating way. Engaging an analogy used by Anne Rutherford, I refer to this as "Millipede Sensing".

## 2. Millipede Sensing

Drawing on James Gibson's "ecological approach to perception", Rutherford entertains the possibility of a cinema that enables embodied, *full-bodied*, experiences. She describes

a form of perception "more akin to a millipede than to a camera", the millipede's "thousand tentacles feeling their way through a space rather than a single lens taking it in view" (Rutherford, 2006, p. 135). This multi-sensory vision engages the inner ear system (which regulates our sense of balance, and of up and down) and the entire proprioceptive nervous system (through which we sense movement in our bodies and know roughly where our limbs are in space, even when we can't see them): sight is integrated into a complex network of sensory experiences, and absorbs information from both "outside" and "inside" the body (Rutherford, 2006, p. 135). In a "millipede" understanding of sensation, the human skin is not a sack separating the self from the world, but is a "membrane that mediates a contact [...] that can respond to the flux of textures, of temperatures, can glow, can bristle and tremble, can even relinquish its boundaries in an osmosis of feeling and sensation" (Rutherford, 2006, p. 139).

Sarah Pink and Kerstin Leder-Mackley suggest that an imaginative empathy is what allows viewers to transform visual media into multisensory experience – that "seeing and hearing can lead researchers and viewers to empathize with and imagine multisensory embodied experiences and not simply the aural and visual worlds of others" (Pink & Leder-Mackley, 2012, p. 4.1). They add that this requires a certain volition on the part of the viewer, who must willingly "take on the viewing position that generates such ways of knowing and learning" (Pink & Leder-Mackley, 2012, p. 4.3). So, a willingness to meet the world empathetically and imaginatively is key — and this willingness might underpin all of the bodily dispositions I am describing here.

In conjunction with her perspectives on the senses, Rutherford proposes an alternative way of thinking about *mise-en-scene* in cinema. She proposes that we approach *mise-en-scene* not as a matter of what objects are "put into the frame", but of what "experiences are put into the film" (Rutherford, 2006, p. 151), and that we approach the video frame as a field of "sensory intensities" instead of a container of discrete objects (Rutherford, 2006, p. 152).

This kind of sensing, feelers stretched outwards (and inwards) to glean information from the world, is used often in Contact Improvisation. In this dance form, I establish points of physical contact with another body and begin to give and receive weight in an improvised play with the mechanics of our respective bodies in relation to gravity. As weight rolls around, is poured from body into body (and always also into the floor), I must open my whole body to receive haptic information about the other person's activity. Looking with my eyes will only help me so much. In fact, it often throws me off course as I start to incorrectly pre-empt what my partner will do next based on what I can see, rather than on what I can feel. The far more reliable way of ascertaining where my partner will go next is through my nerves, which are open at every point to receive touch-based information. Thus, seeing is conducted in broader strokes, feeling in finer strokes. (Where exactly on my shoulder blade is the other person leaning into me? Just how much weight can I pour

onto their skeletal/muscular structure at this point?) I usually keep my eyes open in a "soft vision" that does not fixate on things. Sight is there as a safety net in order to avoid a collision and to remind me where the floor is if I fall and need to catch my own weight. With extensive contact between bodies and an attempted full-body attentiveness, corporeal boundaries start to feel more permeable and a transference of sensibilities begins to take place. I notice, sometimes, that when I dance with a more experienced improviser, my own skill level rises to meet theirs, instantiating a spill of properties, as Anna Gibbs and performance researchers Orr and Sweeney might put it, from body to body.

Activities 5, 6 and 7 were characterised by a search for this bodily disposition, too — I sought a way of operating the camera that involved a haptic responsiveness to the motion of my surroundings and that engaged the senses as a "unified system of access" to the world (MacDougall, 1998, p. 50). As I will describe in more detail shortly, the score employed in Activity 5 did not facilitate this very effectively. Yet the score for Activity 6, which centered around the options of "moving with (others)" and "anchoring" myself in space, began to invite both a more haptic responsiveness to my environment, and a mimicry that allowed for the "spill of properties" from body to body — as the aim of "moving with" (which is closely aligned to the aim of "moving *as*") suggests. The score used for Activity 7 retained the aim of moving with, but featured options for movement that were phrased as decisions involving the management of one's bodily weight. This invited an even more embodied way of responding to my environment, as decisions began to feel less like questions of what should be put into the frame, and more like questions of how I should throw my weight around in order to participate with the movement of my surroundings. This final version of the score thus facilitated a responsiveness with the camera to the mass and momentum of bodies in my environment.

### 3. Peripheral Vision

A sensitised peripheral vision is key to the kind of sensing I describe above.

The value of peripheral vision became apparent to me during a Taiko drumming class in early 2016, when I had only just started learning the form and was taking an eight-week beginner course. Taiko is a style of Japanese drumming that is dancerly and athletic. Originally played only in temples and at royal ceremonies, Taiko is now performed in concert halls and practised by dedicated companies all over the world. The drums vary greatly in size, and proportionately sized sticks and muscular strength are required to push sound through them. Taiko emphasises *ma* – the negative space between parts. The way you organise your body around the drum *between* strokes is a crucial part of the form: it affects the quality of the sound, but also makes up an important part of the visual and (kin-) aesthetic experience of watching a group play.

About halfway through the eight-week course, we had a session with a different teacher – Tom Royce-Hampton. He revisited basic technique with us: grip, stroke, stance. As I have come to experience often, learning from teachers with different approaches and ways of articulating things can lead to a deepened understanding of particular aspects of the form. With reference to traditional Japanese aesthetic concepts, Tom concentrated on the arc you paint with the stick as you bring it high above your head, its curved and accelerating descent on the way down, and especially the way your weight should drop through your legs as this happens. We should not just focus on dropping our arms, or dropping weight into the drum, but focus on dropping weight vertically through our entire bodies. The hit, when the *bachi* (drum sticks) make contact with the skin of the drum, should feel like a flick, or a controlled flop. He got us to put down our sticks and practice lifting and dropping our arms, and dropping our weight down through our legs by bending slightly through softened knees whenever we brought an arm down. From there, we launched into the *renshu* – the warm up. We followed his lead, alternating between playing in unison and playing a call-and-response pattern.

Learning the technique all over again, and with a different emphasis, made me very conscious of myself. There were short periods where I felt a sense of flow, a sense that I was meeting the challenge of each stroke successfully, but I was constantly questioning whether I was doing it right. I tried focusing on specific parts of my body: my grip, my shoulders, my knees, the tips of my *bachi*. My attention shuttled to and fro.

Some time into the *renshu* it occurred to me: *watch him*. I was already aware by then that when I copy a teacher (or someone with more experience in a physical practice than I) *in real time*, a mimetic transference of skills kicks in and I start to perform better.

So I watched Tom. I looked at his *bachi*, his shoulders, his grip, his posture. It didn't really help me. If anything it made me more self-conscious and confused about my own playing. Then I shifted my eyes across, looked vaguely into the centre of the semi-circle of drums and players. Tim was still there, but on the edge of my field of vision, blurry. Now I was somehow able to see the whole of him. *Now* it started to happen. Glimpsing all of him without looking directly *at* him allowed me to really catch how his body moved. I caught the flick, the whip-through of his whole skeleton. Dropping down through the knees first, pulling the rest of his body down in quick succession, whipping the *bachi* into the skin of the drum. It looked delicious, like it felt delicious to do. And even as I was seeing him, holding him there at the edge of my field of vision, I noticed a shift in my own body. I was doing it. *Whip! lift, Whip! lift, Whip! lift, Whip! lift, Whip! lift. Whip! "Ha!" Whip! "Ha" Whip! "Ha!" Whip! "Ha!"* Shouting the morale-boosting verbal cues, the *kakegoe*, between the strokes.

As I described above, throughout Activities 5, 6 and 7 I slowly moved towards a less visually fixated, and more embodied way of composing with a moving camera. I tried hard to cultivate an almost absent-minded, broad-strokes eyesight in which I was not hunting

or reading the frame so much as gazing in its general direction, my experience constituted by much more than visual information alone. What I did often catch, visually, through this broad-strokes eyesight, was an overall sense of how the environment was moving, physically. This allowed for the emergence of information about how to move, or respond, which remained latent when trying to break my surroundings down visually into parts with different meanings. Thus, as the following section of this chapter describes in detail, Activities 5 through 7 led me from a focus on what things should be put in the frame, towards a focus on what experiences should be put into the film – or, what kind of dance should shape the recording.

## Learning to See Differently Through Iterative Practice

### Setting the Stage

As I noted in Chapter One, the development of these "bodily dispositions", which began during Activity 5 and continued throughout Activities 6 and 7, involved the narrowing and focusing of a set of creative methodologies that was initially much broader. In Activity 5 I explored how to foster kinaesthetic empathy, or inter-corporeal resonances, by filming my participants one at a time while they conducted domestic routines in their homes. In Activity 6 I filmed two participants in sprawling outdoor locations while they engaged in dance-based, sensory exercises. For Activity 7 I returned to domestic environments, where the improvised exercise shaping *Washing Lines* was established: I repeatedly filmed participants while they hung out their washing to dry, and later added the element of playing back the footage to them after they had completed it, while they improvised a voiceover commentary on the video. Throughout these activities, the question of what camera movement methodology would best support the bodily dispositions described above became central.

Two underlying factors informed my camera work as I searched for the right method. One was my aim to be *seduced* by the places I was filming as the footage moved through the viewfinder: to be drawn onwards through a scenario by desire, feelingful associations or sensory arousal. There is a precedent here in Theo Angelopoulos's filmmaking practice. He sought out filming locations that aroused his senses, in the belief that his own sensory arousal by a place would invite audiences to engage on a sensory level, too. Anne Rutherford wrote, "Affective engagement is central to Angelopoulos's own description of his process of filming, which he characterizes above all as a process of bringing into play the full sensory registers of his own experience, in order that he can evoke this awakening in his audience" (Rutherford, 2006, p. 148).



Another intention informing my early searching, as I have already noted, was the aim of drawing as little attention to myself as camera operator as possible. I wanted to minimise the imprint of my own decision-making on the footage I produced. The aim of this was not to achieve a "true" representation of events, but to get myself "out of the way" of the viewer's experience of a scenario, and to attain a more "immediate" than "hypermediated" mode of filmmaking. Later iterations would allow for my active thinking to be detectable, as I noticed my own joy at watching films that offered clues about their material becoming while also showing me a "world" in which I could immerse myself. I would realise, too, that allowing my own presence to be detectable in these films would permit a bolder and more playful experimentation with the camera.

## *Moving With, Anchoring and Transition Points:* Towards a Responsive Score

As I explain in Chapter One, my human subjects and I worked to a repeating one-minute timer during Activity 5. While they listened for one-minute cues to switch between doing their daily routine at one millimetre per second (*bisoku* speed), and at their regular pace, I listened for two-minute cues relating to my camera movement. Every two minutes (or, every two beeps of the timer) I would change my proximity in relation to the person I was filming. Two minutes at close-up range, two minutes at mid-range, and two minutes at a long shot range. When I was shooting at long range, I would anchor myself in the space, planting my feet and seeking stillness with the camera. When shooting at closer range I would move through the space alongside the participant. These cues formed the first version of my "score" for the camera (see Video Appendix E).

I implemented this score with four different participants, and from the outset experienced regular uncertainty and discomfort working within it. I often felt tempted to linger at one proximity for longer than the two minutes dictated by the timer, and, with occasional exceptions, did not feel particularly seduced by most of the footage I was seeing in the viewfinder within this score. Throughout the iterations of this activity, and through reflection between iterations, it gradually became clear to me that a score determined by fixed shot sizes and timed intervals might perhaps not be compatible with my intentions. Working with fixed shot sizes and timed intervals did not allow much room to be receptive to the proximities and timings emerging from my surroundings. It also foregrounded the frame as a container, encouraging a compositional approach focused on what would visually land inside the frame, rather than drawing my attention to what experiences, or shared dances, would shape the recording as a whole. The bodily dispositions described above struggled to find their way into this initial set of parameters.

For Activity 6 I changed the score significantly. I had noticed as early as the first iteration of Activity 5 that, as a camera operator, I had the options of (a) following the human subject through their environment at close range, or (b) anchoring myself in place and letting them move through the frame. It was also already clear to me that these two options could form the basis of a movement score. I had implemented this to a limited degree during Activity 5, but for Activity 6 I made it the centre of my score. In this new schema there were no timed intervals or prescribed shot sizes, there were simply two options: "moving with [the human]" and "anchoring" myself (or, put differently, moving with, or at the pace of, *place*). I let myself switch between these modes whenever I felt like it.

"Whenever I felt like it" quickly became a point of uncertainty in Activity 6. I noticed that some transitions from "moving with" to "anchoring" felt a little forced, or felt at odds with what was happening around me. Other transitions felt compatible with what was happening, and almost like a "natural" response. A new aspect of the score emerged: listening out for "transition points". Seeking a "receptive" listening to what was happening around me, I would try to catch the right moment to make the transition from "moving with" to "anchoring", and vice versa (see Video Appendix F).

By the end of Activity 6, which consisted of two separate shoots, I was only partially satisfied with the score and my way of inhabiting it. While listening-out for transition points constituted a much more "receptive" cinematographic method than adhering to the timed intervals of Activity 5, I was still engaging with the tasks I set myself in a very cerebral way. I kept asking myself what this phrase, "moving with", actually meant, and second-guessing my interpretation of it mid-shoot.

After Activity 6 I took an extended break from filming to focus on other aspects of the research. Upon returning to the camera work nearly a year later, I would discover new language to incorporate into the score which retained the aim of "moving with" entities in place, but reduced the amount of cerebral analysis occurring mid-improvisation, and which bore me towards a closer approximation of the bodily dispositions I hoped to cultivate. Before I describe the next phase in developing a camera score, however, I want to focus on one of the major challenges I experienced during Activities 5 and 6, which will help to clarify the evolution that happened in Activity 7.

## *Getting Stranded* and the Struggle to Recognise Vibrant Matter

During Activity 5 it sometimes happened that a person would go somewhere I couldn't follow – into a wet or sandy place that was hazardous for the camera, or into a narrow space that didn't accommodate two bodies. Or sometimes a person would travel away

from the camera faster than I could travel with them. In these moments, what I identified as the “action” in the scene seemed to slip away from me. This made me anxious and distracted, and my commitment to the score would wane as I fervently wished for the human to return to me, to get me back “on track”. The feeling was distinctly one of being “stranded”, and I started to use this term – *getting stranded* – to describe it. Most often this happened when I had “anchored” myself: once I had committed to doing so, a person might run to climb a windy sand dune (see Video Appendix G), or leave the room, and I would be left with what I then experienced as an alarmingly “empty space” – even though on an intellectual level I already knew better than to think it was empty.

Part of what alarmed me was that there were no potential “transition points” in sight: no opportunities to switch from anchoring back into movement, as this required that something be moving in my environment. Humanless spaces may also have alarmed me because Activities 5 and 6 were initially designed to test the hypothesis that, by watching other humans undergo sensory experiences on screen, viewers would empathise with them and thus access, or mimic, some of those sensory experiences in their own bodies. Yet these “strandings” also revealed my own tendency to locate affect, expressivity and filmic “action” in human bodies.

Inspired by experiences in BodyWeather and Contact Improvisation that revealed the value of honouring constraints, I tried to commit to being “stranded” at the whim of my score. I tried *not* to baulk, *not* to struggle when its constraints made me uncomfortable, and when I got left behind with a humanless crowd. Time and time again, I would fail at this. I would wait a painful minute (if that) and then run after the person who had left the room, only to find they were already on their way back towards me. I would call out to my participants, who had ascended the sand dunes, asking them to come down. Reluctantly, they would. In these instances, I broke away from the score knowing, *even as I did it*, that honouring the score would probably have been more fruitful. While I knew in theory that a humanless landscape was vibrant, and that it possessed a degree of subjectness, it was harder than expected to make this broadened sense of subjectivity my default disposition as a handheld camera operator.

## *Hooking, Catching Rides, Linger*ing and being ‘Left in the Lurch’: Weighted Vision and Redistributed Competency

After nearly a year’s break from these activities, I returned to the same score for camera movement and found that I was inhabiting it in a distinctly different way. I had decided to conduct a “practice shoot” at home, as a way of re-familiarising myself with the score. I filmed my partner doing two domestic tasks – cooking, and then hanging out laundry. This “practice run” turned out to be a turning point. Working with the same vocabulary

developed during Activity 6, I found that states of “anchoring”, “moving with”, “transition points” and “strandedness” were at play in a more fluid and, I would discover, *weight-based* way. I discovered that I could let myself be *pulled around* by my partner’s movements in the kitchen and under the rotary hoist in our garden. Sometimes their movement would pull me over to a certain place (creating a camera angle that framed the edge of a window or a patch of wall, for example), and then would flit out of the frame fast, leaving me behind. I would previously have identified this as strandedness. But I noticed that this was actually an *opportunity* to be still with a part of the environment I might not otherwise have contemplated with my camera; it was an opportunity to “anchor” myself momentarily – or, as I would come to think of it (with a changing vocabulary), to “linger” with something. And only momentarily because, before too long, something – some movement in the environment, usually my partner’s – would pull me back into the fold. What had felt like *strandedness*, in all its finality, now felt more productive, and more temporary.

With amusement I decided to change the name for this experience. It was no longer a getting “stranded”, but a getting “left in the lurch”, which produced an opportunity to “linger” somewhere. Being “left in the lurch” is similar to getting “stranded” – it suggests being left behind, being left high and dry. But when I think about what the movement of lurching feels like to me, I imagine it differently: it is a swinging off one’s centre of balance, a leaning over a precipice, *from which one can return*. “Lingering” suggests the desire to stay somewhere just a moment longer, before traveling on. This hanging back creates openings “into which environmental and imagined life may stream” (Krakauer as quoted in Rutherford, 2006, p. 156). In my score, the phrases “left in the lurch” and “lingering” described distinct moments in a singular process of being left behind by a moving body. Being “left in the lurch” referred to the initial separation from a moving body I had been traveling with; “lingering” referred to the subsequent willingness, or desire, to stay awhile in the place where I had been left behind. Because these moments had different *felt* qualities, it made sense to distinguish between them in my terminology.

Additionally, rather than “moving with” and “anchoring”, I found myself “hooking onto” a moving body and “catching a ride” on its movement, almost like surfing a wave. These terms also referred to distinct moments within a singular process – only this was a process of *traveling with* a moving body. While “hooking onto” described the decision to fall into step with another body, “catching rides” described the feeling of coasting alongside it. As I noted in Chapter One, I also started “unhooking” myself from a moving body from time to time – detaching from it and intentionally allowing myself to be “left in the lurch” in order to “linger” somewhere for a while.

