

passage

– a choreographic installation project with one performer created by Martin Kusch / Marie-Claude Poulin (artistic co-directors of *kondition pluriel*) –

Festpielhaus Hellerau/Dresden, CYNETart 2008, October 30 – November 1, 2008

by Johannes Birringer



passage, with Catherine Tardif (left) and a visitor. Photo courtesy *kondition pluriel*

Passage, the artists declare in their program notes, is “a hybrid work, oscillating between installation and performance. It is accessible to visitors who can enter and exit at their will for a duration of three hours.”

This offer of accessibility seems straightforward enough. It lies in the nature of installations, whose origins can be traced back to minimalist sculpture, to present an arrangement inviting to be visitable, to be entered into and walked through, while the notion of hybridity is often associated with contemporary interdisciplinary art that crosses borders and defies easy categorization (especially in science-art collaborations, bio art, or art/engineering projects that involve computational design, artificial intelligence, robotics, etc). While such hybrid constructions are often based in research that requires cross-patching and an exchange between distinct

vocabularies, materials, and methodologies, the aesthetic and artistic merits of oscillating practices aren't necessarily a foregone conclusion, nor need we have blind confidence in art's competent relationship to (scientific) knowledge production and display. The predication of a performative quality in the sculptural arrangement of an installation implies that the latter operates *relationally*, and I refer to Brandon LaBelle's reflections on minimalism to bring back some ideas, first tested in the 1960s, that are now as relevant as they were then. Minimalist sculpture and music, LaBelle argues,

investigates the spaces between objects and their viewers and listeners. The relational concern found in Robert Morris's phenomenology, La Monte Young's immersive Dream House, and Michael Asher's spatial alterations, in underscoring the art object and the art viewer as interwoven into a conversational exchange in which the object produces the looking/listening, and the looking/listening produces the object, comes to suggest the field of attention as a *performative* arena. Thus, art objects do not so much contain or embody meaning but rather are given meaning through a performative exchange. (1)

In the following, I will seek to carefully trace back my steps through *passage* in order to focus especially on the interweaving of the exchanges proffered by the work, asking how a relational aesthetics holds true for interactive choreography constructed, to a considerable extent, through the virtual dimensions of invisible data streams, extensions of the body, rather than real sculptural objects.

Dresden's CYNETarts 2008, a computer arts festival now in its 12th edition, featured two choreographic installations, Penelope Wehrli's *camera orfeo* and kondition pluriel's *passage*. Wehrli is a stage designer and scenographer whose "theatre spaces of calculated transitory complexity," as she calls them, had attracted my attention at an earlier occasion when she designed the scenic (video) sculptures for an opera production of Bela Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* at the Staatstheater Saarbrücken (March 2008). Her kinetic video-projective sculptures were the only "actors" on stage, so to speak, while the vocalists, performing the roles of Bluebeard and Judith, were positioned in front of the orchestra pit in the front rows.