These words – “hooking onto”, “catching rides”, “lurching” and “lingering” – formed the verbal score for camera movement that I would continue to use in the lead up to the assembly of *Washing Lines*. As I noted in Chapter One, the meanings I attached to the

words in this score were partly idiosyncratic, and perhaps are instances of the "creative repurposing" I described at the beginning of Chapter Two. However, each word still had a clear meaning within the context of the score, which allowed it to inspire and circumscribe improvised movement. I gradually developed a more embodied sense of these terms as I continued to film people hanging out their washing, filming up to three or four times a week in late 2015 and into 2016.

As I explain in more detail in Chapter Four, I later added another component to the activity, namely, the recording of an improvised voiceover track. Immediately after we had completed filming and laundry-hanging, I would transfer the video footage to a laptop and watch it back with the participant(s). While watching, they were invited to report on what they were thinking at the time of filming, and/or on whatever came to mind as they watched the footage.

Another significant aspect of this activity was my approach to sound recording, which represents an important source of cinematic affect that I am unable to address in as much detail as I would like in this exegesis. During each improvisation, I used two microphones – one omnidirectional microphone placed strategically in relation to perceptible sounds and anticipated movements, and one directional "shotgun" microphone attached to the camera. Together, these microphones captured sounds emanating from sources close to the camera (for example, the sounds of clothes pegs in a bucket, of speech, of clothes being shaken out), as well as sounds whose sources were further away. Often I placed the omnidirectional microphone somewhere that I thought it might capture the sounds of non-human life, such as the chirp of cicadas or the rustle of wind in the trees. In the final pulling-together of *Washing Lines*, recordings from both microphones were used in a sound design and mixing process that strove to emphasise the materiality of bodies and places, and to ignite the imagination of a potential listener by alluding to a world that extended far beyond the boundaries of the camera's frame.

Writing in my journal throughout Activity 7 brought several important evolutions in my practice to my attention. Firstly, it struck me that many of these new terms – "hooking", "lurching", "catching rides" – described *transfers of weight*. A "hook" is a bent or curved shape that allows one thing to be attached to another, but "hooking" one thing to another also involves a transfer of weight, such that one thing hangs off another thing (when I hook a clothes hanger over a rod, the rod must bear the clothes hanger's weight). To "lurch" is (in my experience) to cast your weight away from your centre of balance, so that you are on the brink of falling, and a recovery from lurching involves re-centring your weight. To "catch a ride" is to let something else carry you for a while – a bus, a surfboard, a friend's bicycle. The "lingering" component of the score was often experienced as a "hanging back". I also noticed that the emphasis on weight in this version of the score resembled the centrality of weight exchanges in Contact Improvisation. As I noted in Chapter One, the phrase "catching rides" is borrowed directly from Contact Improvisation,

where it describes the way you might allow your partner to bear your weight and carry you in a suspended trajectory through space.

Secondly, I noticed that non-human entities were often pulling me around. As I continued exploring these new parameters, I found myself hooking onto various mobile entities: sheets flapping in the wind, a meandering dog, or the spokes of the rotary hoist spinning around its axis. Although the score was still weighted towards the human to some degree, the shift from feelings of “strandedness” to feelings of being “left in the lurch” and “lingering”, coincided with an increased sense of the “semiotic competence” (Hoffmeyer, 1997) of non-human entities in my camera work. In this score, both humans and non-humans possessed a certain gravitational force, an ability to attract and exert a *pull* over my camera. The “weight of things” was more evenly distributed.

Finally, and in summation, this weight based version of the score felt like a move towards a more haptic way of engaging with my live environment as a camera operator. While operating the camera, I was drawing on somatic memories of utilising my weight to respond to other physical presences largely according to *how they moved*, and not only according to what they signified. Decisions felt like embodied events. In this way, all three bodily dispositions – “Receptivity”, “Millipede Sensing” and “Peripheral Vision” – started to come into practice more fully: my senses were more engaged as a “unified system of access”, and I found myself more often using a broad-strokes, peripheral vision that responded receptively to how my surroundings moved as a whole, leading to a decreased concern for the degree of “subjectness” (Hoffmeyer, 1997, p. 940) of whatever my camera was trained on.

It occurred to me while writing this exegesis that perhaps this final incarnation of the score fell into place as easily as it did because of the firm enclosures that were established in Activity 7. As I have noted in previous chapters, improvisation and free play are aided by “enclosures”, structures, or boundaries. For Activity 7, I set myself the boundaries of shooting in long takes, and of shooting the act of “hanging out laundry” exclusively. The domestic settings employed for this activity also established firm geographical boundaries: participants' movements tended to bounce around inside relatively contained domestic spaces rather than jetting off into the distance. As such, when I got “left behind” in these domestic spaces, I could be more certain that a moving body would eventually return to me. The rhythmic, almost circular nature of movements in the washing routine may have had a similar effect, providing promises of another chance. The repeated stretch down to the washing basket, then up (or across) to the line, then back to the basket again, provided endless “second chances” to hook onto, to catch a ride with, to get left behind, and to linger a while.

## Conclusion

Through iterative experimentation, reflection and periods of rest, I arrived at a score that facilitated the cultivation of the bodily dispositions I was hoping to develop: receptivity, "millipede sensing", and the use of my peripheral vision. Importantly, I believe it was the weight-based theme of this score – its use of weight-based analogies, which drew up embodied memories of weight transfer in the process of filming – that helped me to cultivate these dispositions (all of which have corollaries in movement performance practices), and that helped me to access a more haptic mode of engagement with my surroundings.

Thus emerged a conclusive proposition that contributes new insight to the field of improvised handheld camera movement, and to theories of hapticity in cinema. This proposition is that engaging weight-based analogies for decision making while filming can facilitate haptic ways of relating to place as a cinematographer. The earlier sections of this chapter, which focused on theory primarily, also contribute to the theorising of hapticity in cinema by proposing additional connections between this area of film scholarship, and select dance and performance practices. All of these insights emerged from a struggle with the material context of practice (Bolt, 2010), and this struggle was described in detail in the second half of the chapter. The chapter therefore also contributes a narrative about the accrual of praxical knowledge in the field of handheld camera work through an iterative, material process.

However, the arrival at this score for camera movement would only be the first part of what turned out to be a whole new phase in my research. A long series of additional iterations (returning to this same score over and over again) would continue to reveal new questions and opportunities to develop my thinking. While I initially sought to be so totally responsive as to be "moved by" my environment – to be more or less pulled around by it – I would come to realise that I was putting intentional effort *in* to get something else *out*: namely, an ability to respond with suppleness to what was happening around me. (Again I am reminded of Contact Improvisation, where intention and muscular engagement always precede, and help to sustain, sensations of falling and being carried.) The following chapter explores the inevitability and the affective potential of creative effort in my own research, as well as in the film and dance practices that influence it.





# Chapter Four

## Working Material

“It was about effort, you know. You watched the effort.”

– Yvonne Rainer, 2001

### Introduction

As I continued to film in people's homes while they hung out their washing to dry, I came to realise that active interventions and creative efforts were an inevitable part of improvised filmmaking. Because the improvised recordings had an audience in mind, each improvisation was not only a response to what was happening around me, but was also an active sculpting of a work that I hoped would be engaging for viewers, and that would express or enact the ideas described in this exegesis. Besides its inevitability, I realised that creative effort, where it is made palpable in an artwork, may also invite affective experiences for viewers. This growing awareness provoked me to engage with the existing traditions of improvised, materialist and experimental composition on which my research builds, and to evolve my own perspective on the role of *intentions* in creative research.

In the first section of this chapter I address the difficulties with aspiring to non-intervention in one's compositional processes, and reflect on my own initial intentions to "disappear", or become transparent, in my video portraits. I also briefly address the vast body of literature on documentary and its relationship to the "real", as well as to transparency in production methods (Bruzzi, 2000; Nichols, 2010; Renov, 1993; Rotha, 1976; Winston, 1995), and then look at the work of John Cage and his pursuit of a total responsiveness, even a "non-intention", in his chance-based and improvised compositional processes. Because of the ambitious and sometimes essentialist language they used to talk about their practices, both Cage and documentary filmmakers who claimed "objective" approaches in their work were sometimes criticised for being naïve, and sometimes for being dishonest. Taking up Benjamin Piekut's approach to Cage, I suggest we can be more understanding of these artists by reading their sometimes sweeping statements as efforts to clarify their research intentions. While it is possible that some of these statements may have been designed to obfuscate processes, and some may have been ignorant or self-delusional, it is my belief that most often these statements were

attempts to articulate the terms of the artists' "effort" – their trying, rather than their success – and that the *trying* is the interesting part.

Besides taking an interest in what Cage was trying to do, Piekut reinterprets his chance-based compositions as *improvisations* in which unpredictable outcomes were in a mutually enriching relationship with careful creative interventions. Improvisation, Piekut argues, is not so much characterised by chance as by *risk*. This leads us into the second section of this chapter, which explores the affects of risk-taking in improvisation, and the resulting affectivity of perceiving this risk-taking as a viewer. Here I engage with several choreographers and filmmakers who foreground the effort and affects of improvisation and/or performance in their work, thereby including audiences in the risk-taking and pleasure of live performance. These artists include Sydney-based choreographers Rhianon Newton and Lizzie Thomson, the earlier and influential Simone Forti and Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, and improvising filmmaker Jean Rouch. In closing, I offer several examples of how, inspired by these artists and their work, I began to allow for a more active sculpting of the videos in *Washing Lines*, and to allow for this sculpting to be seen.

Thus, in what I have identified as a second "phase" of my thinking throughout this research, I connect with some of the creative ancestry of my research project, and acknowledge the palpability of my effortful mediations as an inevitable and valuable dimension of the improvisations that gave rise to *Washing Lines*.

## The Inevitability of Creative Intervention

### Documentary and Transparency

A long lineage of theorists and filmmakers have critiqued the idea that a documentary – or any filmic text – is able to capture reality in a way that is "objective" or "truthful". In his *Theorizing Documentary*, Michael Renov deconstructed the distinction between fiction and non-fiction films, writing that “nonfiction contains any number of ‘fictive’ elements, moments at which a presumably objective representation of the world encounters the necessity of creative intervention” (Renov, 1993, p. 2). Both Vivian Sobchack and Bill Nichols have argued that the question of whether an image presents as "documentary" or as "fictional" has more to do with how a viewer makes sense of that image (whether they identify it as part of a fictional or non-fictional text) than with how the camera related to whatever it was recording (Nichols, 2010, p. xiii; see also Sobchack, 1999). In 1976 Paul Rotha argued that documentary "is only truthful in that it represents an attitude of mind" (Rotha, 1976, p. 53). Ethnographic filmmaker and film scholar David MacDougall has also suggested that “photographic images are inherently reflective, in that they refer back to the photographer at the moment of their creation, at the moment of an encounter” – and

that this reflexive dynamic is even more present in filmic images. "Corporeal images are not just the images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relations with the world," he writes in *The Corporeal Image* (MacDougall, 2006, p. 3).

Despite this robust history of critique, there is still something seductive about the idea that a camera can provide a "window onto reality". Indeed, this idea existed in my own early aspirations to "de-materialise" as a camera operator and to become a conduit for the affectivity of places and subjects. Returning to the body of critical literature surrounding this topic led me to a fuller acceptance of my own creative agency in the video improvisations comprising Activity 7. In what follows, I briefly explore several perspectives within this body of literature that helped to evolve my thinking, beginning with those of Stella Bruzzi.

Bruzzi suggests that the idea of the "screen as window onto reality" became strongest with the emergence of the "direct cinema" movement in the 1960s, in the United States. Direct cinema filmmakers aspired to "collapse the distance between reality and representation" (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 8); to make films in which events played themselves out naturally, and in which the filmmaker did not construct contrived narratives.

Bruzzi also argues that, more than filmmakers or audiences themselves, *theorists* consolidated the documentary "illusion" (its truth claim), by fretting over actual documentaries' recurring failure to achieve a true fidelity to the "real". She writes, "early practitioners and theorists were far more relaxed about documentary as a category than we as theorists have become, and it is interesting how [...] documentary has in various ways returned to its more relaxed roots with dramatization, performance and other forms of fictionalization and narrativization becoming once more predominant" (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 8). Bruzzi believes that both filmmakers and audiences actually understand the necessary difficulties inherent in documentary representation, and that this does not invalidate the documentary pursuit. "A documentary will never be reality," she says, "nor will it erase or invalidate reality" – or itself – "by being representational" (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 6).

A clear distinction is not always made between direct cinema and its French counterpart, *cinéma vérité*, which takes a different approach to capturing "reality". (Bruzzi, for example, uses the terms "direct cinema" and "cinéma vérité" interchangeably.) Developed ten to twenty years prior to direct cinema and founded by ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, *cinéma vérité* also aimed to uncover a certain "truth". However, Rouch openly acknowledged that his own presence in the realities he sought to document necessarily affected those realities. He said, in interview, "The fundamental problem in social science is that the facts are always distorted by the presence of the person who asks questions. You distort the answer simply by asking a question" (Georgakas, Gupta, Janda, & Rouch, 1978, p. 22). Rouch's films therefore tended to foreground his own presence as a filmmaker.

Klich and Scheer's discussion of immediacy and hypermediacy effectively illustrates the difference between direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*: "immediacy" lends itself to a description of the direct cinema movement's attempts to create immediate access to a (nonetheless mediated) world, and "hypermediacy" can be taken to describe the ways *cinéma vérité* filmmakers drew attention to their own processes of mediation. Klich and Scheer note, citing Bolter and Grusin, that while these are "clearly divergent" approaches, they are perhaps "'opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real'" (Bolter & Grusin as quoted in Klich & Scheer, 2012, p. 135).

Ilona Hongisto's work further enriches the way I think about fidelity and documentaries' relationship to the real. Rather than thinking of documentaries as representations of absent worlds – or, as copies which bear an indexical relationship to an original "reality" – she suggests we think of documentaries as instances of "capture". A documentary captures a small piece of a reality that extends far beyond the boundaries of its frame, and which is vibrantly expressive within that frame, co-composing the resulting documentary in a lively and agentic way. This perspective shifts debates about documentary ethics away from a consideration of their representational value, and towards the question of how documentaries co-compose reality.

In her work, Hongisto draws on Laura U. Marks's writing on enfolding-unfolding aesthetics, which provides a framework for appreciating the palpability of processes of creative translation in film. Extending on Deleuze, Marks suggests that, between the plane of the "infinite" (or the world) and the plane of the "image" (a rendering of a small piece of the world), there is another plane, the plane of "information", which selects parts of the infinite and transforms them into images through processes of calculation (Marks, 2014). Marks proposes that the universe is constituted by infinite folds, and that things which seem infinitely far away from us are not unreachable, but may simply require many unfoldings to be reached. The "informational" process that pulls images from the infinite can thus be understood as a series of "folds" between the infinite and the image. Where these folds are palpable in an image they obstruct our sense of access to the "world" that the image shows, but also draw our attention to the sensuous materiality and history of the image, which wears the traces of its own coming-into-being (Marks, 2014, pp. 158–159).

A growing appreciation of the importance of *structure* in improvisation also furthered my thinking about "non-intervention" and "fidelity to the real" in creative processes. If we approach documentary films as "structured improvisations", then we can see them as creative processes in which "flights of the unexpected" (C. Grant, 2015, p. 353) combine with structures that the filmmakers have set up. Rather than ascertaining whether these

works are "truthful" or "untruthful", fiction or non-fiction, we can see them as instances of composition in which careful structuring and unpredictability interlock.<sup>24</sup>

As I continued to shoot and read, these perspectives on mediation highlighted how, in early iterations of Activity 7, I was trying to conceal my active decision-making and sculpting of the video recordings. I believed that remaining invisible as a camera operator would heighten the affective potential of the videos, drawing viewers' attention to the world beyond the lens instead of to my thinking. For reasons that are detailed throughout this chapter I began to realise that careful constructions (like rearranging the furniture to make it easier for myself to move around with the camera) might be valuable to the shaping of *Washing Lines*, and that allowing the creative effort of mediation to be palpable for viewers might produce a different kind of immersive and affective experience. Further, I realised that accepting my inevitable presence as a mediator might return the emphasis of the improvisations to *experimentation*, and might open that experimentation up to bolder ventures with the camera.

## John Cage: In Pursuit of Non-Intention

In thinking about my own attempts to achieve a total responsiveness to my surroundings in real-time composition, the work of John Cage is an important precedent. Cage was interested in how chance-based composition procedures and structures for improvisation could expand definitions of music and performance, and also how they could facilitate transcendent experiences for musicians and audiences. His work shifted western understandings of improvisation and composition, and, through his relationship with choreographer Merce Cunningham, it also significantly influenced the postmodern dance wave in the U.S.A. in the mid to late twentieth century, thus informing key dance practices that also feed into this thesis.

But besides Cage's importance as a figure in the broader landscape of postmodern dance and improvisation, his work also has a more intimate relevance to my process: the creative aims expressed in his writings about composition and performance suggest that the early stages of my own research were driven by similar aims to those that he pursued.

Over the course of his life, a confluence of Cage's evolving compositional interests and his spiritual interests in philosophy and Zen Buddhism brought about the pursuit of a particular body-mind state in music-making. This state was one of "non-intention" (Cage, 1986/1993, p. 179), or what he also called "a not-consciousness" (Cage, 1961, pp. 38–39), in which he became so responsive to the other factors, materials or entities around him, so entirely available to being "moved by" other forces (be they the components of a chance

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<sup>24</sup> This bears a resemblance to Hongisto's idea that a lively and agentic reality co-composes a documentary from inside the frame. In her conception of documentary, too, unpredictable/autonomous and carefully planned elements work together to shape a film.

procedure, other improvisers, or the boundaries of an improvisational score), that he was no longer making cognitive decisions about how to construct meaning through music. His aim was to get past expressive or calculated choices, and to a point of acting from some pre-cognitive, instinctive or perhaps spiritual place – to be "freed" from "relationship" (or, the construction of meaning through the deliberate relating of different musical parts).<sup>25</sup>

In his essay, "Composition as Process", Cage analyses a range of scores by different composers that, for various reasons, do not quite facilitate this mode of responsive decision making in live performance. Through these analyses, many possible approaches to composition with varying degrees of "determinacy" and "indeterminacy" are laid out for our consideration. Eventually Cage comes to describe a score – in fact a structure for improvisation – that achieves what he is after. It is *Duo II for Pianists* by Christian Wolff. Here conscious, deliberate choices and unconscious responsiveness are finally no longer in conflict. Cage gives the evocative analogy: the "function of each performer in [this piece] is comparable to that of a traveler who must constantly be catching trains the departures of which have not been announced but which are in the process of being announced. He [sic] must be continually ready to go, alert to the situation, and responsible" (Cage, 1961, p. 39). In this kind of structure, a "non-intentional" or "not-conscious" mode of perception and action is reached for not so much by choice as by necessity. "[The] mind is too busy to spend time splitting itself into conscious and not-conscious parts [...] the conscious part [of the mind], by reason of the urgency and indeterminacy of the situation, turns towards the not-conscious parts" (Cage, 1961, p. 39). Cage may be describing what trombonist Radu Malfatti has called a state of "total demand" in improvisation (Mattin, 2015, p. 33) – where a listening and availability to the point of abandon and transformation are required and where one, perhaps, begins to feel like a conduit or host for other forces.