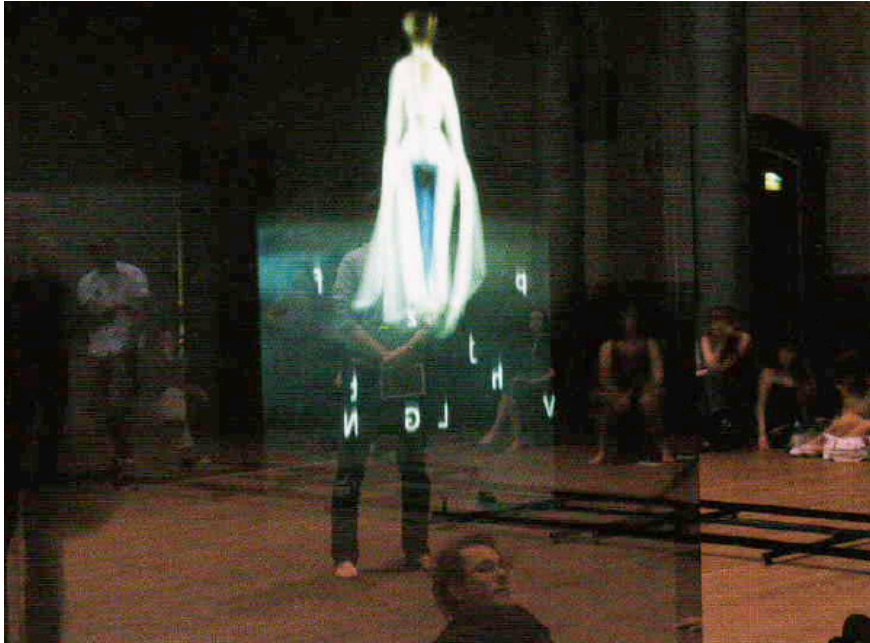


confrontation with self-reflection, Penelope Wehrli's stage design for *Winter*, dir. by Barbara Frey, Basel Theater, 2005. Photo courtesy Sebastian Hoppe

Camera orfeo, her new installation, is subtitled “ an auto-choreographic and media composition” and shows endoscopic images of the vocal cords of a singer while singing the aria "Possento spirito"/"Orfeo son lo" (Claudio Monteverdi) and, among other things, video images of dancers which are fed into a circular system controlled through the random movements of the visitors. The musical, choreographic and visual source material is continuously recombined and transformed into a kaleidoscope of images and sounds through the use of cameras that register what goes on in the exhibition and performance space. Using similar kinetic (moveable) screens and plexiglass surfaces as in *Bluebeard's Castle*, Wehrli here ventures to set up a more complex programmed environment that has generative (algorithmic) dimensions and integrates the presence and movements/locations of the visitors into the reflective surfaces and the modulations of the visual composition.

In other words, the audience moves freely within the installation whose spatial modules carrying the image projections are in constant motion. The music can be heard from the speakers some of which are also moving. Via camera tracking the visitors' movement causes signals to be sent, though they don't perceive this directly. Specific music or video sequences are thus activated which can then, in extension, create other levels of images. There will always suddenly be moments when, as a

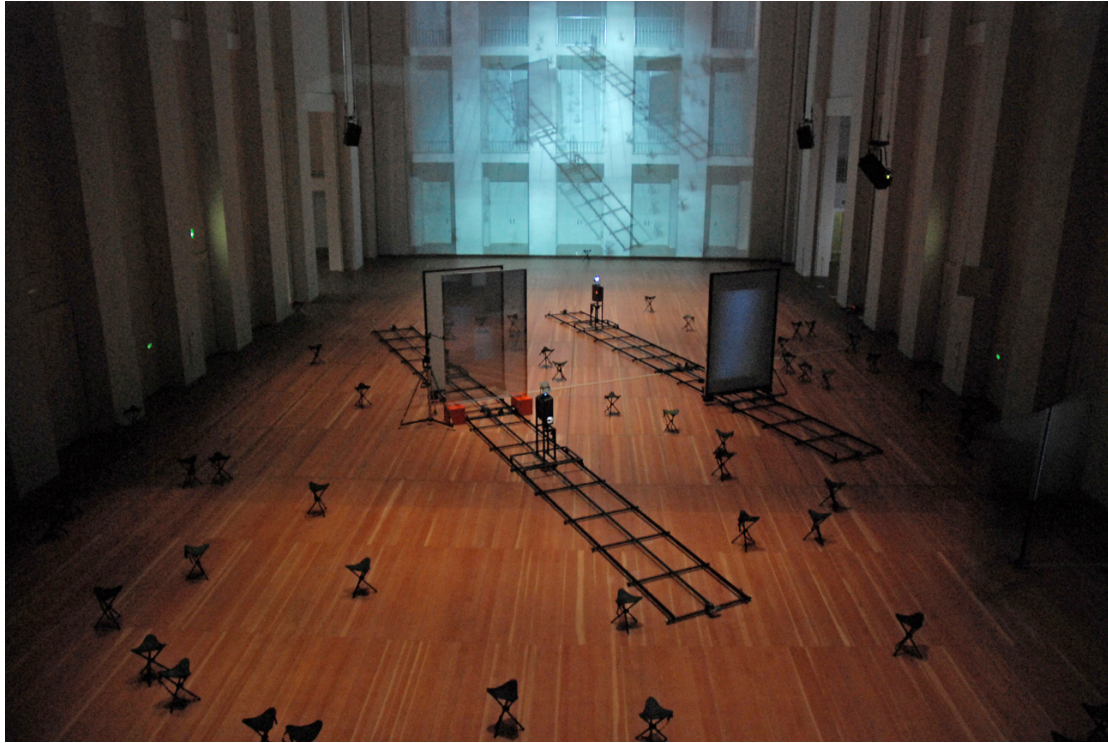
result of spatial constellations, the flow of images and sound that surrounds the performance site will dominate the interior space via a live video and sound feed, and thus erasing Eurydice's projected image. For a determined time period the sensors then remain switched off before they can be reactivated._



camera orfeo, Penelope Wehrli 2008, Festspielhaus Hellerau, CYNETart-Festival. Photo courtesy Penelope Wehrli

According to Wehrli, *camera orfeo* is an attempt to transfer the neuronal process of remembering, which is simultaneously a process of new definition and erasure, onto a theatrical space. I have briefly described the concept and compositional structure of this work which I did not witness directly, but I had an opportunity to talk to the artist before my departure from Dresden. I also heard audience reports after the opening night, describing how individual visitors were experiencing the ephemeral magic of the installation, having been confronted with constantly changing new musical and spatially choreographed constellations and contexts as permutations of the composite material. The interactional premise of this work is provocative, since it implies a kind of “wearing down” or loss of the (im)material contents, of the “protagonist” of Monteverdi’s passionate persuasion aria, directed at the god of the underworld, against the loss/disappearance of Eurydice, her repeated slippage back to the underworld and away from the Orfeo’s grasp. The audience obtains the (camera) point of view of Orfeo, projecting or imagining the woman who returns to be lost

again (and again and again) in a fantasy of re-remembering. The visitors' process of listening and observing, Wehrli said, will be subsumed under this constant process of remembering. The loop-like character of the process, which is already present in the musical structure of the aria, seems to be endless; but the material is limited. It is used up by the visitors.



wide angle view (from the perspective of the gods above ground) of the setting for *camera orfeo*, Penelope Wehrli 2008, Festspielhaus Hellerau, CYNETart-Festival. Photo courtesy Penelope Wehrli

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Camera orfeo was shown in the second week of the festival. In the first week, the exhibition of *passage* was placed in the northern portion of the large modernist Hellerau Festpielhaus, separated from the rest of the auditorium by a large white canvas. A small opening to the side offers entrance into *passage*, and once inside the visitor discovers a landscape of curvaceous screens in a white-colored warmly lit space, with a single performer wearing a slightly dishevelled-looking white outfit, a cotton suit with a laced corset, equipped with sensors and transmitters. The performer in the sensor-dress invites visitors to interact with/touch her, although this is not immediately apparent, and when I step in, no one is yet touching anything. This changes over time.

Once the inter-actional nature of the work reveals itself to the audience, the paradox it creates is fascinating, as we are not commonly encouraged to grope or handle a performer on stage. The theatrical context, in the Festspielhaus, is unavoidable: this is a famous place with a history, where Emile-Jacques Dalcroze once started his Eurhythmics school and created a series of powerful music theatre productions in the early part of the 20th century; since its reopening in the 1990s, many dance works have been presented here, and currently William Forsythe is choreographer in residence at Hellerau (after leaving his post as director of the Frankfurt Ballet).

A proposition of interactivity has to be established to be understood, since interactive choreographies involving audience members are not a firmly established convention, and no instructions were supplied here. How to go about this in a durational installation where visitors can come and go at any point? The proposition to “handle” the performer undoubtedly presents the core innovation of this new work by the Canadian performance group. *kondition pluriel* had established a reputation for their careful *mise en scène* and attention to the integration of live performance and choreographic, projected and real architectural spatial languages (in *schème*, *schème II*, *the techn(o)rganic body*, *entre-deux*, *myriorama*, created between 2001 and 2008), and two installations, *puppet* and *puppet(s)*, created prior to *passage*, may have initiated their experimentation with a touchable performer. I did not see these earlier versions before encountering *passage* on two consecutive days, staying inside the installation for about two hours each time. Having studied *kondition pluriel*’s earlier work, especially *schème II*, I was looking forward to being invited *inside* a “system” that responded to my presence and my tactile, physical encounter with the system’s interfaces – the dancer being the most concrete and direct “mediator” between me and the virtual ecology.