This strikes a chord with me. I recognise, in Cage's analysis of *Duo II for Pianists*, much of what I was aiming for in my development of a score for camera movement, and in my pursuit of the bodily dispositions described in Chapter Three. I, too, was after a certain "non-intention". I sought to be profoundly "moved by" my surroundings, to become a sort of conduit through mimesis, porousness, receptivity. I sought a structure for improvisation that resolved the conflict between my desire to make conscious compositional decisions, and my interest in becoming more entirely responsive to my surroundings – a structure that eliminated the uncertainty and discomfort of having to split my attention, and that drew me into full (or, I would now say, *fuller*) immersion. In the end, I arrived at a score that provided me with "trains to catch" – or, as I ended up calling it (at the time unaware of Cage's analogy), with "rides" to catch.

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<sup>25</sup> In a lecture delivered in Tokyo in 1986 Cage said, "I became free [...] from the notion of 2 (relationship). Or you could say I saw that all things *are* related. We don't have to bring about relationships" (Cage, 1993c, p. 178).

Cage has often been criticised for exaggerating the open-endedness and absence of authorial control in his work. Marjorie Perloff is one such critic. In an article on Cage's and Cunningham's work, she argues that, despite their sincere interest in making de-hierarchised, de-centred or multi-centred work, their practices were in fact characterised by strong hierarchies in which their own artistic contributions and aesthetic preferences were paramount (Perloff, 2012). She points, for example, to John Cage's *Musicircus* in Illinois in 1967, at which one and all were invited to come and make music on equal footing in an enormous hall. Here Cage's own contribution to the musical melee was elevated above the rest: it was presented in a separate space, and was subject to entirely different creative parameters. She also notes instances where audience input was invited in Cage's live performances, but where some contributions were treated as more appropriate than others, suggesting that he did seek to shape outcomes in his compositions. Perloff's scepticism about Cage brings to mind the scepticism that came to surround direct cinema films, which also expressed ambitious aims that could never be fully realised in practice. There is a sense that these artists were flying the flag for one kind of practice, but were enacting another. They were telling us one thing, but doing something else.

Cage and Cunningham's claims to absence or self-effacement in their work have also been interpreted as expressions of male white privilege. Citing Donna Haraway, Benjamin Piekut makes the worthwhile suggestion that although traits like "modesty" and "self-abnegation" are often associated with Asian philosophies (and Zen Buddhism did influence Cage profoundly) this "self-invisibility" may be understood as "the specifically modern, European, masculine, scientific form of the virtue of modesty [...] that pays off its practitioners in the coin of epistemological and social power" (Haraway as quoted in Piekut, 2013, p. 146).

When describing the state of "non-intention" he is after, Cage does often speak (or write) in essentialist terms that romanticise or overstate what his scores achieve, and that imply a moral superiority to mainstream western musical interests and tastes. For instance, in a 1948 lecture Cage situated his explorations with percussion in a tradition of experimentation that attempted to "liberate all audible sound from the limitations of musical prejudice" (Cage, 1948/1993a, p. 32). At the other end of his career, in 1991, in a disgruntled letter to the orchestra members of the Zurich Opernhaus, he wrote, "My work is characterized by nonintention and to bring this about, *I Ching* chance operations are employed in its composition in a very detailed way. On the other hand what many of you are playing is characterized by your intentions. We are on opposite sides of the future both musically and socially" (Cage, 1991/1993b, pp. 255–256). Cage seems to make assumptions and accusations here, and to set an impossibly high standard for not only good music, but *morally sound* music (in the same way that direct cinema filmmakers made a case for the moral soundness of a truly "observational", non-interventionist

cinema). Perhaps he was judged against high standards himself because of the high standards to which he seemed to hold himself and others.

In "Composition as Process", when analysing works that do not invite a full non-intentional immersion, or that allow for only moderate open-endedness in improvisation, Cage also sometimes sweeps a diverse range of approaches to, and experiences of, live performance into opposing camps – dictated versus free, conscious versus not-conscious. For example, in analysing *Indices* by Earle Brown, he suggests the work of the performers is fully "laid out before them [...] The conductor is not able to conduct from his own center but must identify himself insofar as possible with the center of the work as written. The instrumentalists are not able to perform from their several centers but are employed to identify themselves insofar as possible with the directives given by the conductor. They identify with the work itself, if at all, by one remove" (Cage, 1961, p. 37). In analysing *4 Systems*, also by Earle Brown, Cage contrasts the possibility of a score that is "not consciously organised" with a score that ultimately requires that the performers play "consciously" – or, with a mind to establishing meaningful relationships in the music according to the score. "What might have been non-dualistic becomes dualistic", he surmises (Cage, 1961, p. 38).

In contrast to Cage's perspective, many improvisers – such as those interviewed by Kent De Spain in his compilation of interviews with dancers (De Spain, 2014) – embrace the fact that improvisation involves the frequent management of slippages and transitions between immersion and self-awareness. Contemporary improvisation theorists currently building on the work of Cage (such as Hazel Smith and Roger Dean) have also come to think of composition as something in which structure and open-endedness always already interlock (Smith & Dean, 1997, p. 4), so that even in highly structured situations, performers do retain some margin to express themselves, or to connect with the work in a personal way. So, a performer is never only dictated to, or entirely free – they usually find themselves somewhere in between.

It would seem that Cage was after a mind, and an attention, *not split*. I started out looking for this, too. However, as iterative experimentation and reflection revealed to me, in the context of my research it was more helpful to *embrace* the calls I received to split, or direct and redirect, my attention in improvisation. Indeed, this might be the overarching story of my exegesis: a coming to terms with the multiple priorities at play in video portraiture, and the complex ways this required me to harness my mental focus.

## The Dispensable Manifesto

Critics like Perloff respond to palpable tendencies in Cage's writing: a tendency to discuss his pursuits and the broader musical landscape in terms of stark contrasts or oppositions, and a tendency to imbue these with moral values. As such, his statements may be – and



have been – read as elitism, wilful obfuscation, or self-delusion. In contrast, experimental music scholar Benjamin Piekut has tried to interpret these as statements of intent: as indicators of what Cage was *trying to do*. Piekut foregrounds the fact that Cage was in pursuit of a particular body-mind disposition, one in which he was able to lose himself, to become one with his environment. Cage was interested in the potential of everything to be beautiful, including chance appearances and convergences in his compositions (Piekut, 2013).

I, too, can see how Cage might in fact be writing about something *sought after*, and not something always achieved. His use of ambitious language and sometimes essentialist turns of phrase might have served a practical, immediate purpose in establishing a clear aim or direction for his work, and in bolstering his artistic pursuits.

The same can be said of Yvonne Rainer's famous *No Manifesto*. Rainer is a prolific choreographer and filmmaker who participated in the Cage/Cunningham composition workshops and the resulting Judson Dance Theatre in the mid-twentieth century. She wrote the No Manifesto in 1965, and it was full of bold and uncompromising renunciations.

The manifesto begins:

No to spectacle.

No to virtuosity.

No to transformations and magic and make-believe [...]

It continues in the same way for ten more lines.

Rainer's tone was, perhaps, reflective of an avant-garde style of formulating ideas that was common at the time of her writing – a style that Perloff describes as “the articulation of new rules [...] strategically couched in the language of no rules” (Perloff, 2012, p. 33).

Or, again, maybe we can make sense of Rainer and the statements of her contemporaries in a different way. Maybe there was something freeing about the uncompromising phrasing of these manifestos (or manifesto-like statements), something useful about them that had little to do with extending a hierarchy of aesthetic values to all artists for all time.

When asked about her “No Manifesto” in an interview in 2001, Rainer reflects, “There’s that one that still bites me in the tail, I can’t get rid of it” (Rainer & Banes, 2001). She adds, “I found it necessary, to clarify what I was doing, to write about it.” Later, in her autobiography, *Feelings are Facts*, she describes the manifesto as “a provocation that originated in a particular piece of work. It was never meant to be prescriptive for all time for all choreographers, but rather, to do what the time honored tradition of the manifesto always intended manifestos to do: clear the air at a particular cultural and historical moment. I hope that someday mine will be laid to rest” (Rainer, 2006, p. 264).

Clearly, artists' statements are made for various reasons and are intended to circulate in particular contexts. They express convictions, allegiances, avowals and disavowals, enthusiasms, and aspirations. Rainer's reflections suggest that even when such statements sound essentialist, or take on the particular form of the manifesto, they can be understood as *time-specific expressions of intent* that function as useful tools to focus and develop artistic practice.<sup>26</sup>

Angela Goh, a Sydney-based choreographer and dancer, explored this very idea during her research residency at Critical Path in 2014. Goh worked with choreographer Rhiannon Newton and visual/digital artist Benjamin Forster to investigate the formation of shapes with the body. Yet this investigation was in fact a means to explore something else that was of greater interest to Goh, namely, how the artists might track their shifting sense of what the work was about and where it was heading through the daily writing of a manifesto.

The residency produced a small press booklet titled *Outcomes*. It was a collection of the three artists' daily manifestos – three trails of repetitions, revisions and departures. The booklet's introduction reads,

Writing and rewriting a manifesto every morning ... was a way into allowing ourselves to define the research boldly and proceed with it determinedly even though we don't know yet what it could be. [...] We don't have to agree with each other, we don't have to agree with what we wrote the day before, and you don't have to agree with what we have written either. [...] The aim throughout the process was to do research. To respond to the undertaking, and to respond to the expectations of our situations [...] and to meet those expectations, but to devise a way to do so which was always on our own terms. (Goh, Newton, & Forster, 2014)

Here the manifesto is seen as a means by which an artist might proceed with a sense of boldness, even though they don't know yet what their work could be. It is a means by which an artist might evaluate their work on their own terms. Working at a very different time from Cage and Rainer, at a time when research intentions are perhaps more often packaged as questions or propositions, Goh was exploring what it might feel like to allow oneself to proceed through research via declarations: to write a manifesto every morning, as a way of focusing practice, and to allow that manifesto to change shape from day to day.

Reading the introduction to *Outcomes*, I imagine the manifesto as a sort of pylon made of paper, folded quickly into shape and shoved underneath the creative research, to prop it up for a day. Having served its purpose, it can be scrunched up or set aside, because tomorrow there will be a new paper pylon, folded fast. Goh described the cul-de-sacs and reorientations in her creative process in a similar way when discussing the making of her

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<sup>26</sup> Two examples of filmmakers' statements that can be understood in this way are Dziga Vertov's early writings (see Michelson & O'Brien, 1984), and Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg's "Dogme 95" manifesto, issued in 1995.

piece *Desert Body Creep* in 2016. She talked about the choreographic materials that might be developed and then discarded in the process of making something, and suggested that this discarded material was not a waste of time or energy, but was valuable insofar as it had served its purpose in moving her practice forwards, and could then be set aside (Goh, 2016). Just like these discarded choreographic materials, the daily manifestos in *Outcomes* are no less valuable for being expendable. It is their expendability that makes them functional as flexible focusing devices.<sup>27</sup>

The emphasis on transience and diversity in Goh's manifestos is not as palpable in many of the avant-gardist (or maybe the essentialist) statements we see from Rainer and Cage's era. But if we approach these earlier statements as indications of what an artist was attempting to do at a particular point in time, rather than as permanent renunciations, banishing from acceptability all those who say "yes to make-believe", for example, then we access their intentions, their *trying*, and the affects these might produce.<sup>28</sup>

These approaches remind me to enlist scores and theoretical positions as *temporary* focusing devices, useful in articulating my research intentions within a specific context, and helpful in keeping track of continuity and change in an iterative research process. Retrospectively, I can see that the earliest iterations of Activity 7 were guided in part by a "no to forcing things" – or maybe a "no to all movement that is not a 'being moved by' my environment". These *No to...*'s were valuable as part of a *dispensable manifesto* which articulated the terms of my trying (not my succeeding), and which helped me to consolidate a valuable score for camera movement. They would later be replaced by statements of intent that acknowledged the inevitability and the value of my agency as an improviser. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the incentives that drove my early experimentation – receptivity, permeability and soft vision – continued to draw me forwards through practice, but no longer eclipsed other considerations that I realised must also weigh in.

## The Affects of Creative Effort

In the following section of this chapter I explore the centrality of risk-taking to improvisation and, following on from this, the affective possibilities implicit in witnessing risk-taking and creative effort in improvised practices as a viewer. In doing so, I discuss

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<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, Rosalind Crisp refuses to circulate a written copy of what she expressly clarifies is a *temporary* manifesto outlining principles of her practice. She explained this before reading her temporary manifesto to us at a two-day workshop in Sydney, in August of 2016.

<sup>28</sup> In this spirit of generosity, we also need to acknowledge that the deep openness of contemporary practices like Goh's builds upon the effortful creative enquiry of earlier artists, and that our own assertions (as "postmoderns") may be seen as wanting at a later date.

several key dance and filmmaking practices that have been influential to *Washing Lines*. To enter this discussion, I return once more to John Cage.

## Improvisation: Risk and Vertiginous Futures

Benjamin Piekut's critique of Cage turns partly on the idea that he was a modernist among modernists. As such, Cage's emphasis on chance in his works tended to portray nature as an objective, clock-work system of causes and effects. Drawing on Bruno Latour, Piekut observes that this mechanical, objective vision of nature was one means by which modernist thinkers tried to plug the deep sinkhole of uncertainty that opened up when colonial expansion brought societies around the world into contact with each other, and Europeans found their own world views destabilised in the face of radically different ways of life (Piekut, 2013, p. 137). Universalities were established wherever possible, machines and measuring instruments were all but deified, and "nature" was conceived of as something that operated according to laws, so that one could, with sufficient time and effort, come to understand and predict its movements. When Cage talked about uncertainty in his work, he talked about compositional components (stimuli, outcomes) that were as yet unknowns to him and that he may not have chosen, but that still fell into place according to some natural, stable logic. His interest in the indeterminacy of chance was underpinned by a deep *certainly* about the way nature functioned. Piekut proposes that approaching nature as agentic and capable of variability would make for a much deeper uncertainty than the kinds of uncertainties that Cage discussed in relation to his work.

Even though he was committed to freeing his nonhuman collaborators from human intention, Cage could only grant them a single manner of operation—chance alone. And yet the world makes a much more uncertain contribution than the mere application of laws of chance, and a properly realist account of Cagean musical indeterminacy would situate it in a fundamental ontological indeterminacy that takes seriously the agency of all entities. (Piekut, 2013, p. 154)

As well as proposing that nature is in fact creative and agentic, Piekut analyses an example of Cage's compositional process to show how active *Cage* was in his chance-based processes, making creative decisions at every turn. The natural entities that Cage enlisted did not always "speak" of their own accord; Cage worked hard to bring their expressions into the audible realm of his compositions. (We might even apply Laura U. Marks's ideas about the infinite, information and images, to suggest that Cage worked hard to "pull [chance-based musical expressions] from the infinite".)

Instead of thinking about "nature", or non-human entities, as things that responded to Cage's procedures in a clockwork fashion, Piekut proposes that we see Cage and the entities he worked with as partners in a creative dance. At every turn in the compositional

process Cage allowed unknowns to influence him, but also responded creatively and selectively to them. Similarly, the entities he enlisted acted creatively within his procedures, rather than re-acting in a mechanistic way. Of course, it is important to remember here that the ways in which non-human entities "improvise", "create" or "decide" may not resemble human-psychological versions of those processes, and may not even be entirely available to human knowing.

Piekut thus arrives at an exciting proposition: he suggests that we think of Cage's process as a co-improvisation between agentic entities that is characterised more by *risk* than by chance. More broadly, he suggests that an agentic model of "nature" implies a shift from chance-based to risk-based thinking. In a world where nature *acts*, "things" do not "fall into their natural place". Rather, things improvise, trusting that what they do will produce a desirable outcome, and risking all the while that it will not. Piekut cites Latour to propose that improvisation in the face of risk is the basic structure of life itself: nature improvises constantly, and evolution is an infinite series of creative actions taken at the "vertiginous" brink of reproduction (Piekut, 2013, p. 157).

Moving from structure to stimulus, mechanism to vitalism, *chronos* to *kairos*: this change describes precisely the difference between indeterminacy and improvisation. In a risky world, good and bad surprises do not simply occur; they are produced through the improvisations of innumerable actors. [...] If this is true, are there theoretical opportunities to be seized by taking improvisation—not chance—as not exactly nature's manner of operation, but rather, as the world's manner of emergence? (Piekut, 2013, p. 156)

Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow, who write about improvisation in acting and theatre, similarly muse that improvisation might be "similar to the processes, by which, for instance, a biological structure evolves to new levels of order [...] for improvisation is about order, and about adaption, and about truthfully responding to changing circumstances, and about generating meaning out of contextual accidents" (Frost & Yarrow, 1990, p. 3).

In the evolutionary interpretations offered by Latour, Piekut, Frost and Yarrow, improvisation happens in the leap between what is existing, and what is emergent; risks are taken in the gap between the known and the unknown. Piekut writes,

Evolution occurs in the gap between cause and consequence, where uncertainty is transformed into risk, then opportunity, then advantage. Acting inside that gap necessitates improvisation to bridge temporarily the perforations between existing and emerging entanglements. (Piekut, 2013, p. 157)

Stuart Grant defines performance as risk in a moment of improvisation: "The contention is not that performance entails a risk or an element of risk, but that risk defines performance; that a performative event is truly performative precisely and only to the

extent to which it risks failure – of connection, felicity, catharsis" (S. Grant, 2014, p. 128). Thus Grant differentiates between the performance event – the play, the dance performance or the opening ceremony, for example – and the performative moment itself, which recurs constantly within the overall performance event, and which is a leaping into the unknown, characterised by its position *between an uncertain future and the past that it leaves behind*.<sup>29</sup> "The performative moment is a temporal structure which is not yet in time, but which leaves time behind it," Grant writes. "As such, in itself, it can never be grasped, because, in the grasping, it would no longer exist" (S. Grant, 2014, p. 129).

Importantly, and expressly connecting the performative moment to improvisation, he adds:

The performative moment is the moment of *decision*. [...] The decision offers itself to the performer. Failure to take or recognise the decision is what is at risk in the performance. [...] At the performative moment, the performer always hovers at the cusp of possibility, borne and buffeted by the history of their own training, the script or score, the cultural tradition, the specific situation, the actions of the other performers, and the lure of the ultimately unknown possibility which beckons. (S. Grant, 2014, p. 130)

Grant's description of the performative moment contains images of vertigo, of precipice, of leaping. Such images recur throughout the writings on improvisation assembled here.