But how does one describe the phenomenological resonances, the tactile, auditory and visual stimuli of such a system, what was there to see and experience, how did the system work as a computational environment, and how does one engage the interactive setting of a “hybrid” performance? The proposition sets up a participatory *ground* or place, to use a term introduced by architect Malcolm McCullough in his writings on *Architecture, Pervasive Computing, and Environmental Knowing* (2), and thus the setting, the physical architecture and our embodiment of context-oriented

interaction design assume a primary significance as we are given the freedom of movement into/across the installation. “Choreography,” one might assume, must orient itself in this installation toward a kind of moving space itself, a flow of spatial and kinaesthetic perception for which space is conceived in relation to a moving point of view or, perhaps, a moving point of “touch.” The tactile, kinetic dimension is foregrounded, as if our motor-sensory organism were responsible for the changing shapes of the space. The first question I asked myself, then, was how to sensorily “read” and hear such space, with its visual projections wandering around in it, strolling over the screens, hovering a bit, dissolving, aggregating, flowing, hopscotching. The visual images themselves, mostly abstract, never seemed to be still, they were always in movement “around”, or sometimes jumping “across,” encouraging the visitor to behave likewise.

And so I strolled around. Unlike screen-based installations with a single, focussed perspective (in most museum video exhibits you sit on a bench at the end of the room and look at the screen, or sometimes, as in Shirin Neshat’s double projections, you sit in the middle), *passage* sets up a distributed system, an environment in which video/film changes places, and thus alters the ground from which we tend to “watch” filmic images. I could not see all the images, not did I intend to after a while, although film generally tempts one to look for content. I could only discern two figurative/representational sequences that make the eyes zoom in, and as the moving images were processed in real-time (through a Max/Msp/Jitter patch using data input from the sensors), the images naturally seemed jittery, scratched, unstable, anamorphosing. The dematerializing tendency of electronic media could be felt, a strange and beautiful quality of what John Cage might have called the “weather” could be sensed in this audio-visual atmospheric work, a weatherland of colored mists and fogs, waves that resembled geological layers of color and abstract shapes, curves, lines, and striations. A screen panel situated near the middle of the rectangular white space also had changing light directed onto it, carving out subtle silhouettes in changing moods (red, blue, white).

Stepping into the atmosphere of *passage*, the embodiment of the system becomes a synaesthetic experience: I follow stimuli, I drift through the kinaesthetic scenario, moving carefully around, lying down on the floor, leaning against the outside wall

behind the screens, moving forward again, listening, sensing the environment over a period of time. I navigate my auditory experience, following the musical sound's spatialized distribution, keeping a peripheral eye on the dancer, who might be behind me at any given point. The experience builds through the durational exposure, there is no linear "stage" dramaturgy, as visitors can come and go as they please, some in the audience staying for a long time, others only briefly. There is much to observe or intuit of course in the behavior of the visitors themselves, how they approach the work, feel comfortable stepping inside, engaging the dance or preferring to stay on the perimeter, cautious yet attentive.



passage, with Catherine Tardif (left) and a visitor. Photo courtesy TMA Hellerau

Apart from the human dancer/interactor, wearing her technologized gear, the medical corset with wires, transmitter box on the back, and sensor manchetts on left arm/wrist, right leg, and shoulder straps – slight intimations of a straitjacket or 60s space age outfits creep into my mind – there were also three white, clothed objects in the space, one looking like a penis-shaped trunk or like an elephant foot, slightly angled, the other more fin-shaped, shark-like. The latter had a slider (to influence visuals), the former a round dial (to influence sound and volume). There was also a floor pad that looked like a scale, with a footprint on it. If you stepped on it, the sound stopped altogether....

What comprises the system? First, it is the overall scenographic architecture, which I began describing as a white space, with a white dance floor and the screens surrounding it. There are 6 screens, all of them slightly curved, the two opposing ones on the short sides curved snake-like as in half of a figure-eight. Then there is the lighting, and the sonic surround sound (interactive or live mixed, featuring electronic music and a many-layered tapestry of continuous sound, I do not recall any silence). Then there are the projected abstract visual graphics (coming from 3 sources, 2 projectors hung on the grid and a third one hung pointing upward at a mirror that was motorized and could rotate, sending the image traveling around the space parameter).

Lastly, there is the dancer who “lives” in this environment and whose actions I don’t always understand (why is she looking at the screens intently?), but whose presence I become attuned to and whose inexplicable behavior I am allowed to examine, especially in those moments where I make direct contact with her, when she invites me, lets me touch her, rejects me. She either follow her own motion sequences (choreographies?) within the structure of the system, or relates to us, allowing people to interfere with her “program.”



A visitor at clothed object with slider (left), Tardif in front of screen. Photo courtesy of TMA Hellerau.

Occasionally she seems stuck in default mode, like an idle avatar, then again she hesitates or observes us (her audience or fellow-dwellers), then takes initiative, to "dance", to act, or again just "be there," lying down to rest, present but inactive. I cannot tell whether she is affected by the sound or not, whether her mood or her emotions change because of us. Her dancing is non-expressive and somehow detached. Whatever it is I imagine, I could go on fantasizing about this elusive figure (and a gendered perspective is also unavoidable, for example in certain phases of the work when the dancer is surrounded by a group of men who might begin to bear down on her or crowd her) in a space that could also be perceived as being quite clinical, almost like Dr Charcot's hospital or the cuckoo's nest where Jack Nicholson was trapped, where I am trapped now, caught up with my hysterical memories sweeping up strange associations.

The associations bring about various semantic layers, yet how do I make meaning of this system, and the experience of being in such a system, including the accountability of my own actions and reactions? What are my responsibilities? What is the dancer's responsibility? The meaning of an interactive work resides in the interface itself, David Rokeby (the creator of the Very Nervous System) once wrote in the 1990s, when such interactive sound and video installations came to be seen more often in galleries and museums., yet when the notion of participatory design or co-authorship was still in its infancy. It is still in its infancy. Thus one can't avoid making some critical observations, about the dancer and this "hybrid" dance, the spatial environs, the interactional dramaturgy, the various sublimation and desublimation effects.

Above all, a critical approach needs to address the interactive proposition – the "participatory game" – since often there is an assumption made about such installations, namely that they indeed depend on the communion or co-creation between system and audience. Anna Munster has spoken of "interfaciality"(3), examining how relations between humans and computers have been mapped and how the "impossible" worlds of the machinic and the organic are bridged to bring the body into an intimate communication or "face-to-face" conversation with the system's operation (or failure thereof, which happened near the very end of the installation one night and led the artists to call it a day, surprisingly, rather than

allowing the visitors and the dancer to accommodate the break-down and continue living within the altered, inoperative environment).



A visitor's hand touches the dancer's shoulder/sensor. *passage*, with Catherine Tardif. Photo courtesy kondition pluriel

The visitor, in such a dynamic field of relations, is clearly assuming responsibility in making the work manifest itself, after examining the “degrees of freedom” and control built into the cybernetic integrations of the systems components. The immediate sensory, tactile interface is mostly created through the dancer, and here interfaciality is directed at human-to-human intercourse, since the terrain of “informatic bodies” (Munster) or interactive objects (sound, video) is more difficult to parse, the data streams and algorithmic operations remaining invisible. Looking at the screen, as the dancer does so often, is an inconclusive interface relationship, in this work, for the mapping is not readily perceivable as causative, and thus the virtual affect (in sound diffusion and video projection) is not immediately discernable. In the dramaturgical constellation described here, the burden of responsibility still rests on the shoulders of the interaction designers, the composers/choreographers (three men sit at tables lining the space, huddled over their laptops, clicking data objects with the mice). Choreographer Marie-Claude Poulin, who did not dance in this piece, was present, cloaked in a dark coat and walking around, occasionally stepping inside as well, turning the slider or the dial, as if to encourage us, and give us a “model” of what we can do here. I had seen such a planted role enacted elsewhere, in interactive installations, and jokingly refer to it as a kind of “foreplay”: the designer or choreographer instructing us, so to speak, in how the objects can be animated or manipulated.(4)

In interactive settings where the participation game has to be intuited, there is always a certain learning curve, and some artists have even resorted to the strategy of supplying “how to” manuals to the visitors, which might be considered a puzzling maneuver for our latter day hybrid art forms. Yet the operations of a system, which form the distinct aesthetic and conceptual dimension of informational, networked art, are crucial for our embodiment of the virtual world opening up through the interfacial logic that can be gleaned, learned, and “appropriated” by the players. If we are to perform in this environment, we need to intuit how it can be performed, since empirically speaking we cannot be expected to arrive as virtuoso performers for a choreographic system designed by Poulin and Kusch, with Catherine Tardif having had the advantage or “wearing” the unstable reactive environment and teasing out distinctive improvisational gestures with her sensors.