A number of other improvisers have written about risk in their practices. Improvising flautist Ellen Waterman, for example, writes that what is virtuosic about improvisation is the risk-taking. She offers the insight that "turned on its ear, what seems like virtuosic risk-taking in improvisation is actually the skillful exercise of trust" (Waterman, 2015, p. 60). Mattin, too, writes about the departure from the "safe zone" in improvisation. In conversation with trombonist Radu Malfatti he discusses those situations that "put one in a position of total demand". What I think he means is, those situations where total attentiveness and presence are demanded of you, and where there is "no way back" (Mattin, 2015, p. 33). As dramatic as this may sound, it does capture the thrill of falling into futurity in live performance, where no action can be taken back and where every action informs subsequent actions. The risk is not necessarily one of death or total failure, but of *not finding oneself transformed* in the encounter with other bodies, other agendas, and with the particulars of a time and place (Smith & Dean, 1997; Waterman, 2015).

Improvising filmmaker Jean Rouch, too, notes the riskiness involved in composing "on the fly". Working with single takes determined by the duration of film stock available to him, Rouch described the high stakes involved in improvising sequence length shots in

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<sup>29</sup> For Grant, performative events do not only include artistic performances, but also a much broader range of social, cultural and political processes, such as the opening of parliament or the negotiation of a hostage situation.

unscripted situations: "All of [the camera operator's] bodily improvisations (camera movement, framing, shot lengths) finally result in editing while shooting. [...] It is this aspect of fieldwork that marks the uniqueness of the ethnographic filmmaker: instead of elaborating and editing his [sic] notes after returning from the field, he must, under penalty of failure, make his synthesis at the exact moment of observation" (Rouch, 1974/1995, p. 8).

The *falling into futurity* described above is experienced in a very literal, physical way in Contact Improvisation. Sally Banes describes Contact Improvisation as one of the "emblematic" improvisational dance forms to have come out of the postmodern dance boom of the 1960s, and to have persisted into the present (Banes, 2015, p. 135). Maybe it is the centrality of falling in Contact Improvisation, the constant need to throw yourself physically off balance in order to continue the dance, and the real risk of physical injury, that makes it such a fertile terrain for exploration in improvisation. One is constantly taking risks, constantly exercising trust.

These perspectives on risk in improvisation helped me to understand the sense of precariousness I was experiencing in the iterative improvisations that culminated in *Washing Lines*. As in many live performances, everything I did as a camera operator would potentially be "seen" by the audience in a long take. I was sculpting each video *as I recorded it*, every decision acting as a "point of no return". I risked that I would not transform, would not listen to my co-performers properly (as the contract in improvisation tends to be "that I will listen to you deeply and respectfully and that you will also listen to me in the same way" (Waterman, 2015, p. 60)). I risked that I would fall out of connection with the dance of laundry-hanging as it happened around me, or let doubt hinder the development of flow. I risked that I would fail to divide my attention when necessary, forget to check in with myself and with others, or not track the overall shape of the work. Of course, there was always the opportunity to do it again, but, as I have noted earlier in this exegesis, every repetition is necessarily *a return with a difference*.

These ideas about improvisation also highlighted that what excites me about many works in both cinema and dance is *witnessing creative effort*. I get to watch people work, think and feel their way through decisions at speed, to watch them navigate structures and throw themselves over precipices, so to speak, into exhilarating and unknown futures. In what follows I will describe several examples of such works, which form part of the history of improvised practice on which my work rests.

## The Affects of Efforts: Dance

Because of the postmodern and late colonial awareness that representational media and recording instruments have the power to misrepresent others, artists and scholars have an

ethical obligation in many cases to clearly state what they are doing, and how – to flag their own partiality as a mediator, or, to "situate" themselves (Haraway, 1988).

In their book on improvisation and the arts since 1945, Hazel Smith and Roger Dean write that when audiences know improvisation is going on – whether they have been told, or can tell for themselves – they tend to sympathise with the performers, and to bring a degree of openness to their experience of the work. In some situations, I would add, viewers are even able to empathise with the performers, to access what the performers might be experiencing, drawing on a combination of kinaesthetic empathy, their prior experiences, and their familiarity with the score or “rules of the game”. These rules may have been explained to them, or they may be evident in the performance event itself.

I would like to suggest that, besides the ethical impetus for showing process, there may also be an affective impetus for it. In addition to an ethics of disclosure, an erotics of disclosure. Watching people think, solve, feel, and respond "on their feet" produces affects. In what follows I will try to describe a materialist erotics of effort.

## Efforts and Affects in Current Somatic Practice

I imagine action and intention in creative practice as two elements traveling in varying degrees of synchronicity: sometimes our actions meet our intentions, sometimes they do not. When someone is working hard to achieve something that is just beyond their reach, intention and action separate. In this slipping apart, each element comes into clearer relief. Both the idea (where someone is *going*, what they intend) and the materiality of what is going on (where someone *is*, what they are made of) become clearer.<sup>30</sup>

In early 2016 I joined choreographer Rhiannon Newton for the first time at a research residency for her project, *Bodied Assemblies*, as an audiovisual documenter (as I mentioned in Chapter One). Following on from her research into solo improvisation (titled *Assemblies for One Body*), *Bodied Assemblies* looked at the capacity bodies have to be different, radical, many – but also to find affinities with each other, to find a kind of sameness.

In this earlier installment of the research Newton worked with three dancers, Ivey Wawn, Julian Wong and Bhenji Ra. The first time I joined them I didn't photograph or film, I just watched. That afternoon, Newton presented Wawn, Wong and Ra with a series of timed movement tasks that they used as starting points (or scores) for movement improvisations – for example, to embody a rock, or to perform a "dancing body". Drawing on their

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<sup>30</sup> Several theorists, including Rudi Laermans and Jean-Francois Lyotard, imply a similar distinction between what is intended and what is enacted, relating intention to a script, score or choreography, and relating enactment to the performance of that script – its raising up into temporary physicality and ephemerality (Laermans, 2015, p. 104; Lyotard, 1977, p. 88). I understand intention as a plan, an imagining of what one is going to do – which may, or may not, also be formalised as a script, score or choreography.



individual movement histories, which included training across contemporary dance, Feldenkrais and Voguing (and of course countless other movement experiences) the dancers began by working towards difference, taking a given stimulus in unique directions according to the way it met with their bodies.<sup>31</sup> Then, halfway through the allocated time, the dancers would begin to search for a shared movement quality, drawing on what they glimpsed of each others' dancing. A process of osmosis, of transformation, would begin to take place. Sometimes, around this point, Rhiannon would prompt, "now get really clear on what this is", meaning that the dancers should search for clarity about the movement quality or motif they were developing together, wordlessly, a meeting point between their practices and histories.

The dancers' first brief was to perform "dancing body", *at speed*. They worked two at a time, for two minutes at a time. During the first minute they worked towards difference, during the second they worked towards sameness.

I could have watched them for hours. Working first towards difference: thinking and feeling their way forwards through time, listening to their bodies. Stretching, contracting, trying on different movements and movement qualities. Exploring something, milking it, abandoning it. And then feeling their way towards similarity: gleaned from one another, whirling around to grab a glance, a rag of what the other was doing, and embedding it in their own body as they approached something shared. There was a kinaesthetic empathy on my part, a sense of how it might feel to move like they moved: the pleasure in rotating your arms that way, how it might feel in the shoulders. The quick expulsion of breath, the sweep and squeak of feet across tarkett, of track-suit clad thigh against thigh. It was satisfying to watch the decision-making, happening at speed. "Watching a dancer THINK ON THEIR FEET. There's a satisfaction in that – watching real time composition", I wrote in my journal, that evening.

There was also something revelatory about their negotiation of a unison. Their relationship to perfect sameness was asymptotic; it was only ever something they would *almost* reach. This difference-and-similarity revealed to me both their intention – to find something shared, to "get really clear about what it was", to find that precision – and their material – which *mostly* approximated something shared and precise, which shifted constantly in and out of similitude. I sensed where they were heading, but also very much where they *were*. Action and intention, individuality and sameness, melded and separated, melded and separated, like a shimmering superimposition: two similar but different moving images.

It is important to note that the dancers were not aiming for sameness at all costs – they were aware that a perfect sameness was always going to be partly out of reach. Newton

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<sup>31</sup> The body considered as an archive of movement experiences is a popular current idea suggested by dance theorist André Lepecki. See Lepecki, 2010.

seemed to be working with the sense that the persistence of difference is precisely what is interesting about the pursuit of sameness (or of duplications) in live performance. In her solo work, too, *Assemblies for One Body*, there is an understanding that watching the slippery relationship between intention and action in repetition, watching the slips and shifts that in fact make repetition an expression of change, is interesting. And for all the reasons I have been articulating, I would agree that it is.

I similarly enjoyed watching *a dancer at work* when Lizzie Thomson performed her piece PANTO at Campbelltown Arts Centre in 2011. I remember watching her reach for demanding body shapes, for virtuosic dance moves. Some of the moves were just beyond her reach, so that even as she threw herself into executing them, there was the slightest looseness, the slightest separation between what her body did, and the “moves” as an abstract ideal (which I probably recognised from my own childhood jazz-tap-ballet history, and from popular feature films about dancing). In the slip, in the coming apart of (what I took to be) her intention and her actions, I sensed what she was aiming for, and saw in sharp relief, too, what her body was actually doing. I got a tactile sense of its qualities: its weight, the degree of suppleness in the joints, muscle tone, lung capacity. I also sensed something about her personality, her psychology: her drive, her willingness to abandon composure in the pursuit of something else, and her willingness to let me see it. This performance was the first time I saw Lizzie Thomson – we had never met – and yet I felt I had had a personal connection with her by the time the performance ended.

## The Art of Not Giving One Hundred Percent

And yet, for all this writing on the importance of effort – that is, of *trying hard* – I had a later experience participating as a dancer in Newton's research that complicated this premise. This experience occurred during the “open sessions” that made up part of the second development period for *Bodied Assemblies* – the same sessions described in Chapter One, in relation to repetition as an “opening up” of possibilities.

We had been working through a series of different movement tasks, and the final task of the morning required that we work with two different and complex tasks at once, for a continued period of time. One task involved naming objects in space, the other involved giving expression to bodily memories of dancing as they arose.

I found this dual task difficult. It may have been for a number of reasons, but one of the most obvious was that I was trying to do such a thorough job at each task: I was intent on *not missing a beat*. Frustrated, I wondered how meticulous my approach to this exercise should be – whether I should be aiming to succeed at both tasks simultaneously, which was hard to do. I struggled to achieve a feeling of “flow”. Later, when I fed this back to Rhiannon in a group discussion, she suggested the solution of doing a more permissive version of the exercise: being looser with both tasks, allowing myself to fail a bit at each.

As she spoke I began to imagine a creative disposition that allowed for incompletions, for oversights – even for occasional non-authenticities, or "fabrications". She added that when she asks us to try to "be rocks", for example, she knows we're not *actually* ever going to become rocks. This echoed her sense, described earlier in this chapter, that two dancers aiming for a shared movement quality were never going to be entirely identical. Even though finding sameness (or "rock"-ness) was the *task*, it wasn't the sole *point* of the exercise.

This conversation in the studio reminded me that, while it is sometimes useful to pour all of one's effort and attention into a task during an improvisation or performance, it is also a valuable skill to be able to moderate one's expenditure of effort and attention according to what is helpful or sensuous. By allowing myself to achieve neither task perfectly, I might be able to work between or across two tasks more successfully. As BodyWeather practitioner Linda Luke has also said, "holding a task lightly" enables one to hold other tasks too, and to work between them. The challenge is to hold a task "just lightly enough" – or, conversely, "just tightly enough".

Further, a loosened grip on the tasks shaping performance (the choreography, or the parameters for improvisation) may allow audience members to access that zone between intention and action, and between the associations that a creative work evokes (dreams, memories, other worlds, narratives) and the material constitution of the work itself (which is made of minds, muscles, floorboards, imperfections). It may have partly been Lizzie Thomson's *looseness* that allowed her to do an *almost* "perfect" version of a virtuosic dance move. It may have been her careful balancing of effort against *permissiveness* that allowed us to enter this liminal zone where her work, her effort, became so vibrantly visible. Similarly, as I will explain in detail later, Jean Rouch's film *Jaguar* (1967) may reveal the work of creativity so delightfully because Rouch permitted certain compositional aspects to be achieved "imperfectly", most notably in the way the improvised dialogue recorded after the initial film shoot does not sit flush over the images – the mouths on screen do not always move in tandem with the audible speech. These slippages affect me: they include me in the risk-taking of live performance.

Applying these ideas to my own creative work, *Washing Lines*, served to liberate it, opening up new affective registers and compositional options in the handheld camera work. Fostering a more permissive attitude in the improvisations helped me to hold multiple tasks in my attention at once: to be receptive to environment, to be attentive to my intentions as a composer, and also, eventually (and as I explore in more detail in the following chapter) to attend to the possible meanings that viewers might draw from the materials in the frame.

## Efforts and Affects at the Birth of Postmodern Dance

There is a lineage we can draw from the contemporary somatic practices I have described above – with their emphasis on watching work – back to dance developments of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Two instances of dance-making stand out to me in particular. One is the early work of Simone Forti, which emphasised the materiality of the moving body through task-based improvisations. Another is the work of Belgian choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, in whose widely renowned choreographies, *Fase: Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich* (1982) and *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1983), the affects of effort are subtly accentuated through repetition, variation and the performers' bodily expressivity.

### *Task-Based Movement*

In an interview with dance writer Sally Banes in 2001, Yvonne Rainer recalls Simone Forti's *Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things*, a series of performances presented at an interdisciplinary art evening in New York in 1961. Rainer says, "It was about effort; you know, you watched the effort" (Rainer & Banes, 2001). She adds that *Five Dance Constructions* (...) was seminal in the way it shifted what a dance *is* and how audiences could relate to it (Rainer & Banes, 2001). The performances were like sculptures that people could circle, talk in the presence of, and walk away from whenever they chose to. Performers joined the audience whenever they were not performing, and sometimes the audience was centrally involved in a piece – as in *Herdin*g, in which, amusingly, performers herded the audience back and forth from one end of the loft to the other "until they became irritated" (Spivey, 2009, p. 13). Gestures that blurred the boundaries of art and life, and that invited the kinds of reflexive viewing positions that we are now familiar with, were at this time still provocative reorientations.

Forti's dance constructions were movement pieces with an arbitrary duration in which the participating dancers performed simple tasks while navigating physical structures in the space. Forti designed nonhuman constructions – loops of rope suspended from the ceiling, a giant see-saw – as well as making constructions with dancers' bodies, as in the piece *Huddle*, where a group of dancers stood in a huddle and formed a webbed roof using their interwoven arms and heads, and took turns climbing over it, finding hand- and footholds in each others' bodies to get up. For *Slant Board*, Forti constructed a ramp set at a 45-degree angle to the floor with ropes attached to its upper end. The ropes were knotted at intervals to give the performers traction. The performance consisted of Forti and two other performers moving up and across the board, holding onto the ropes, in whatever ways their bodies (with varied mobility and stamina) would allow. They were allowed to rest, but had to stay on the board for the full duration of the performance, negotiating their way across it while accommodating each other.

In *Five Dance Constructions* [...], Forti enacted a rule-based improvisational method that asked dancers to respond creatively and economically to precarious situations that drew attention to the material qualities of their bodies. In following a rule, the structure of a human body emerged – its musculature, its relation to gravity, its thinking. Virginia Spivey writes that in Forti's work, "the dancer no longer appears transformed into a dying swan or nutcracker prince moving effortlessly across the stage; rather, the viewer sees a real person, made of flesh and bone, subject to gravity's pull and limited by her or his body's particular skills and range of motion" (Spivey, 2009, p. 13). *Five Dance Constructions* shows how structure and indeterminacy may interlock harmoniously (instead of being at odds with one another), and invites affective encounters with bodies *at work*.

A note on the importance of Forti's work feels necessary here. While many choreographers associated with the Judson Dance Theatre cite her as an influence on their work, her contribution to minimalist and materialist performance practices is generally under-acknowledged. Rainer writes that Forti's presentation of *Five Dance Constructions* in 1961 "proved to be way ahead of its time.... As things then stood, it was as though a vacuum sealed that event. Nothing was written about it and dancers went on dancing and painters went on making painterly happenings and theatre pieces. It would be another two and half years [sic] before the idea of a construction to generate movement or situation would take hold" (Yvonne Rainer as quoted in Spivey, 2009, p. 11).

Forti's collaborator and former husband Robert Morris would, a few years after *Five Dance Constructions*, present a sculpture exhibition that was visibly influenced by Forti's work.<sup>32</sup> Morris openly acknowledges Forti's influence on his early sculptures, even saying that some of his works were slightly altered versions of her ideas (Spivey, 2009, p. 15). Yet key ideas that Forti explored in *Five Dance Constructions*, such as the similarities between objects and human bodies and the blurring of art/life boundaries, have more often been attributed to Morris's work, which has become seminal in minimalist art history. Such omissions are common. As Erin Brannigan points out, "An impression persists that postmodern dance followed Minimalism in sculpture, and this view negates the numerous ways in which dance contributed to major, cross-disciplinary aesthetic shifts through its own knowledges, conditions, research processes, and compositional methods," (Brannigan, 2015, p. 7). (Brannigan also notes that this dynamic continues to be evident in visual arts institutions' approaches to dance in Australia.) These historical omissions also tend to be gender-specific: most of the artists appearing in the minimalist canon are men, although women visual artists were doing similar things at the same time. Spivey suggests

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<sup>32</sup> Morris's exhibition was called *The Plywood Show*, 1964.

that these issues “converge in a study of Forti,” and notes that scholars have recently been redressing them (Spivey, 2009, p. 11).<sup>33</sup>

The postmodern dance movement in the U.S.A. (and beyond) would continue to explore the affectivity of witnessing bodies at work. The late Trisha Brown, who danced with Merce Cunningham and later participated in the Judson Dance Theatre, wrote:

There is a performance quality that appears in improvisation that did not in memorized dance as it was known up to that date. If you are improvising with a structure your senses are heightened; you are using your wits, thinking; everything is working at once to find the best solution to a given problem under pressure of a viewing audience. In contrast, at that time, modern dancers glazed over their eyes, knuckling down behind that glaze to concentrate and deliver their best performance—an understandable habit but unfortunately resulting in a robot-look. At Judson, the performers looked at each other and the audience; they breathed audibly, ran out of breath, sweated, talked things over. They began behaving more like human beings, revealing what was thought of as deficiencies as well as their skills. (Brown as quoted in Rainer, 2006, p. 242)

These were bodies responding to problems; bodies engrossed in *trying*.

### *Performing Effort, Performing Affect*

The early work of choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, developed across the Atlantic in Brussels, has also had an important influence on my own practice.

Thirty-four years after its 1982 Brussels premiere, I saw De Keersmaeker perform *Fase: Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich* at the Sydney Festival of 2016. A piece for two dancers, she performed it with Tale Dolven, a current member of the Rosas company (instead of with her original dancing partner of 1982, Michèle Anne De Mey). In this piece the two dancers enact very similar movements repetitively. However, minute differences remind us consistently of the uniqueness of each dancing body, and the singularity of each repetition.

Besides noticing the sameness/uniqueness of bodies and repetitions, we (the audience) are also invited to see the pleasure, the exhaustion, and the small negotiations of dancing. A friend who also attended this 2016 performance, and who sat very close to the stage, said she could see and hear the two dancers exchanging what sounded like verbal cues and reminders. Although she could not understand what they were saying, she had the impression they were saying things like, "This one's yours!", or "Now, now!" In the final

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<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Spivey writes that Yvonne Rainer is an exception to this rule. She attributes this difference to the many theoretical explanations Rainer has provided for her work in writing and in interviews, and to the way Rainer was able to appropriate minimalist critical language to describe what she did.

section of the piece, De Keersmaeker's building fatigue was expressed through loud breathing and occasional vocalisations; she even seemed to be skipping certain movements (cutting corners?) and then falling back into step with Dolven, the other dancer, who was decades younger and seemed to have little trouble keeping up.

Rudi Laermans writes that in *Fase* the affects of dancing are performed for an audience in ways that are sometimes spontaneous, sometimes controlled – sometimes even a little theatrical, deliberately accentuated. He summarises,

Exhibiting both pleasure and exhaustion would become a defining feature in the work of De Keersmaeker. Allowing this corporeal expressivity clearly goes against the dominant trend in minimal dance, ballet, or the modernist tradition of Cunningham, to conceal the joy or the effort of dancing. Besides the face, it includes being audibly out of breath or visibly sweating heavily. These exposed states predominantly concern the dancing body, not the psychological interior or individual personality of the performers. Exterior signs of physical pleasure or fatigue allude to the overall corporeal affectivity that the dancing induces in the dancer's body. (Laermans, 2015, p. 95)

This corporeal affectivity was apparent to me as I watched. My journal entry following this performance muses,

[There is] a sense of comfort, of *this must feel good to do*. these shoes must feel good to wear, this twist in the torso must be satisfying [...] this is how the feet feel best, and the arm can be unfolded through here, and to plough through in this way, turning this spiral, will feel sensuous and good. (Journal Entry, 11 January 2016)

The sense that "this must feel good to do" also appears in a journal entry following my first encounter with Newton's *Bodied Assemblies* work:

First, it is the dancing bodies, at speed. It looks delicious, satisfying to do.<sup>34</sup> (Journal Entry, 20 May 2016)

In these performance practices, the affects of moving and thinking-while-moving spill over into my body, filling me with desire – not a desire for the people themselves, but a desire to participate in the movement.

Laermans's description of the foregrounding of affect in De Keersmaeker's work provides me with language to articulate one of the most persistent aims of *Washing Lines*: to reveal the "corporeal affectivity" of hanging out washing.

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<sup>34</sup> The sense that "this must feel good to do" appears again in Chapter Three of this exegesis, where I describe the feeling of seeing Tom, my Taiko teacher, play in my peripheral vision. I write, and felt at the time, that "it looked like it felt delicious to do" – whereupon I found myself, also, *understanding it* in my own body. This instance is especially interesting because it suggests that affect and mimesis are in a two-way exchange: mimesis *produces* the sharing of affects (or, an emotional/experiential convergence), but equally mimesis may depend on affect, in the sense that engaging with the affectivity of another's movement helps to produce similitude.

## The Affects of Efforts: Film

Similar feelings of desire, joy and corporeality are at play in the ethnographic films of Jean Rouch, who was a forerunner in the exploration of improvisational and collaborative processes in cinema.

Sam Di Iorio describes Rouch's career as unwaveringly committed to a playful exploration of the capacities of emerging recording technologies to create films based in improvisation. Although Rouch did not link any of his works to specific political causes, Di Iorio notes the political nature of the working method that he eventually developed, which eschewed traditional, director-centred ways of working that reflected broader patriarchal and imperialist power structures (Di Iorio, 2005, p. 62).

### Jaguar (1967)

Di Iorio sketches the full trajectory of Rouch's filmmaking practice and notes the point at which Rouch started to make films that intimately included participants in the filmmaking process.<sup>35</sup> One of the first of these films was *Jaguar*.

The film follows three friends, Damouré, Lam and Illo, who decide to leave their home town in Nigeria to go and earn money in the big cities of Ghana (then still called the Gold Coast) for a few months. They travel together for most of the way and then, following the advice of the wise men consulted at the beginning of their journey, they split off and go their separate ways to work – Lam and Illo to Keta, Damouré to Accra. After travelling alone for some time, they converge again at the market vendor Damouré is running, and make fun while selling goods together. By this time Douma, another friend from back home in Nigeria, has fallen into step with them. Eventually the four of them decide to return home. They celebrate that they are changed men because of their time away: they carry home a wealth of goods, and a wealth of new wisdom and experiences.

*Jaguar* was made with virtually no money and minimal equipment. The film stars Damouré Zika, Lam Ibrahima Dia and Illo Gaouadel, three men who would continue to work on Rouch's films as writers, producers, composers and actors. Contrary to the documentary impression it gives, *Jaguar* is staged. However, it is improvised – Di Iorio notes that the actors literally "invented the plot and characters while the camera was rolling" (Di Iorio, 2005, p. 60). Rouch did not have the means to record synchronised sound. As a solution to this problem he shot the movie first, and then asked the actors to improvise their dialogue from memory later on, to a rough cut of the

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<sup>35</sup> Di Iorio prefaces this by mentioning the potential problems with some of Rouch's early work, which took a distanced position from his subjects and thus risked exoticising them. He notes that Rouch became aware of this, and thereafter strived to include his participants more intimately in his films.



silent footage.

This method of assembling the film is what I love most about it. Rouch's choice to record improvised dialogue and commentary to pre-recorded images creates a strong sense of the assembly itself; as Rouch himself might put it, it gives the film a "handmade aspect" (Rouch, 2007). Sometimes the dialogue seems to sit synchronously with the images; at other times it sits askew. The dialogue's slipping in and out of sync reminds me of dancers' slipping in and out of sameness in Rhiannon Newton's *Bodied Assemblies*. In this looseness, in the difference between the audible dialogue and the moving mouths on the screen, I sense what the film is made of. I sense its playful construction.

It is worth pointing out here that I was aware of the film's production process before I started watching it. I had a basic understanding of the "rules of the game", and it remains difficult now to discern whether I would have had the same response to the film if I had not understood them. Yet many aspects of the film's composition contribute to its roughly-assembled feeling. Often the figures on screen are far away from each other, so that they would have to raise their voices to make themselves heard when talking to each other. However the recorded dialogue is spoken in a relaxed way, as though the characters are close together – which, in their audio recording context they probably were. The overall content of what is spoken, too, reflects the curious hybridity and the playful, improvised nature of the film. There are times when a particular shot continues on for an extended period, and it feels like the actors are riffing on ideas and phrases, trying to come up with anything to fill the time, even if it means repeating themselves.

The dialogue sometimes turns into a running commentary, particularly when the characters in the film go their separate ways and the footage reveals things each character has experienced on his own. And commentary, in turn, occasionally evolves into a more abstract discussion, until a turn of events in the footage draws the speakers' attention back to what is presently happening.

Every so often statements are uttered that declare *who a person is*, or *what they are doing*: "I'm the shopkeeper," Lam says at one point. This statement, too, could be interpreted as dialogue between the characters in the film; but it could also be interpreted as a commentary by the actors. In addition, the statement feels half like an *explanation* of what is going on (we actually do see them working at the market), and half like an *establishment* of what is going on, restructuring the world of the game. Lam is letting the others know, *from now on I'm pretending to be the shopkeeper, keep that in mind*. This suggests that the actors might be re-constructing, and perhaps even creatively altering, the narrative as they review a silent edit of the film and improvise dialogue to it in real time.

These clues about the improvised nature of the film create a sense of falling into futurity alongside the actors, a sense that everything that happens in the film is as much a surprise for them as it is for me (although this may not be the case). We are in the newness together, and it creates a sense of collusion, of inclusion, of intimacy.

In the same way that postmodern choreographers aimed to present dancers at work, this film presents actors at work. Or perhaps, considered from a different angle, it evokes both the fictional passage of time proposed by the *story*, and the actual time it takes for the film to play out, as improvised voiceover is recorded – what we might call "real-time", or what Smith and Dean refer to as "improvisatory time" (Smith & Dean, 1997, p. 26). In this way *Jaguar* seems to celebrate, and draw my attention to, the "folds" in its construction. As a viewer I move through those folds, directing my attention this way and that to perceive the different layers within any one filmic moment. These folds, or layers, pertain to the double nature of the actors/characters, but also extend to the visual quality of the entities that appear on the screen (a plant battling in the wind, the overcast daylight during a street parade in Accra), and to the palpability of the technological processes that have mediated these entities (the grain in the image, the timing of a cut). Being asked to hold all of this in my attention produces the feelings of "fullness" I have alluded to throughout this chapter: a texture of experience that emerges from what the film demands of me, or from the large amount of potentially affective information it loads me up with.

## Acknowledging my Efforts in *Washing Lines*

Inspired by these cinematic and dance based practices, I began to embrace the active efforts, constructions and even fabrications shaping the improvised recordings I made for Activity 7. Realising that these structuring elements gave definition to the videos, and still created many opportunities for risk-taking and "flights of the unexpected", I allowed for more careful preparation and planning in advance of a given shoot, and also allowed traces of the effortful construction of the videos to be apparent.

Examples of more active planning before a shoot include clearing Vanessa's cluttered corridor before recording, and accepting Nouha's offer to move her car out of the carport to allow me to better move around her with the camera. I also discussed basic lighting options with participants (to have the curtains open or closed? Lights on or off?), and started asking participants who I hadn't filmed with before to walk me through what they were going to do – to show me where their washing line was, and how they got there. At an earlier time, I might have considered this "cheating". This shift reflects a waning anxiety about preserving the "veracity" or "authenticity" of a situation, and an increasing emphasis on setting up structures to support improvisation.

Traces of the videos' construction, and of my thinking and effort, appear in *Washing Lines* in the form of camera movement, visible adjustments to light-levels in the image, interactions between the participants and myself, and reflexive voiceover.

One video in *Washing Lines* in which the camera movement sometimes evidences my thinking, and even my distractedness, is the portrait of Ashleigh, Daisy, Becky and

Indiana. After all the clothes have been hung out Ashleigh addresses me from off-screen, asking me if she and her son Indiana should "go get Daisy some food?" When I realise it is *me* she's talking to (and not Indiana), I am momentarily distracted from my camera work to look over at her and nod, and my commitment to "lingering" with the clothes horse and Daisy falters. A few moments later, I get "left in the lurch" at the clothes horse once Ash and Indiana have wandered to Daisy's water trough. Although there are no opportunities to "catch a ride" over to them at that moment, I decide to break away from the score and move of my own accord, to get closer to Ash, Indiana and Daisy. This is something I would previously have identified as "forcing things", or "hunting for action", and I would have felt the urge to conceal or omit it. But it could also be perceived as a moment of intentionality and decisiveness that is intended to enable more responsiveness later on: an active sculpting that exists in a mutually enriching relationship with receptiveness.

Visible, real-time technical responses to unpredictable lighting situations occur in Maree and Yori's videos. In Maree's video, there are two instances in which I flick the "gain" dial on the camera to add more light to the image, as the room in which she hangs out her washing turns out to be darker than expected. In Yori's video, I have to adjust the aperture settings (which also manage the amount of light in the image) as we move between sun and shade, and the changes are noticeable in the video. While some colour grading *may* (or may not) have effectively concealed these adjustments, I made no attempt to conceal them in post-production. Like the few camera movements that revealed my active role as a composer, these adjustments revealed my thinking "on the fly", my *trying* on the fly, and might actually add an effortful texture to the videos.

Verbal exchanges between the participants and I, as well as participants' glances to camera, reveal my presence as a filmmaker. These exchanges and glances became more frequent, and also acquired a more relaxed tone, once I started to tell participants that they could openly acknowledge me during the recordings – in the earliest iterations of Activity 7, I had asked participants to act as if I was not there.

Yet the constructed nature of the videos is perhaps most obvious in the use of voiceover. Deep into Activity 7, I added a new component to the activity: immediately after filming I transferred the recorded footage to my laptop and asked participants to watch it back with me. As they watched, I asked them to report on what they were thinking at the time of the recording, and/or what they were thinking about presently, as they reviewed the footage. I made an audio recording of their speech, and edited this recording to create the voiceover for their video portrait. The technique of improvising voiceover in real time to video playback was borrowed directly from *Jaguar*. It was partly intended to reveal the recording process, but was also partly intended to hold the audience's attention as they watched the portraits, which have a distinct pace, playing out in real time. (This reflects, again, how welcoming active interventions on my part coincided with a growing consideration of the potential audience for these videos.)

While sometimes the voiceover appears to emanate from the space-time of the video (almost as though we were listening to the internal thoughts of the person hanging out their washing on screen), it also sometimes slips *out of* temporal synchronicity with the video – when a participant speaks reflexively about what they were thinking at the time, for example, or when their reflections somehow reveal the gap in time between the video and voiceover recording. In their voiceover reflections, subjects describe their own awareness of the camera and reveal how certain aspects of this ostensibly "live moment" were constructed. They also reveal aspects of their relationship to me, situating the portrait in a real-life context that extends well beyond it (for example, Dave's voiceover reveals that we have been shooting together for a long time). By slipping in- and out of temporal synchronicity with the video (now appearing to emanate from it, now not), the voiceover sometimes helps to produce feelings of immersion and intimacy in relation to the world on screen, granting us access to the inner life of the human body we see there, and at other times draws attention to the improvised and compositional processes at work in the film.

The technical quality of the voiceover recordings may also, to the trained ear, sometimes reveal the constructed nature of these videos. In some portraits the voiceover reverberates slightly with a "room echo" resulting from the fact that the voiceover recordings were made indoors in participants' homes, where the possibility of setting up an amenable sound recording environment varied. The audible reverberation may serve as a reminder that the voices we are hearing do not emanate from the mind of the person we are watching on screen, nor from the place that we are seeing on screen. While I was given the opportunity to record voiceover in a professional studio whose padded walls blocked out all other noise and absorbed all echo, I anticipated that conducting the voiceover improvisation in a studio setting might be inhibiting for participants, and might diminish the sense of spontaneity and ease I hoped to create in the exercise. I chose to prioritise the latter, and to accept that my own cobbled-together "sound recording booth" (which involved throwing a bedspread over a tripod and huddling underneath it with my participants, along with a laptop and sound recorder) would probably allow the resulting voiceover to carry audible traces of where it was recorded.



Figures 1 and 2: My "mobile sound recording booth" – a fitting throwback to the cubbyhouses of childhood play.

## Conclusion

In coming to a critical appreciation of the active decision-making and compositional work involved in *Washing Lines*, I became more cognisant of the lineages of materialist and improvised practice upon which my work builds, and was prompted to situate my work accordingly.

Along the way, I arrived at conclusions about why certain creative works engage me, and potentially others, affectively as an audience member. A key conclusion was that performances and films which deliberately reveal part of their process firstly include audience members in the risk-taking inherent in performance and improvisation, and secondly create opportunities for audiences to connect with the sensuousness of the creative work's material qualities (drawing attention to what the work is *made of*, and not only what it means). While the work of Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker and Simone Forti has been theorised in this light before, my engagement with the contemporary Sydney-based practices of Rhiannon Newton and Lizzie Thomson offered insights into current improvised dance practices in Australia and how the work of these artists specifically creates encounters with the risk-taking and materiality of live improvisation.

This chapter also describes my evolving thinking concerning artists' statements – particularly statements with an ambitious, essentialist or even manifesto-like flavour. I arrived at the insight that, while artists like John Cage have been critiqued for not always achieving the high standards their own statements implied, perhaps the purpose of this

sort of language is not to describe their successes, but their intentions. In addition, I drew into the fold another contemporary Sydney-based artist who considered these very questions through an arts residency in 2014 – Angela Goh. I was thus able to theorise another instance of enquiry through dance in the current Australian landscape, connecting international mid-twentieth century discussions about art to present meditations on the same in my home city.

Further, repeated improvisations at the washing line combined with ongoing reading, participation in regular performance training and residencies, and critical reflection, led me to articulate key strategies for improvisation, such as the "art of not giving one-hundred percent". This was, again, an insight that emerged from a struggle with the material contexts of practice (an exercise that confounded me in the studio with Newton, or a crisis experienced in the moment of filming). As such, much like Chapter Three, this chapter offers more narratives about the practice-led accumulation of "originary" understandings, which may feed future practice-led research.

As I have noted, acknowledging my intentions as a filmmaker coincided with a growing appreciation of potential audience responses to *Washing Lines*, and with an increasing sense of the liminality, or multi-dimensionality, of this mode of improvised video portraiture. By this I mean the need to attend to multiple things at once as a composer: the materiality and weight of objects around me, my own compositional intentions, and, as the following and final chapter of this explores, the potential meanings that might be inferred from these "portraits".







# Chapter Five

## Sensuous Recognition

### Introduction

In the introduction I described three distinct phases in my exploration of the concerns of this project. The first phase was characterised by a desire to disrupt habitual ways of interpreting my surroundings with a camera, and to be moved by my environment. The second phase reintegrated a sense of my active constructions within the improvised score, and the third and final phase recovered an openness to the potential *meanings* that may arise from the score – their inevitability, and also their value.

My sense of the inevitability and value of meaning-making in the videos comprising *Washing Lines* grows from the understanding, described in Chapter Two, that encounters occur *in context* – in a time and place, and against the backdrop of different histories, which together form a shifting, not-quite-knowable "landscape" (Carter, 2013). In Chapter Two I explored the importance of this "landscape" in relation to play; this present chapter explores the importance of "landscape" in relation to images – for like all art, images exist in a broader historical context that brings the inevitability of cultural and personal interpretations to bear on them.

David MacDougall writes that “the meaning we find in what we see is always both a necessity and an obstacle. Meaning guides our seeing [...] but meaning, when we force it on things, can also blind us, causing us to see only what we expect to see or distracting us from seeing very much at all” (MacDougall, 2006, p. 1). Both entirely necessary and a point of difficulty, these possibilities for meaning-making cannot go unaddressed.

In "folding" the moving images that comprise *Washing Lines* back into the world, I must accept that they will tangle with other images, with the broader histories of images and entities (Hongisto, 2015, pp. 12–17), and with viewers' personal histories and reference points. If, in these videos, I want to minimise the scope for normative or other unwanted readings, I will sometimes have to actively work at inviting certain interpretations, and disrupting others. Encouraging interpretative processes might also increase the affective potential of the videos. Meaning does guide our seeing, and interpretations and associations form an important part of the affective relationships viewers may establish

with pieces of video as sounds and images recall both broader cultural reference points, and deeply personal ones.

This third phase of my thinking informed the videos concretely in two ways. Firstly, it affected the way I inhabited the movement score, so that I became increasingly cognisant and accepting of instances of potential meaning or narrative where they arose. Secondly, it led me to experiment with improvised voiceover and captioning of the videos as a means of encouraging and guiding interpretive processes for viewers. (These captions were intended for use in the online video gallery I used to present *Washing Lines*, as well as in a written document accompanying the downloadable version of the video series.)