She may know what effects her gestures have on the sonic and graphic flow, and she knows the dramaturgy of the sections or movements constituting the durational fabric of *passage*. The visitor, however, is innocent. The planted performer in this hybrid work thus attains the quasi-religious role of a priest who performs the ceremony or the interaction ritual into which our presence is invited. She becomes our surrogate, and we commune with her, through her.

The actual role of the audience communion, as a community of co-creators, is not easily assessed in such a context which overtly, of course, makes no reference whatsoever to the sacred or the ritual connotations of “partaking” but where, and I base this on previous experiences of complex interactive networked installations, the role of the audience interactor is surely predicated on a learning curve. In anthropological terms, then, there is a threshold, across which one steps to become initiated. I have to learn how to understand or glimpse a bit of the system’s behavior in order to behave with it, embrace it, or remain a sceptical disbeliever, an atheist of interactive art. Rather than becoming a believer over the years, I actually tend to think of interactivity nowadays as a red herring, believing it to be highly overrated for the artistic contexts in which it is applied (not the general HCI and product design markets, naturally, where interactive technology has become pervasively everyday, second nature). A relational aesthetics presumes a coherent community of

knowledgeable actors to partake of a dialogic exchange, but interactivity is not an artform.

But even as an atheist, I know that behavioral social systems of interfaciality always require some form of etiquette or protocol, and therefore an art installation that is centrally built around an interaction design, has a more clearly articulatable social function and operationality, along with its aesthetic stimuli and sensations. Whether the social and the aesthetic functions can be conjoined into a powerful, emotionally or perceptually gripping scenario, is a matter of doubt. To an extent, I also doubt *passage*.

On the one hand, the effect, or effectiveness, of the aesthetic impact of the work, its look and the sensations it caused, the unfolding of its "dramaturgy," the intimate encounters with the dancer, all these had a cumulative dimension. The "choreographic installation" takes slow time. There seemed to be seven or more atmospheric cycles or sections, and if one stayed long enough, one could recognize that after two hours, the atmospheres loop back to the start up of something one remembers having seen before... the dancer stands in front of one of the screens for quite a long time, her arms opened up like wings. Naturally, it is a durational installation, and a first cycle has to kick in, yet presumably the sections within the cycle need not follow a precise linear sequence, they might also be scrambled, as the weather changes. This is an assumption one now brings to non-linear, real-time works or (game) levels. But how does "choreography" function in such durational settings?

On a metalevel, the "choreography" as a subsystem of the installation system here comments on itself, as it implicitly must comment on "installation" as its hybrid partner and augmented computational environment. The self-reflective commentary is non-conclusive, unless I take Catherine Tardif's behavior to signal a complete reduction to being a "puppet" of a system or to being a transducer of audience behaviors. There is now a tradition of Konzepttanz (since the 1990s, mostly in Western Europe) in which not-dancing or barely dancing has been established as a conceptual re-examination or an updated institutional critique of the apparatus of choreographic "capture."⁽⁵⁾ Konzepttanz purportedly subverts the established expectations of the theatrical apparatus and turns its conventions against itself, or it

addresses the rules of the game of kinetic spectacles, as Jérôme Bel showed us in his provocatively decelerated pieces critiquing dance's participation in the modernist project of compulsive, agitated mobility/athleticism/virtuosity (in *The Last Performance*, *Jérôme Bel*, and *The Show Must Go On*), or as Xavier Le Roy did so persuasively in *Project* (2005) where he turns dance into a confusing and confused ball game.

Passage is not a conceptual dance, yet it also refrains from mobility, athleticism, virtuosity and expressivity, and any particular (modern dance) linear progression of steps and preformed phrases reliant on particular repeatable techniques, even as the paradox of repetition, philosophically speaking, is barely addressed by Poulin. Interactional gestures, animating data streams caused by accelerometers, bend sensors or touch sensors worn on the body surely require careful training (repetition) and understanding of how the sensors function in the xyz field. Wearables also tend to require design solutions for the sensor application (worn on the skin or integrated into the garments and currently emerging smart textiles within the intelligent fashion design field). The garment design for Tardiff's wearables was negligible; *kondition pluriel* here opted for a technical "look" that left the wires and devices exposed, attracting attention to the technology rather than the sensual dimensions of fabrics or fabric movement. On the kinesthetic level, Tardiff's attention to the environment as a whole, with its shifting and nervous weather conditions, can even be interpreted as requiring stillness as well as an internal (inward-looking) awareness of how the human organism and sensory nervous system relate to the external ecology, the "remote interfaces" here made present through the sonic and projectional video worlds.