I continue this chapter by exploring the relationship between sensation and interpretation, casting them as overlapping and mutually enriching experiential fields that viewers can actively navigate. I then describe the relationship between improvised cinematographic strategy and narrative in the practices of Jean Rouch and Leonard Retel Helmrich, two improvising cinematographers who have been especially influential on me, before articulating the relationship between cinematographic strategy and narrative that is particular to my score for camera movement. Next, I describe several instances of active meaning-making that I engaged in throughout the production of *Washing Lines*, unpacking some of the wealth of meanings that converge around the act of doing laundry, and the complexities these sometimes produce. In closing, I reflect on the importance of the long take, in relation to both my score for camera movement, and the broader concerns of my research.

## Sensuous Recognition

Filmmakers and theorists who are interested in haptic cinema often note the value of interpretation and the narratives it invites – especially where such narratives co-exist in productive tension with a textured, dilating present. Deleuze is one such theorist. In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (1986), he applies C.S. Peirce's semiotic schema to film, describing various modes of engagement with images that are categorised as *firstness*, *secondness* and *thirdness* experiences. I interpret these experiences as a progression from initial, ineffable sensation, through to interpretation – or, as I will suggest, through to a *recognition* of what one is sensing.

Firstness describes initial sensation: an encounter with something that cannot yet be located in historical space-time or in relation to other entities, and that can therefore not yet be named. According to Deleuze, "firstness is difficult to define, because it is felt rather than conceived: it concerns what is new in experience, what is fresh, fleeting and nevertheless eternal" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 98). It has "as its limit the simple affect of fear [...]" but as its substance it has the compound affect of desire and astonishment – which gives it

life" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 101). This sensation, which Deleuze calls the "affection image", exists in a kind of solitude – it can only refer to itself because it is unrecognisable and therefore not able to be related to other things. One can, however, absorb its *quality*. (Deleuze gives Joris Ivens's 1929 film *Rain* as an example of firstness in cinema: it gives the quality of rain, which is distinct from both the idea of rain, and from an actual, historical instance of rain (Deleuze, 1986, p. 111).)<sup>36</sup>

Firstness may give rise to secondness. In secondness, sensation no longer relates only to its own quality: here it *can* be located in relation to other things and, thus, identified. This is what Deleuze means by "dividuation": for something to become individual, it must become distinct from all the other things that it is not (Deleuze, 1986, Chapters 6-7). When they enter into secondness things cease to be mere possibilities or qualities; they become actualities, materials in the world with the power to act on each other, and be acted upon. Deleuze therefore calls secondness images "action images".

Thirdness occurs when firstness and secondness are drawn into "relations": when a viewer establishes conceptual or mental relationships between them. Deleuze describes thirdness as a contemplation or interpretation of sensations and materials that produces "intellectual feelings of relations, such as the feelings which accompany the use of the logical conjunctions 'because', 'although', 'so that', 'therefore', 'now'" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 197). These feelings are referred to as "mental images".

As I alluded to before, I understand firstness, secondness and thirdness as a progression from initial sensation in an encounter towards a recognition of what is encountered. Seen this way, firstness describes sensation before it is recognisable, secondness describes a concrete recognition of things in space and time, and thirdness involves the recognition of abstract, relational and perhaps associative dimensions of experience. While I am aware that there may be a host of literatures on "recognition" that define the term in different and important ways, the sense of "recognition" I wish to bring into play is a feeling evoked by Paul Carter's description of the "landscape of encounters" (2013), introduced in Chapter Two. It is the feeling of, "I was walking in the landscape and I *think I saw...*" (the colour blue; your washing line; the loneliest summer of my childhood). Recognition, here, is used to describe a process of finding the familiar in the newly encountered. It is a spectrum of un/certainty, and involves resourcefulness on the part of the recogniser, who relates what is new in perception to whatever is at hand: to memories, signposts and other available reference points.

Sarah Pink and Kerstin Leder-Mackley propose a similar relationship to images when they unpack the idea, initially proposed by David MacDougall, that "visual media allow us to construct knowledge not by 'description' [...] but by a form of 'acquaintance'"

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<sup>36</sup> Deleuze has also defined affection images as "potentialities" or "possibles" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 102).

(MacDougall, 2006, p. 220). Pink and Leder-Mackley write, "In our project, forms of acquaintance might include both the idea of feeling that we understand something because we can access it through a similar personal memory or experience, or conversely by seeking to use our resources of experience to try to understand that which is quite different to our own" (Pink & Leder-Mackley, 2012, p. 4.1). To construct knowledge by acquaintance suggests, to me, a process of making sense of the world by relating what is newly encountered to what is remembered from a past encounter (or encounters), in the face of a constant level of uncertainty. The word "acquaintance" suggests a feeling of both familiarity and mystery (an acquaintance is different from a friend; to "make someone's acquaintance"). To construct knowledge by acquaintance might be to say for a long time, "I *think* I've seen you before, therefore you *might* be who I think you are," until eventually you can say with some certainty, "I know I've seen you before..." It therefore offers another evocative way of thinking about "recognition" in the way I interpret it here.

Matilda Mroz's discussion of "resonance" further enriches my sense of the uncertainty of recognition. Drawing on David Trotter's use of the word, Mroz suggests that sometimes sensations or events *feel* significant – they "resonate" – but cannot be fully identified. The sense that something is significant, that something "resonates", suggests a half-recognition that desires to know more, but that may never "cross over into definite meaning or symbolization" (Mroz, 2012, p. 5). This sense of uncertainty indicates that it is not always easy to distinguish between firstness/secondness/thirdness states, and that many feelingful experiences contain compounds of the three.

I also understand recognition as being in a close relationship with narrative. Once things become recognisable, meaningful relationships may be established between them ("because", "although", "so that", "therefore", "now,"), and these may come to approximate narratives of varying complexity. It follows that the cultural and personally specific ways in which audiences recognise (or interpret) sensations, profoundly inform what kinds of narratives are drawn as audiences connect these points of recognition. Laura U. Marks seems to sketch the close relationship between recognition and narrative-making when she writes, describing Mona Hatoum's experimental video, *Measures of Distance*, "At the point where the image of the mother becomes recognizable, narrative rushes in" (Marks, 2002, p. 16).

The gradual welcoming back of interpretive processes in my thinking reflected a growing conviction that films could engage viewers in several different ways at once, facilitating what Gene Youngblood has called "the simultaneous perception of harmonic opposites" – or, the ability to "[see] incompatibilities together" (Youngblood, 1970, p. 82). This might involve seeing characters and actors simultaneously (as I did when watching *Jaguar*). It might also involve engaging with sensations on a firstness and thirdness level simultaneously, an experience which is enhanced by a viewer's ability to suspend and apply their interpretive faculties volitionally.

While filmic sensations often arrive as strange or familiar (or a combination of both) in ways that are out of our control as viewers, I would argue that we sometimes wilfully produce experiences of familiarity and unfamiliarity for ourselves. We can even *restore a degree of firstness* to sensations that have become over-determined by their familiarity, or their appearance of conventionality. The ability to make something strange again, to suspend interpretation, is part of the interpreter's skill-set. Drawing on the work of Giorgio Agamben, Rudi Laermans suggests just this: that one's potential in any field includes the potential to *not do* what one is trained to do (Laermans, 2015, pp. 54–55). A skilled musician's potential includes not only all kinds of capacities for making music, but also capacities for sustaining silence and for playing *against* technique. In a similar spirit, and writing about cinema specifically, Vivian Sobchack describes viewers as "volitional" and "deliberate" in their co-constitution of cinematic experiences – "the viewer has to work to constitute the image, to bring it forth from latency" (as summarised in Marks, 2002, p. 13).

As I moved towards the completion of *Washing Lines*, I increasingly hoped to create multidimensional portraits within which viewers might be able to make, and enjoy, various interpretive movements of this nature.

## Meaning-Making and Improvised Camera Movement

The ways in which mobile, long takes guide interpretation and construct narratives have been widely theorised. Lutz Bacher, for example, distinguished between "expressive" long takes, which further a narrative, and "rhythmic" long takes, which suggest an aesthetic and a mood (Bacher, 2006). André Bazin described the long take's unique ability to leave intact the continuity and ambiguity of dramatic space, in contrast to montage, which made an interpretation of that space (Bazin, 1967/2005, p. 34) – while Jean Mitry countered that the mobile long take is not so different from montage in the sense that both are forms of narrative sequencing that establish relationships between entities (Nielsen, 2007, p. 43). Alexandre Astruc famously projected that the mobile camera would function like a pen, allowing the cinema "to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language" (Astruc as quoted in Rascaroli, 2008, p. 28). The power dynamics implicit in the camera's ability to capture and interpret has also been theorised from many angles – I return to this point later.

In what follows, I explore the intersection of camera movement and narrative with a specific focus on improvisational strategies – or, how a filmmaker might work their way towards and through narrative possibilities while improvising with a mobile camera. I begin by looking at the work of Jean Rouch and Leonard Retel Helmrich, two filmmakers who are keenly aware of the improvisational strategies they employ, and who have

referred to their improvisations as "dances" of a kind. I then look at the work of Sarah Pink, a sensory ethnographer working with video, who conceives of her "walking with video" practice in ways that are especially relevant to my work. After examining how these three filmmakers employed cinematographic strategies to suggest meanings, tell stories and, in Pink's case, to "gather" or construct place, I describe how potential narratives and meanings figured within the cinematographic strategy used for *Washing Lines*.

## Jean Rouch: experimental constraints, regular re-evaluations

An active prototyper of the earliest handheld cameras, Jean Rouch wrote, "For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it, trying to make it as alive as the people it is filming" (Rouch, 1974/1995, p. 8). His work is particularly influential to my score-based approach because of his interest in suggesting meanings and telling stories within experimental constraints.

For Rouch, the relationship between improvised camera work and narrative was one especially determined by the technical constraints of filming with equipment that he sought to make as mobile as possible, with a crew that he kept as small as possible to increase the fluency of the exchange between the improvising filmmaker and the subjects of the film, and to minimise the impact of the crew's presence in the subjects' community (Rouch, 1974/1995, p. 6). When shooting while traveling significant distances alongside his subjects, Rouch regularly found himself in situations requiring technical resourcefulness. His film *Cocorico! Monsieur Poulet* (1974), in which a travelling threesome of aspiring chicken-vendors must constantly salvage their car from total breakdown or make it do near impossible things to be able to continue their journey, is in some ways a nice metaphor for the way Rouch himself interacted with his camera while shooting the film. He notes that occasionally camera angles in his films have been interpreted as offering a particular reading of what was happening in the frame, when they were in fact primarily the result of his having to accommodate technical or logistical necessities (Yakir, 1978, p. 411).

This need to work resourcefully within constraints, in profoundly unpredictable situations, produced an improvised storytelling strategy that was characterised by frequent re-evaluations of narrative possibilities between takes. For example, when filming *Hippopotamus Hunt* (1950), which documented an annual, ritual hippopotamus hunt on the Niger River, Rouch used film stock that allowed for a maximum shot-length of 22 seconds. Rouch would shoot for as long as possible, and then, in the enforced breaks between 22-second takes, would decide what to frame next, in order to further the story. In an interview about the making of this film, he said he made decisions about how to frame the next shot with virtually no time to deliberate, and would decide based both on

what had happened before, and what he thought would happen next (Rouch, 2007). Each choice he made in terms of how to start recording affected, to a degree, what following choices would become available to him. His moments of re-evaluation between shots remind me of a consultation with a compass. Where is north now? Where-to next? (Although this analogy falters a little upon the realisation that, in improvised storytelling, "north" itself is often shifting.)

## Leonard Retel Helmrich: a circular and subjective schema

Working many years later, Leonard Retel Helmrich also uses a mobile camera and works with long takes. His improvised camera method is an important predecessor to my own because it is shaped by a set of options for camera movement that function somewhat like a score.

In Helmrich's practice, the relationship between narrative and camera movement is one in which the camera uses a range of circular or semi-circular "orbital" movements to suggest relationships between subjects and places, according to his sense of what story is unfolding around him. This requires that he become an emotionally immersed participant in the social world he is documenting, and use the orbital movements of his camera (supported by a lightweight, custom-made rig) to sketch the relationships and shifting dynamics that he feels are becoming important to the story, in real time. The camera's circular movements suggest relationships between people and environments, indicate shifts in relationship dynamics, and invite changes in *focus* for the audience by, for example, inverting positions of foreground and background, phasing entities in and out of the *mise-en-scène*, or orbiting around singular subjects. He calls this system "Single Shot Cinema", and refers to it as a "camera choreography" (Helmrich, 2013, p. 6).

Invoking Alexandre Astruc's prediction that the camera would become like a pen, allowing for great subtlety of personal expression in cinematic authorship, Helmrich explains that the narrative presented in Single Shot Cinema expresses his emotional point of view on the situation: what we see is the narrative of his unfolding understanding of a scenario, more than any true or objective narrative (Helmrich, 2013, pp. 2–5). Indeed, the camera movement in his film, *Position Among the Stars* (2010), introduces character perspectives – and expresses Helmrich's own perspective – with distinct clarity.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Position Among the Stars* is the final instalment of a documentary trilogy Helmrich made that follows the life of a family in Jakarta. Its other instalments, *Eye of the Day* and *Shape of the Moon*, were released in 2001 and 2004 respectively.

## Sarah Pink: Walking with Video, Gathering Place

Sarah Pink conceives of her work with a camera less as narrative construction, and more as the "gathering" of place. A sensory ethnographer working primarily with audiovisual media, Pink utilises walking as a central cinematographic method. Her cinematographic (and ethnographic) approach is premised on Tim Ingold's understanding of place as an "entanglement of lines or trajectories" (Pink & Leder-Mackley, 2012, p. 3.6), and also on Doreen Massey's suggestion that place is an "event" – an "ever shifting constellation of trajectories [of different entities]" (Massey as quoted in Pink & Leder-Mackley, 2012, p. 3.6) that is constantly being reassembled or reconfigured depending on who or what "pulls it together". So, places are not fixed and waiting to be discovered – they are generated through the ephemeral co-presences of different beings and things in motion. Pink writes that her approach to filming place is also underpinned by Edward Casey's suggestion that place (a) centres around the "experiencing body", and (b) is something with a "gathering power" – it is able to "draw together bodies and things, and time and space" (Pink, 2007b, p. 245). As such, she sees walking – and specifically the walking *route* – as an event that, in turn, generates a place-as-event.

The person who walks a route with a camera helps to construct place in several ways: first, the filmmaker's route contributes to the actual shaping of a place-as-event, as their walking route forms one trajectory among the mesh of pathways that together constitute place at the time of filming; and equally, the camera gathers together a version, or "representation", of a place as it records the things it is walked past.

As Pink puts it,

"seeing place as a form of gathering provides us with a metaphor for understanding how, by making place through the creation of a route, things, persons, social encounters experiences [sic], discourses, reflections and more are gathered together as components of that place-as-route. As such the route can be seen as place-as-event." (Pink, 2007b, p. 245)

Pink uses this walking/gathering method in her ethnographic study of the Green Lanes Community Garden in the UK, and also in her studies of sensory domesticity and energy consumption – how people make their homes feel "right", and how variously energy-reliant domestic methodologies (including laundry practices) enable this feeling. She has made both a long-form documentary about laundry practices in Indonesia, and many unedited, single take recordings of people showing her around their laundries and re-enacting their laundry practices in the UK.<sup>38</sup> Pink understands these video recordings as instances of "gathering" (Pink, 2007b, p. 249, 2009, p. 12).

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<sup>38</sup> Pink's co-authored long-form documentary was titled *Laundry Lives* (Pink & Astari, 2015), and the shorter video portraits shot in the UK were part of the Loughborough University and RMIT-based "Energy and Digital Living" web project (Pink, 2014).



Pink's cinematographic approach is relevant to my work in many ways. In the theories Pink invokes, place would seem to be created *through motion* – an idea that resonates with a dance-informed approach to portraying place with a handheld camera. Her conviction that places are shifting and unbounded, brought into being by a mesh of criss-crossing pathways, captures the experience of working within the eventual score for camera movement used in *Washing Lines*: the score required an attunement to the criss-crossing trajectories of all the entities moving around me, as it was *their motion* that would enable and give shape to my own.

The idea that place is "gathered together" along a route that the camera moves along also suggests that perhaps my "danced" (or dance-informed) route with a camera similarly "creates a filmic representation of place in which it gathers together bodies and things, and time and space through its focus on experiencing sensing body(ies)" (Pink, 2007b, p. 248).

It is also worth reflecting on the language Pink uses to describe the relationship between her camera and its environment – to "gather". Another seminal female filmmaker, Agnes Varda, similarly described her filmmaking process as one of "gleaning" – of collecting, of salvaging leftovers (Varda, 2000).

These metaphors are in stark contrast to those employed, it must be said, by male, or male-identifying, directors and film theorists. Jean Rouch himself has written that the moving camera "penetrates" reality (Rouch, 1974/1995, p. 7); Gilles Deleuze has written that a moving camera "splits" and "enters" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 23). While "penetrating" and "splitting" have dominating and somewhat phallic undertones, "gathering" evokes a bringing together; the etymological roots of the word, "to plait or fold in cloth", and to "collect, store up" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2018), suggest maintenance, aesthetic concern, care.<sup>39</sup> "Gleaning" suggests salvaging, treasuring, working with leftovers. Perhaps, too, gleaning implies a working with what *can be freely given away* – with what need not be wrested. The language (and thus the mentality) proposed by these female-identifying filmmakers provides an important feminist alternative in a filmmaking landscape deeply inflected (like so much of the world) by patriarchal and colonial power relations and ways of thinking.

## My Movement Score: encounters in a network of pathways

In the camera movement score used for *Washing Lines*, narrative figures as a series of opportunities for story-telling or meaning-making that are encountered by the camera as it moves through place. Answering to a score whose components include "hooking onto"

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<sup>39</sup> The etymology of the word "gathering" shows its relationship to domestic labour – an interesting link, as domestic labour features centrally in many of Pink's video investigations. Domestic labour, like the laundry, is far less frequently the subject of films – ethnographic and otherwise – and bringing them into the light, as Pink has also done, is a political act.

things, "catching rides" on things, being "left in the lurch" by things, and "lingering" with things, the camera's movements are reliant upon the pathways that other bodies make through place: it is picked up by them, carried through place by them, and left behind by them. This method was taken up more as a means to become *caught up in the movement of the world* than as a means to say specific things about the bodies I filmed. (Like "gleaning" and "gathering", the notion of being "caught up" in the movement of the world offers another feminist alternative to the more dominating analogies that have been used to describe the mobile camera.) And yet, on my trajectories through place with a camera I frequently met with instances of recognition, or interpretation, which presented me with an opportunity to consciously suggest meanings: to say something about a subject, or to suggest a narrative. In such an encounter, I could choose to take up and explore that opportunity, or to let it slide past me.

Here I am reminded of Alejandro Rolandi's reflections, during a Contact Improvisation course, on the potential interpretations or narratives that presented themselves to him while dancing the "Underscore".<sup>40</sup> He noted that narrative possibilities sometimes cropped up in his awareness while dancing – meaning that he recognised the potential of a certain movement-phrase to bear cultural meanings or to tell a story. Rolandi said he had started experimenting with the conscious choice to entertain narrative possibilities – to let his subsequent decisions be influenced by a sense of what these particular movements might *mean*, what story they might tell – or to simply notice them and then let them go, prioritising other elements in the score. During the filming of *Washing Lines*, the cropping up of narrative possibilities felt similar: they felt like recognitions in a landscape that I could choose to engage with, or to leave be.

One particular instance of recognition and narrative-building in *Washing Lines* provides a good illustration for how this often played out in the improvisations. It happens in Gideon's portrait. While Gideon performs his laundry-task in the basement of his apartment block, he notices a forgotten pile of laundry on one of the dryers. The pile breaches the edge of my camera frame; almost simultaneously I notice Gideon's response to the pile, and register its dramatic potential. I decide to adjust my camera to let the pile enter the frame fully. By organising the frame to emphasise the laundry pile, and by working to capture Gideon's openly performative response to it, I choose to identify the pile as his, and to suggest that he has forgotten it here, thus instigating the construction of a potential narrative. The construction of this narrative continues when Gideon gathers up this laundry pile and carries it to the elevator, the camera following him; it continues in the voiceover improvisation where Gideon confirms that he had indeed forgotten the

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<sup>40</sup> In Chapter One I describe Nancy Stark-Smith's "Underscore" as a series of drawings and words that are used to structure non-verbal group improvisations.

laundry; and, finally, it continues when I decide to include this voiceover in my eventual audio edit for Gideon's portrait.

This is an interesting example because in this instance the decision to pursue the construction of a narrative was quite possibly a joint one. As I described in Chapter Two, Gideon took an active, deliberate role in co-composing his video portrait. While I cannot remember exactly what happened in that quick, speechless negotiation, it could well be that, in the split-second of his noticing the laundry pile and my letting it enter the frame, Gideon, through his body language, suggested the narrative construction to me, and I, in an instant, agreed to pursue it with him.

Sometimes the camera ended up framing things that lent themselves to *unwanted* readings – such as breasts, which are near the shoulders (so central to much laundry-hanging), and which have been the repository of objectifying gazes throughout film history. Such encounters demanded that I engage with the potential meanings of what was in the frame, and that I work to somehow redress them. Throughout the improvisations I developed ways of noticing such potential interpretations, and responding to the complexities they threw up. This is the subject of the next section of this chapter, which addresses specific meanings that may attach themselves to images, and the ways I tried to work with them.

Of course, many improvising filmmakers may work to similar parameters, following what they perceive to be the "action" in a scenario (which is often contained in moving bodies), and making decisions on the fly about whether to pursue or forgo a given opportunity. However, what is distinct about the score for camera movement in *Washing Lines* is its emphasis on interweaving pathways as the basis of an improvised, materialist investigation. A constant awareness of the criss-crossing trajectories of moving bodies and materials sat at (or very near) the forefront of my attention throughout the improvisations, and what counted as "action", or as "meaningful", was thrown into question as I pursued an expanded sense of things' agency and vibrancy. Perhaps mine is not so much a distinctive method, then, as that it is a method taken up with a distinctive emphasis or interest.

It is important to note, too, that human movement pathways and human time have remained relatively central in *Washing Lines*. Many compositional choices – the titling and captioning of the videos, the voiceover (with the deliberate exception of Ashleigh, Indiana, Becky and Daisy's joint video), and the camera movements – helped to centre human narratives. Even so, I hope to have submerged humans – even if only slightly – in a broader network of pathways, textures and temporalities belonging to vibrant, non-human subjects, which together generated places in motion.

# Recognitions and their Implications

The ability for things to be recognised – to be identified beyond their firstness qualities – requires that I consider what the materials in the videos *may mean* for a broader audience, and also what I *want them* to mean. It prompts me to consider, too, what I would *not* want the series to accidentally imply, and to respond to that with adjustments (in the improvised video recording, but also through voiceover editing and captioning of the images) that unsettle unwanted readings.

In his own grappling with the problems of visual representation and interpretation, MacDougall articulates my own concerns well: "The transformations that take place in the portrayal of the film subjects are complex, and not always a matter of conscious intent. Filmmakers often watch helplessly as the figures on the screen take on characteristics quite different from themselves in life" (MacDougall, 1998, p. 40). Earlier in the same book he writes, "It is no coincidence that some people fear photography as a theft of the soul [...] by freezing life, every film to some degree offends against the complexity of people" (MacDougall, 1998, p. 38).

One of my main concerns in this regard has been to avoid inviting stereotypical or oversimplified readings of my subjects. What viewers do with these videos, interpretively, is always beyond my control. But, as Vivian Sobchack says, filmmakers can *solicit* a certain response to their work (Sobchack, 1999, p. 253), and this is something I attempt to do.

## Washing Lines and Human Bodies

From the beginning of my research, I sought to engage a diverse group of participants in terms of age, ethnicity, ability, gender and sexual identity. And as I began to assemble some of the improvised takes into a "portrait series", subtleties relating to how the subjects were filmed and how they might be read became important. This was particularly the case when it came to gender, because of the positions women inhabit in both domestic practice and cinema. As the curators of laundry-themed art exhibition and oral history project *Hung Out To Dry* have noted, washing has been understood in much art and in many cultures as women's work (Greenop, Stead, & Holland, 2015).<sup>41</sup> Additionally, women's bodies in film appear against the backdrop of a long cinematic tradition in which the female body was (and is) primarily a sexualised object (Mulvey, 1975).

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<sup>41</sup> *Hung Out To Dry* was an initiative of anthropologist Kelly Greenop and architects Naomi Stead and Allison Holland. The exhibition took place at the University of Queensland Art Museum in 2015. In this exegesis I reference an hour-long panel discussion with the curators and selected artists, which was organised as part of the exhibition and oral history project.

In saying that women have appeared as sexualised objects in cinema, it is important to question the presumption that eroticised looking is synonymous with the male gaze. As Jane Gaines and others have noted, a queer take on Mulvey's argument would seek to de-centre heterosexual and male desire in analyses of women's "to-be-looked-at-ness" by drawing attention to the ways in which women may exist "for each other's eyes" – on screen, off screen, and in looking relationships between on- and off-screen subjects (J. Gaines, 1986, p. 64). However, while I might bring a "resistant" reading to my own video recordings, this does not preclude the possibility for other kinds of interpretations to be made.

This was brought to my attention through an improvisation early in Activity 7, before I had started to incorporate voiceover as a part of the process. I made a recording with a woman participant which inadvertently opened with a close-up of her chest as she carried her laundry basket down the garden steps. The video subsequently showed, like many others, her bare shoulders and arms working to hang out the clothes. I did not register how the video might allow the woman to be objectified until I showed this video to a small group of people, whose immediate feedback was that the video made it easy to objectify her. This came as a shock to me because it was not at all what I had intended, or what I saw in the video.

In subsequent improvisations, I became more aware of the ways in which women's bodies might be read in the frame, and how women's relationships to washing and housework played into the broader history of domestic labour as women's work. This awareness affected my camera's pathway through the scenario, which now registered new nodes of cultural and gendered meaning where they arose. It also prompted me to address potential meanings by foregrounding the women's subjectivities through voiceover. In Jess's voiceover, for example, she and I both address materials in the frame that might become sexualised objects: we note the intimacy of my filming her lacy underwear, at which she jokes, "lucky there was no stains". Later she tells me she was sometimes worried, while we filmed, that I was framing her breasts or the undies she was wearing. I reply that I was aware of that; that I've noticed how women's bodies become legible on screen in ways I don't want them to be. I tell her I tried not to frame her breasts too much. In this portrait a woman is hanging out her washing in bare arms and legs – but also, she and the woman who filmed her are having a candid discussion that speaks to the way she is represented on screen. The voiceover suggests mutual respect and a mutual awareness of the visual regimes that women move within. Jess is not only a body to be looked at, she is also a subject whose gaze is articulated through voiceover commentary that affects the way the visual material is interpreted.

The use of voiceover and captioning was also effective in presenting a diversity of feelings about housework across the women who appear in the series.

Sarah Pink observes, through her visual ethnographies of domestic practices in Britain, that laundry is one way in which people actively and creatively construct their identities (Pink, 2007a). Through the sensory palettes they create in their home environments and through consumer decisions they make, they express and construct who they want to be in the world. Pink emphasises the agency that women exercise in controlling these processes, and notes that some of the women she interviewed resist the pull towards a more equal sharing of the laundry because they value having this control. She also points out that women access a source of power when it comes to housework: they inherit expertise and information on how to do it effectively. (Jess and Nouha allude to the maternal passing-down of this information in their portraits.)

In *Washing Lines* I sought to show that some of the women in male-female partnerships did the laundry with a sense of pride and agency. Nouha is methodical and thorough, and enjoys the compositional aspect of hanging similar items together, with similarly coloured pegs. She notes, with amusement, that in "her culture" (she was born and raised in Lebanon), the way a woman does her washing is seen to suggest how organised she is. Maree, too, notes in her voiceover recording that she actually doesn't like her partner Mark doing it because hanging out washing is a very precise process for her and she likes having control over how it is done. This piece of voiceover counters a brief glimpse in the video of Mark sitting back in an armchair with a book as Maree walks through the house with the washing basket. The voiceover establishes Maree's agency where the video may have suggested otherwise.

The portraits also suggest that not all women enjoy hanging out washing – Yori does not try to conceal her lack of enthusiasm about the task when she does it for the camera. When I showed *Washing Lines* to a handful of people to hear their feedback in the late stages of its completion, one viewer reflected that Yori was "a bit of a downer" – she did not smile and one could not be sure if she was happy in her life. At first this feedback unsettled me, as I wondered whether Yori would be upset to learn that she was interpreted this way. However, on further reflection I realised that, if Yori was interpreted that way, then it was all the more reason to leave the portrait as it was. From what I knew of Yori, she probably would not mind, and her portrait unsettled the expectation of women, more so than men, to smile and appease. A woman not interested in smiling for the camera, not overly concerned with appearing upbeat or happy, was, in the first place, nothing to be worried about, and, in the second place, an important addition to a series of portraits that aimed to frustrate gender stereotypes.

I was also conscious of how people of other genders were represented in the videos. I appreciate the moment, in the portrait of Adam and Harri, where Adam repeatedly kisses Harri on the forehead. Harri is in fact non-binary transgender, but could be read in the video as a cisgender man or as a trans\* man, as the case may be. To fold back into the world images of tenderness between two people who may be read as male, felt important,

given that the Anglo-Australian socialisation of men generally does not seem to encourage displays of tenderness – certainly not of kissing between men. I also sought men for the series who were emotionally articulate and comfortable with sharing their vulnerabilities. Additionally, I was aware of moments when the camera came to land on other body parts, besides women's breasts, that might be personal or vulnerable – such as the crotch area, which I perceived as sensitive (in terms of what it might signify) when filming with participants of all genders.

Besides its gendered connotations, laundry has also been used as shorthand for other identity markers in cinema, and in the arts more broadly. I will sketch these briefly. Drying practices have a symbolic relationship to socio-economic status, with the drying of laundry in publicly visible or shared spaces suggesting poverty and grittiness in films (as films cited later in this chapter illustrate). Washing lines also become indicators of cultural otherness and cultural authenticity in artistic renderings of travel experiences. The curators of *Hung Out To Dry* draw on published travel diaries, sketches and paintings to show how washing lines often suggest to a traveller that they have managed to move past the façade of the city; that they have accessed a part of its authentic identity as they glimpse private routines and personal effects belonging to "local" people (Greenop et al., 2015).

In response, the aim of the curators is to turn this lens back onto their local culture, where laundry practices and spaces are often overlooked. My videos aim to do this too. In addition, my videos seek to return a gaze to the subject who risks being reduced to a "cultural other" through voiceover narration, and to fracture stereotypes by offering information in the voiceover and video captions that shows the multidimensionality of each of the subjects.

As bell hooks and many in her wake have noted, to look – with a camera, or otherwise – is to engage power (hooks, 1996, p. 254). A gaze may inadvertently perpetuate regimes of power and privilege (as visual anthropologists also remind us (Ginsburg, 1998, p. 175; Griffiths, 2002)), and it may equally be a way of taking power *back* if one is oppressed by such regimes, and denied the privilege and the pleasure of gazing. As I noted earlier, the content of the voiceover in *Washing Lines* reveals that subjects are watching recordings of themselves as they speak. Not only that – they are watching *my looking at them* – a recording of my gaze. As such, the power to look, which, initially, rests with me as a filmmaker, is temporarily redistributed as subjects see what I was seeing while they were hanging out the washing. To cite Jean Rouch's notion of the camera as a "thief of reflections" (Rouch, 1974/1995, p. 2), in showing them the footage, I give the subjects back the reflection that I stole from them. Dave's comments, early in his video portrait, suggest that having access to these recorded reflections can be life changing. However, in my final editing of voiceover and writing of captions, power to define my subjects came to rest with

me again – and this meant that editing and writing these framing devices was often sensitive, difficult work.

In concluding this discussion of human bodies on screen, it is important to note that I have emphasised the gendered connotations of laundry especially, and have spent less time contemplating other ways in which subjects might be read and represented. Jane Gaines's essay on "White Privilege and Looking Relations" provides an important reminder that gendered relations vary according to their intersections with other aspects of social and political experience; that many people who have moved through the world as a woman in some way may *not* experience gender-based oppression as the primary point of oppression in their lives; and that painting gender-based oppression as a universal (and universally defining) experience may, under certain circumstances, work to reaffirm white, middle-class norms (J. Gaines, 1986). As such, I want to acknowledge the other symbolic regimes and power relations at work in the cinema and in video-based representation – such as those relating to class, ability, ethnicity – and the important conversations that these open up.

## Washing Lines and the Personal, the Private, the Public

The washing line, as a *place*, also lends itself to meanings. Washing lines are full of important absences: lovers, parents, children and friends are remembered through smell, touch and the specifics of a place. In the video portrait series, Dave's strong sense of his physically absent partner, Penny, offers a glimpse into the weight of meaningful relationships that may permeate laundry spaces and practices. Dave reflects on the location of memory, citing Oodgeroo Noonuccal, a poet Penny used to love, to suggest that maybe memory is more embedded in the places we visit than it is in us.

As Greenop, Stead and Holland note in their panel discussion about the *Hung Out To Dry* project, washing is about *care*: caring for clothes, caring for loved ones (Greenop et al., 2015). The contents of a 2011 British poetry collection also titled *Washing Lines* reflects the regularity with which people either connect with childhood experiences, or with experiences of caring for others, when confronted with line-drying scenarios. Many poems in the book are warm with a first-person address to someone of great importance, although it is not always clear whom:

You've been blackberrying again.

I take your blouse

and watch it turn



through the white suds  
in the drum, rinse-hold,  
spinning slowly through the cycle.

Jane Holland, *Spin-Cycle*

How it rained while you slept! Wakeful,  
I wandered around feeling the sills,  
followed closely by the dog and cat.

Jane Kenyon, *Wash Day*

Washing's tendency to open onto the deeply personal may also have something to do with its restorative function. Sarah Pink concludes in her paper, "Dirty Laundry", that washing is primarily about restoration and freshness (Pink, 2005). Under the pretext of getting clothes clean we in fact wash them to restore them to a sensory state that feels good and fresh – to make the fibres flow a certain way again, to make them smell right (and perhaps, as Vanessa's desire to wash the smell of someone else's soap powder out of her latest thrift shop purchase suggests, to make them smell like "ours"). While, for some, hanging out washing is a central part of the day, for many it is also an interstitial time – a time *between*, and temporarily free from, weightier pressures. The sensory and practical aspects of washing thus flow into and out of emotional and psychological senses of ritual, personal restoration and refreshment. As poet Ruth Moose writes, "All is forgiven in water, sun / and air" (Moose in "Washing Lines", 2011).

While recording the *Washing Lines* video portraits, I savoured moments in which the sensory qualities of water, sun and air were accentuated– possibly because they evoked feelings of restoration and freshness. Usually such moments occurred when the weather interacted visibly or audibly with the material properties of things – when the sun made the white of a shirt shine brighter; when the wind ruffled through the trees, or put a dent in a bed sheet. In Adam and Harri's portrait I enjoyed pointing the camera up to catch the sky and the sunlight as it filtered down purple through the bottom of the plastic peg container. I similarly enjoyed the way Vanessa's hair clung to her pegged-out clothes and lifted away from her head in strands, catching the light. And how Jess's grandmother's sheets lifted and flapped in a generous gust of wind, at the very end of her portrait. All of these moments were instances of weather animating material – or, conversely, of materials animating (giving visible and audible form to) weather. And together, weather and material produced a sensory plenitude that "gave form to" the meanings and feelings I have been discussing here.

In cinema, washing lines also become romantic and sexual spaces. Big sheets afford privacy. The sensuality of damp fabric, the weather, and the snatching of a private moment in an often overlooked space, lend themselves to "big feelings" (Björk, 1993) and, indeed, the washing lines have been a cinematic forum for matters love and sex related since the silent cinema.<sup>42</sup>

That said, washing lines are not always private or overlooked. After Nouha and I recorded her portrait, she drove me to the train station and, in the car, asked me if I thought washing practices were a culturally specific thing. I gave a non-specific answer. She went on to tell me that in her former home-town in Lebanon, people's washing lines were usually visible to the entire neighbourhood, so that everyone saw everyone else's washing, and made inferences about each other on the basis of their laundry practices.

The laundromat or laundrette is a distinctly *public* space. It is usually an urban space and, in cinema, often functions as a forum in which human lives intersect. In a film like *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) – where, too, washing is strung out on a balcony, face to face with a smoggy train line, suggesting a particular socio-economic status – the laundrette is a space of encounters between strangers, or acquaintances who often have no more in common than their shared use of the laundry facilities. Because it facilitates unlikely meetings, the laundromat or laundrette also becomes a romantic or erotic space – a place where lovers might meet for the first time, a place whose publicness increases the vertigo of personal connection.

In Gideon's portrait in the *Washing Lines* series, he finds the laundry space empty and does most of his jobs in solitude (save for my presence with the camera). And yet there is a moment in the video where another person comes in to do their washing. It is a brief and unexpected encounter and besides a quick acknowledgement of each other, and of my presence with the camera (Gideon assures the other person, "It's alright"), the two tenants quickly sink into solitude again – a kind of aloneness in togetherness. It could be that in the absence of a camera, Gideon and this person would have had a more substantial verbal exchange. Or perhaps there was an unspoken understanding that each would leave the other to their day.