It is this temporal awareness and attentiveness, as a state of being/performing amongst the architectural and computational surroundings, which characterize the dancer's non-presentational behavior. She does not dance for us, her subjectivity is not constituted through her dance technique or exhibition of movement, but through her unimposing cellular consciousness of sharing the environment with anything that might happen in it, including the visitor's voluntary or involuntary engagement of her (costume's) sensorial surfaces, which in this case become membranes of what

Australian dancer/digital artist Hellen Sky calls the “borderless body” or, more comprehensively, embodiment within an “electrophysical dramaturgy.”(6)

But how to recount the "choreographic installation" of such states of awareness, of being and becoming, to someone not familiar with the protocols of responsibility in hybrid artworks and the protocols and flows of interactive designs? Would I not be asked: What did it mean (or how is it given meaning), how did it look, what did it do, how was the dance? If there was no dance, how did the performance affect me and how did the audience respond to it? Was there a direct connection to the music? What were the images like? Did I enjoy the sound, did it impel me to move to its rhythms or pulsions, or was it ambient, meditative? And what were the relationships between the performer (mover), the moving images, the "operations" the visitor could carry out inside the space to modulate the sound and the visuals?

These questions are hard to answer. Overall, the installation had an ambient feel to it, but to call it meditative would seem to contradict a participatory design reliant on enaction, on relational intensities of subjects and objects within a social behavioral environment, rather than on interior psychological or somatic processes. Regarding the interactivity, I am still an athlete: it appeared to me as if sometimes I had no "control" over anything, and thus my touching a dial and moving my hands along the dancer's touch sensor fell flat as a useless activity, reminding me that I had not yet understood the system and its contingencies, or possibly it was malfunctioning or following an autonomous rhythm (artificial intelligence) not comprehensible to me. At other times, I noted the change in volume, or color or velocity of the images, and I became increasingly interested in observing the dancer and how she moved with the surroundings or influenced the resonance of graphic modulations. Again, I did not see a cause-and-effect relationship, and thus the issue of the gestural control, so vital in sensor-choreographed art, remains unresolved. The environment, it seemed, acted very subtly and modulated itself nearly imperceptibly; it possessed an invisible logic, a circuitry that was not apparent, affecting my mood nevertheless.

I became lazy, and thus my response attitude started to be muffled. I did not lose interest as much as I began to relax and just dwell in the space. At one point I noticed a square lighting up on the floor; the dancer was lying on her back to one side of it,

and so I strolled over and lay down on the other end, assuming the same posture, and waiting to see what might happen. After nothing happened, I rolled over slowly toward her until I ended up quite close, sensing her slightly twitching motions, the little tremors in her feet. When I touched her arm, the dancer didn't like me to shift her arm or bend it, she resisted, and when I noted the small, almost mechanical motions she made, as if she were a puppet animated by invisible strings, I tried to stop them. She forcefully continued, and so I took my hand away. My touch was not welcomed at this moment, yet a few minutes later, after she had gotten up and walked around, she approached me offering me the right side of her pelvis, pointing to a little knob on her costume. Awkwardly, caught up in my astonishment and discomfort, I turned the knob and noted a change in the sound environment. Well, it was a let down, and a slight embarrassment, I thought. The "electrophysical dramaturgy" had failed to incite anything in me except a sensation of despair.

The knob was confusing to me, as I had begun to think of the dancer's costume as the main tactile and sensorial/haptic interface in this work, but at the same time the costume, much like the other objects in the space, harbored an old-fashioned HCI (levers, sliders, knobs and buttons), functional rather than sensual. A far cry from Hélio Oiticica's *parangolés* or Lygia Clark's carefully chosen sensorial-relational objects. Regarding human-computer interfaces, the interactional design for the wearable did not seem conclusive if my effort at manipulation was resisted or if it only worked intermittently and without my knowing when it was "on" or "off." When I caught up with the dancer a while later, and turned the knob again, nothing perceivable happened, and thus a communion didn't take place.