I hoped to evoke some of these meanings in the portraits: to convey the senses of restoration, longing, solitude and community that can permeate the act of hanging out washing. As I suggested earlier, I found that such meanings emerged not only from participants' speech, or from the physical display of relationships on screen, but also from the sensuous materials of washing and place – from the quality of the light, aural textures,

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<sup>42</sup> A film estimated to have been made in the 1890s, viewable via the Huntley Archives, evidences this:  
<http://www.huntleyarchives.com/searchresult.php?keywords=&option=all&filmCategory=&filmDecade=&filmSound=&filmColour=&filmNumber=11061>

the way the weather played in the clothes. It would seem that the affectivity of hanging out washing emerges from a melding of materials with meanings, memories or stories.

## Laundry as Feelingful Material in *Fish Tank*

In Andrea Arnold's film, *Fish Tank* (2009), the affectivity of laundry works in a similar way. Like Arnold's later film, *Wuthering Heights* (discussed in Chapter Three), *Fish Tank* revels in often overlooked textures and dances: in the play of wind in leaves, the glint of light on a necklace. Everyday objects help to suggest a character and setting, but also seem to be employed for their ability to set into motion momentary ecstasies that emerge from their material properties, often in relation to weather.

In *Fish Tank*, as in many representations of laundry, washing serves as an indicator of protagonist Mia's socio-economic status. As she charges angrily through the open air corridors of the public housing complex in which she lives, on her way between school, home or dance practice, laundry is consistently strung up above balcony railings, blending in with her environment to suggest a living situation in which personal space is constrained and the lives of the housing complex's inhabitants spill through their front doors into communal spaces. Now and then, however, laundry becomes something else: it becomes a bearer of light, of fresh air, of newness.

Mia's relationship with her volatile mother is a constant source of agitation to her. This increases when her mother starts dating a new man whom Mia feels a strong and confusing connection with. About halfway through the film we cut from Mia watching late-night TV in a darkened living room, to a wind chime made of seashells moving gently before a sunlit window. A blue sky behind the glass. Mia has woken up on the living room sofa. She turns her head. Out the open balcony doors, freshly washed white shirts billow on the line. They catch the sunlight and seem to move in slow motion. Her mother is out there, chatting on the phone while bringing in the shirts. She works slowly, distracted by her conversation. The hard edge is taken out of her voice by the sound of wind and birds, and the faint clanging of the things the wind animates. For a moment the day is gentle; for a moment, without blemish.

## Narrative and the Long Take

My enquiry into the relationship between camera movement, affect and meaning-making in these portraits was crucially supported by the use of long takes as a shooting parameter. I therefore finish the chapter with a reflection on the value of the long take in relation to the concerns of this project.

## Arising and Subsiding Actions and Passions

The origins of the long take are often located in Italian neorealist cinema. André Bazin's writing on this subject is well-known: he suggested that the use of the long take in Italian neorealist cinema served to portray reality in ways that reflected its deep ambiguity and multi-dimensionality. This was in contrast to American and European realist montage which worked to "analyse" events, narrowing the range of interpretations they might invite (Bazin, 1967/2005, pp. 34–36).<sup>43</sup>

Agreeing with Bazin and taking his argument as a jumping-off point, Deleuze suggests that the long take sets up visual and sonic landscapes that both precede, and outlive, human actions and passions. In these landscapes, which exist of their own accord, action and passion arise, and then subside again. "The situation is not extended directly into action," Deleuze writes; "it is *invested by the senses, before action takes shape in it*, and uses or confronts its elements" (Deleuze, 1989, p. 4, my emphasis).

A key compatibility between the long take and the concerns of *Washing Lines* emerges – namely, the ability of the long take to submerge human actions and passions in vibrant landscapes that exist of their own accord. In the creation of *Washing Lines*, long takes were partly used to suggest the arising and subsiding of human presences in place. Combined with a commitment to "lingering" when I had been "left in the lurch", long takes helped to create an almost rhythmic arising and subsiding of human presences throughout the videos, as humans left the frame for extended periods of time, and then reappeared in it. One person who gave me feedback on the videos as they neared completion, noted that these instances (of humans leaving the frame) were particularly affective when they occurred in the middle of a take, and not at its end. While humanless scenes at the end of a portrait were more recognisable as "endings" (the washing was hung, the "stage" emptied of performers), humanless tableaux in the middle of scenes felt surprising and disarming.

The notion of a long take in which actions and passions arise and subside dovetails with Deleuze's theory of cinema as a series of "any-instant-whatever's", which holds that *affects belong to motion, and to the passing of time*, and that they must be *given* enough time to arise.

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<sup>43</sup> Bazin's arguments about the long take appear more polemical in other people's renderings of his work than in his own. He prefaces his propositions about the importance of the long take in neorealist cinema with the qualification that they form "less an objective statement than a working hypothesis" (Bazin, 1967, p. 24). As Tiago de Luca and Nuna Barradas Jorge note, "'the montage vs. sequence shot' binary [...] injects a rigid notion of cinematic specificity into Bazin's realism when the latter was, in fact, open to the fundamentally unspecific nature of cinema in its historically situated relations with other arts and the world at large" (de Luca & Jorge, 2016, pp. 7–8).

## Affects as Belonging to Movement, and to Time

Deleuze begins his first volume on cinema by suggesting, with reference to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, that the moving image in cinema be considered not as a series of still frames whose sequencing produces the illusion of movement, but as a series of connected movement-segments. Thus he emphasises the ontological validity of the transition *between* frames – that visible, graspable shift we see in the image when, with our editing software open, and our fingers on the computer keyboard, we step through a clip one frame at a time. This analysis of film as a technology keeps it within the realm of *motion*, in which life has not come to rest as a given, but is constantly evading total graspability. It reflects Deleuze's sense that "the relevant category is not Being – what exists, but Becoming – what changes" (Marks, 2014, p. 157).

Next, Deleuze traces a history of art in which, formerly, movements (such as gestures or dance phrases) were described by way of poses: still images that acted as a kind of summation or essence of that movement. He then suggests that this practice of reducing movement to poses is, in more recent times, replaced by arts practices in which every part of a movement is considered as important (or as unimportant) as any other. Cinema is a perfect expression of this newer sensibility, as every frame – or every movement-segment – is of equal value to the flow of the moving image (Deleuze, 1986, pp. 4–5). If even one segment is taken out, the fluidity of the movement is visibly disrupted. A shot is thus made up of a series of *any-instant-whatevers* – or, I would say, of *any-movement-segment-whatevers*.

Within the series of any-instant-whatevers that constitute a take, or shot, intensities or climaxes may arise – and these intensities are often singled out for dramatic purposes through montage. Yet Deleuze wants to remind us that these climaxes (of action or passion) *depend* on their position in a string of any-movement-segment-whatevers. They can not arise in isolation, as poses. The example he gives is Muybridge's now-familiar study of a galloping horse (1878-1884). When the horse's gallop is broken down into twelve still frames and these frames are observed side by side, we find one gravity-defying moment in which all four of the horse's hooves are lifted from the ground. This moment of total elevation is impossible to capture as a long exposure, or in isolation from all the other moments that precede and follow it. Or: it is *only* possible if it arises and subsides in a tumbling, uninterrupted series of any-moment-whatevers. The point is that intensities, actions and passions "belong to movement" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 6); they belong to the passing of time, and it follows that to witness such movements, we may have to *wait* for them to arise and subside.

The iterative improvisations shaping *Washing Lines* were filled with moments like these: moments in which an affective intensity emerged as part of a continuous movement, and in which it was necessary to wait for this intensity to come and go. The image that comes

to mind is of Jess's grandmother's embroidered sheet lifting in the wind, at the very end of her portrait. To capture that moment, the sheet's generous welling up like a sail, I had to linger persistently – to wait for material, time and weather to move towards and through that point.

The extended periods of "lingering", or stillness, in *Washing Lines* bring up another aspect of this idea that affects belong to time: namely, that the experience of stillness in duration in a film allows for the gradual "amplification" of perception and emotion.

## Temporal Amplification

In a thesis chapter on affect and the senses in the films of Theo Angelopoulos, Anne Rutherford proposes that a considered use of extended duration in long takes may instantiate the gradual intensification and slow-release detonation of emotions – what she calls *temporal amplification*. She takes issue with David Bordwell's interpretation of Angelopoulos's long takes as "dead" and "distancing", and writes, "the only way [these] shots could be seen as dead or inert [...] is to rob them of this temporal amplification which is at the core of Angelopoulos's cinematography – all of the elements he deploys are fused together, pressured, transformed by time" [sic] (Rutherford, 2006, p. 153).

Interestingly, Emre Çağlayan also refers to stretches of "dead time" in his discussion of "slow cinema", and describes slow films as "boring". However, he does so in order to "reconfigur[e] boredom as a receptive state of mind" (Çağlayan, 2016, p. 63), and as a condition that may give rise to "aesthetic or intellectual elation" as well as "hypnotic, contemplative and meditative experience" (Çağlayan, 2016, pp. 65–66).

Rutherford goes on to suggest, citing Walter Benjamin, that the use of extended duration in Angelopoulos's films invites viewers to develop a sense of "experience" akin to the German word, "erfahrung" – which means "experience", not in the sense of an isolated event with which one collides ("what an experience that was!"), but as an accumulative, memory-laden sense of the world ("in my experience...") (Rutherford, 2006, p. 161). This mode of experience does not aim to affect through shock, but by drawing memories and feelings up from deeper soil, bringing them into conversation with present sensations.

I wonder if the "transformation" of images "through time" that Rutherford describes, partly depends on the ways viewers apply and suspend their interpretative faculties when watching long takes – willing familiar images back to a sort of strangeness or finding a familiarity in the new. In doing so, viewers might engage with the many registers of meaning and affect in an image, and perceive its "modulation between depth and surface" (Mroz, 2012, p. 9).

Sharing de Luca and Jorge's sense that stillness makes the experience of duration more acute (de Luca & Jorge, 2016, p. 6), I attempted to create periods of prolonged "lingering"

or stillness in *Washing Lines*, in the hope that this would create opportunities for the gradual amplification and transformation of sensations and emotions. I also hoped that the camera's stillness, in duration, would accentuate expressions of non-human time – such as, in Vanessa's and Adam and Harri's portraits, the dance of a spider's web in the breeze.

## Conclusion

I started out, early in Activity 7, trying to avoid active meaning-making in order to engage with the sensory affectivity of hanging out laundry. Fifty odd improvisations later, I am increasingly convinced that the sensory aspects of laundry gain at least some of their affective power from the meanings that laundry invokes. So, sensation and recognition are wrapped up in each other. It becomes difficult to define exactly where firstness ends, and where thirdness begins. If these poles can be conceived of as opposites at all, then they are "harmonic opposites". Conveying their affective power through video has required that I learn how to work in a state of harmonic opposition as a camera operator, attending to incentives that at times demand contradictory things from me – such as the incentive to respond to the materiality of my surroundings in a non-mastering way; the incentive to actively engage as a composer of these videos; and the incentive to interpret my surroundings, and to guide viewers' interpretations. Working in this liminal creative zone posed challenges, and was often uncomfortable. But it also prompted me to borrow, develop and articulate creative strategies, and to come to a number of "originary", or praxical, understandings – and this was a richly rewarding process.





# Conclusion

## Looking Back

When I relate *Washing Lines* and its accompanying exegesis to my research intentions four years ago, it seems that I *did* end up exploring what I had hoped to explore – affect, mediation and place – but not at all in a way I could have foreseen.

The process was from the outset driven by an "enthusiasm of practice" – I "dived in" and started constructing "experiential starting points" in the form of different "activities", in order to pursue "something which [was] exciting", "unruly", as Haseman so aptly describes it in his writing on practice-led research (Haseman, 2006, p. 100). At first these activities (described in Chapter One, and illustrated in the Video Appendix component of the online video gallery) were wide-ranging in their emphasis and methodology, "expanding rather than decreasing variables" (Douglas & Gulari, 2015, p. 393) to see which methodology might throw up something resonant. The activities were interspersed with periods of reading and reflective writing, and over the course of Activities 1 through 5, I developed – through repeated practice and confrontation with situations that defied my expectations – an experience-based understanding of how to effectively evolve my understandings through reflective, iterative research.

Led by an emotional or affective sense of what was compelling across the exercises and also by an attention to which activities spoke most directly to my research "enthusiasms", I burrowed down into the specifics of Activity 5. This activity was the first time I explored the portrayal of human subjects in the sensory context of domestic labour, with a handheld camera. It was also the first time I utilised an improvisational score.

Sensing during this activity that I was moving in the "right" direction, but that there was plenty still to be resolved, I went through several more iterative cycles which included Activity 6 and the early iterations of Activity 7, in pursuit of a haptic, immersive and profoundly responsive way of portraying subjects in place with a handheld camera. Finding a score whose compositional options evoked embodied experiences of weight transfer, such as "catching a ride", "being left in the lurch", "hooking onto", "unhooking" and "lingering", brought an answer to this.

Yet I persisted with further iterations of Activity 7, carrying out nearly sixty shoots in total, in response to advice from my supervisor. Continued iteration revealed important additional opportunities for refining my approach to handheld camera movement – or, more specifically, for refining the way I managed my *attention* while doing so. Over time, I shifted from seeking a responsiveness to the movements of my surroundings that was so total as to be "non-intentional" (Cage, 1986/1993, p. 179), to an appreciation of the ways I

could balance responsiveness with different layers of awareness and intention. This led me to write an exegesis that contributes to the wider field of improvisation an in-depth reflection on the nuanced ways improvisers can – and often expertly do – direct their attention in improvisation. (The various elements of this contribution are detailed throughout the remainder of the chapter.)

Opportunities for further research in this area remain. In particular, exploring how groups of improvisers wield their attention collectively in a filmmaking context, and how performance methodologies might inform that process, would be a particularly exciting avenue for future research. While this research did engage the subjects of the video portraits as "co-improvisers", the degree to which these improvisers rose to this task and took on responsibility for the shaping of the videos varied greatly, and the development of my improvisational approach was primarily a solo enterprise.

## A Cluster of Process-led Insights

Throughout this process, I stumbled across many unanticipated insights about practice-led research, affect, improvisation and artistic intention. These included the discovery of two understandings of repetitive or "iterative" practice that had a strong basis in embodied experience, through encounters with the work of Donald Schön and Rhiannon Newton. As previous researchers have already noted, iterative practice can be used both to narrow a research focus, and to open up an area of research to new possibilities and questions. What was unique about these approaches, however, was their embodied nature, which provided a distinctly body-based way into understanding iterative methods. Working with a score as a research tool also led me to conceive of its value as a tool in live improvisation, and in research more broadly, in key ways, and to summarise these succinctly (as I do in Chapter One). Over the course of the four years, further understandings about practice-led research continued to surprise me while I worked, and key among these was the discovery that my own research method could be understood as playful. This led to deeper exploration of play as a phenomenon, and to a theory of research (explained in Chapter Two) that emphasised its affective or emotive dimensions – what I have previously referred to as the *feeling states* of practice-led research.

Anne Douglas and Kathleen Coessens understand research as an improvised process, and define improvisation as "working with what is ready to hand" (Douglas & Coessens, 2011, p. 180). As I started pursuing an interest in affect, mediation and place, I drew on what was readily available to me – a background in several movement and performance practices – and discovered many points of contact between these practices and the notion of a "haptic cinema" that was becoming increasingly prominent in my PhD research. Drawing these performance practices into the fold of my experimentation gave rise to new insights about the possible connections between performance based methods and theories

of hapticity in cinema, and I articulate these in Chapter Three. This same chapter also describes my gradual progression towards a score for camera movement that engaged weight-based terms ("catching rides", "hooking onto", being "left in the lurch", "unhooking", and "lingering"), as I summarised earlier. The discoveries I made using this score led me to the proposition, and knowledge-contribution, that weight-based analogies for decision making with a handheld camera may offer improvising cinematographers routes into a more haptic way of responding to their environments as they record.

The decision to keep returning to this score with an open mind as to what I might still discover led to an insight that significantly shaped the eventuating creative work, *Washing Lines*. This insight was that the feelingful encounters we may have at the washing line, and when both making and watching video, are characterised by inbetweenness: that they often emerge somewhere between unfamiliarity and familiarity, between sensation and signification. Similarly, I learned that my awareness as an improvising camera operator could slide around between an attention to things' material sensuousness, an awareness of my active decision-making as a mediator, and an attention to what the materials in the frame might signify. This was an important progression from my initial aim to access a state of totality – of a total non-intention, and a total immersion in a single task. Chapters Four and Five articulate this continual process of discovery.

Chapter Four also offers a range of other insights that emerged from this process: I came to the perspective that by revealing some of the *effort* of creative work, artists can invite their audiences into a sensuous connection with both the risk-taking and the materiality of what is going on in improvisation. I came across key strategies for improvisation: in particular, the value of holding a task "just lightly (or, just tightly) enough" to be able to hold other tasks also – or, put differently, taking a "permissive" attitude to the parameters of a given improvisation to create a greater mobility, or agility, with respect to competing priorities. I also discovered that openly acknowledging the inevitably complicated relationship between an artist's intentions and the actual outcomes of their creative work need not dispel the value of their intentions, nor the practical value of articulating those intentions in bold and ambitious terms. Finally, I also came across opportunities to reflect on and document instances of current dance-based research in Sydney (such as the work of Lizzie Thomson, Rhiannon Newton and Angela Goh) by noticing and teasing out connections between long-term international discussions about artistic composition and the research interests of choreographers I encountered in Sydney in the present day.

## Listening to the "Landscape", Valuing the "Attempt"

The heterogenous, non-linear nature of these insights reflects the fact that they were indeed "stumbled across" in a practice-led context – they were "discovered", and not anticipated beforehand, which Bolt argues is a key feature of "praxical knowledge" (Bolt,

2010). It also reflects the observation that many have made of practice-led research: that it is often "messy" (Haseman, 2006, p. 101), "idiosyncratic" (Bolt, 2010, p. 29).

Further – and finally – the non-linear nature of these findings brings to mind Barbara Bolt's recounting of her experience painting at the edge of the desert in Western Australia (Bolt, 2010), described at the beginning of this exegesis in Chapter One. I like the idea that, just as the visually "fractured", sunlit landscape of the Western Australian desert in turn "fractured" Bolt's working theories of painting, the landscape of my experiences throughout this project demanded a somewhat fragmented collection of insights – insights not forced into relationship inside a single conceptual framework, but left to cluster freely around a process that was revelatory in diverse ways.

Bolt's approach to research values the *attempt* – the trying – and whatever it may reveal. My project was undertaken in the same spirit. It constitutes an attempt at reflective, iterative creative research, and a rendering of that attempt in language. It offers a collection of articulations and syntheses of ideas that, together, add insights to the existing scholarship about creative practice. I hope that these articulations also reflect some of the feelingful sensations which pervaded the trying, and which were sometimes its driving force – desire, frustration, bewilderment, satisfaction, anticipation, elation.

Anne Douglas and Kathleen Coessens write that finding language for experience is an important step in learning because it provides both a trace of what happened, and an invitation to retrace that experience – but, always, to trace it differently (Douglas & Coessens, 2011). In the same way that I hope both *Washing Lines* and this exegesis retain vestiges of the affects with which they were made, I hope that the written traces contained in the exegesis offer invitations to re-trace, to re-purpose and to re-invent.





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