How then can we evaluate such a choreographic installation as interactional design? In terms of choreography, the kind of movement I observed was hardly memorable or interesting, as I suggested earlier. There was no particular development of gestures or motifs, and those gestures I could discern seemed unmotivated and expressionless. There was a sequence of small improvisations and certain phase patterns, interrupted by non-activity, as part of a structure which one might call misleadingly "counter-choreographic," without a purpose other than "activate" kinetic data (in the interface) or fulfil a task-like mechanical operation. It reconstituted motion as "capturing" data or animating data controlled/analyzed by the computers.

The movement quality was what it was: uninteresting, repetitive, quite meaningless in terms of expression or emotional content, and yet such criteria naturally imply the wrong anticipation. There can be no narrative or emotional content in such an installation which embeds "atmospheres," unless the story that is being told claims other ways of dealing with the visible and the kinaesthetic. Can one speak of atmospheres of tactile evolution? Of sonic, visual and kinaesthetic real-time occurrences, and thus of composition as occurrence, coincidence of layers, conjuring a kind of listening touch within an intimate and beautifully lit space/environment? But why do I look at empty screens (without images), then move my head, and now some screens have images, and when I turn around again, it is the same image distributed (like sound) around me onto three of the six screens? Why the duplications? I perceive the synaesthetic appearance of "geological" layers of pixels, colors, fuzzinesses, morphologies or topologies, and at one point, a handshake begins to crystallize out of lush pixels slowly gaining contours and then disappearing again.

At another point, to my astonishment, I see the feet of a person walking, continuously walking away, and as I become transfixed by this quasi-real image, I note that behind me the dancer has been moving around a small square, lit from above (and I glimpse a camera looking down with bird eye's view). So it is her (her image), she walks, and somehow the camera tracks her in real-time now, and shows me her feet, oh no, that is not possible, it is bird eye' view, but I see her legs from a side angle, so these feet must be prerecorded. And now she goes to the perimeter, and tries to cajole some observers/audience members to come inside the space, and I hear her subtly whispering, which is actually a surprise. I note it with pleasure, since I remember at some point lying down on my side, in one corner, for maybe 20 minutes, that the electronic sound seemed to be pounding, getting louder and louder, as the layers of the sonics evolved to a piercing high frequency, which I found disturbing in this otherwise quite womb-like surrounding. I hear the dancer whispering to the observers, she must wear a microphone near her mouth, and not too long afterwards, within the layers of electronic sound, now with deeper and more consonant frequencies, I begin to hear spoken words, as if the dancer's voice had now entered the landscapes of this installation. The wind caught her words, and now the echoes drifted over to my corner.

There were some haunting and beautiful moments, perhaps indeed moments of a mood that is hard to describe, when slowly the space and the sound of this space began to sink into my body, when - to my surprise - I began to find it completely natural to lie in the middle of this installation, on a white floor, with a dancer or other folks moving around me, stepping over me, someone behind me looking down with a puzzled expression. And then I close my eyes, because it's okay to do that.

References:

- (1) Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, London: Continuum, 2006.
- (2) Malcolm McCullough, *Digital Ground: Architecture, Pervasive Computing, and Environmental Knowing*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.
- (3) Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics*. Dartmouth College Press, University of New England, 2006.
- (4) Johannes Birringer, "User Testing for Participatory Artworks," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 1:2 (2005), 147-73.
- (5) Cf. Johannes Birringer "Dance and Not Dance," *Performing Arts Journal* 80 (2005), 10-27, and the special issue on "Choreography" edited by André Lepecki and Ric Allsopp, *Performance Research* 13:1 (2008), 118-22. For a critique of the capture system, see André Lepecki, "Choreography as Apparatus of Capture," in the special issue on "Dance Composes Philosophy Composes Dance Part II," ed. André Lepecki, *The Drama Review* 51:2 (2007), 121-123. Part I of this series appeared in *The Drama Review* 50:4 (2006), 16-51.
- (6) Quoted from Hellen Sky's presentation at the Performance Research Seminar Series, Brunel University Center for Contemporary and Digital Performance, November 12, 2008.