THE WORK OF SHARING:
DISCUSSING PERFORMANCE IN THE MODE OF
PERFORMANCE

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How do we discuss performance in the mode of performance? How do we think and discuss *through* art-making rather than think and discuss *about* art-making? A defining characteristic of artistic research is the rejection of simple binaries, in pursuit of a complex, interwoven relationship between theoria, praxis, and poiesis. This is, no doubt, a point of philosophical inquiry. However, for those who identify as practising artist-scholars, it is also a recurring practical challenge, particularly within academic conference situations. How can artistic research practices be effectively shared in contexts that traditionally prioritize scholarly papers and presentations? Early in its evolution, the Artistic Research Working Group of Performance Studies international (PSi) initiated what was called the Porous Studio, an attempt to create a studio-like setting within and during the PSi conference. Participating artist-scholars, as well as local artists from the conference's host country, were invited to share their work in ways that, similar to the presentation of papers and panels, elicited direct critical response from those in attendance. Building upon this project, the Artistic Research Working Group has continued to experiment with models of exchange, leading within recent years to a three-part engagement that we initially called 'Perform–Respond–Extract', and most recently identified as 'Perform–Respond–Extend'. Both models involve structured, interactive engagement between group members, including preparatory work prior to the gathering, artistic presentations during the conference, and reflective documentation after the event.

This multimedia essay is describing, or rather demonstrating, one attempt at dealing with the problem how to discuss performance in the mode of performance, based on a presentation at the Performance Philosophy conference in Helsinki in June 2022. There we tried to present and demonstrate in a miniature form the 'Perform–Respond–Extend' model that we have explored in the working group, and to do it in a hybrid format, with two performers in the room and two performers present via Zoom. The three phases of the method (perform, respond, extend) were performed by three members of the group and restricted to three minutes of prerecorded material per person at each stage. The third phase was augmented by live performances by the two members present; Annette Arlander made a table-top performance with pinecones in front of her video and Michelle Man danced with her text slides as accompaniment. Unfortunately, and perhaps significantly, these two live performances were not properly documented and exist only as basic online recordings.

The essay consists of a brief introduction based on the presentation by Bruce Barton and three pre-recorded video compilations prepared by Annette Arlander, Johanna Householder, and Michelle Man, as well short explanations between them. The main video examples are accompanied as appendixes by the original abstracts, two recorded extracts of our preparatory discussions on Zoom, and a rough documentation of the live performances during the conference. A link to the working group archive or blog provides further background information.

The title of this essay, the work of sharing, refers to engaging with and sharing artistic research. The philosophical problem that has accompanied artistic research practice probably since its initiation, is 'how do I share this work?' How can it be done, what are the forms and what are the processes? What are the ways in which the work—that is so very much associated with the actual experience of doing the work—can be shared? What are the possible modes of exchange? How can the work be disseminated and then reapplied in other contexts? We have prepared video materials as examples, so this introduction is quite brief, just to introduce both the context and a few ideas to address this philosophical problem that we are engaging with.

We are presuming that many of our readers are quite familiar with the idea of artistic research, so there are only a few ideas that we want to make sure we have a shared understanding of as we begin. The key idea being that artistic research is indeed a form of research in which artistic practice is the central mode of enquiry, even if the topic or focus is not necessarily artistic practice. This distinguishes it clearly from many other forms of research; artistic practice is the defining characteristic of it. Moreover, 'artistic practice (can) be viewed as the production of knowledge or philosophy in action' with 'the potential to extend the frontiers of research' (Barrett and Bolt 2007, 13). This leads to a series of characteristics that are quite pertinent for what we are discussing here. The first characteristic is that it is a form of research, which is or which we can call *enactive*; it is a fully embodied form of research. And it is therefore one that is carried out through the practice, that is done by doing, which is a particularly important aspect for the challenge of disseminating artistic research. The second characteristic is that it is a form of research which is highly situated, and which therefore is quite distinct to the context in which it is taking place. As such, it is very much unique to the circumstances of the individuals involved, the location, the time, the

temperature, etc., to a degree that makes the transmission of this research and the sharing of this research often quite challenging. The third characteristic is that it is also an emergent form of research, one in which not just the discoveries of the research emerge through the process, but often the process itself emerges while evolving on a constant basis. The researcher must be sensitive and open to that unfolding, in order to allow the research to guide us as much as it is a vehicle for the enquiry that we started out with. And finally, the fourth and last characteristic of it is that is an interdisciplinary form of research; almost inevitably one moves across the boundaries of specific established disciplines and of specific methodologies in an effort to work almost always in a highly collaborative manner.

With these ideas in mind, the place that we start from and the problem that we are dealing with is this form of engagement with knowledge, which is resistant to and even perhaps suspicious of outcomes and results, which particularly in an academic context provides all kinds of challenges. Drawing on Mark Fleishmann's, thinking about performance-as-research (2012), it is a form of research that is less interested in arrivals and destinations, or in the distance that is covered between two points, and more interested in the quality of the movement between those points. It is about the experience of the travel itself, and the textures of the travel itself. And in that sense, perhaps one could think about it as a form of embodied philosophy, or a form of philosophical embodiment. That is the base from which we are going to be presenting our examples.

We are all members of the Artistic Research Working Group of Performance Studies international, a working group that has had a long life; one which has a large number of members from around the world, some of whom are coming from year to year while some rotate through and change depending on where the conference is being held, what the theme of the conference is, and the various characteristics that vary from one year to the next. One of the key elements is that the working group has been designed to engage with local communities. When conferences were always in one place only, unlike many of the conferences held today, it was a means of engaging with new communities of artistic practice and artistic research as the conference moved from location to location.

To give a sense of how this evolved over more than a decade, here is a little bit of the history of the Artistic Research Working Group: In 2011 in PSi there was what was referred to as the Artists' Committee, which was understood as a place for artists working within PSi and often within academia to bring their work together, to present their work to each other, and to have exchanges in a place somewhat removed from the rest of the conference in a space where the conventions of the conference gave way to more free forms and more flexible ways of engaging with each other. This was later referred to as the Porous Studio, with the idea of porosity referring to engagement with local communities; the PSi community arrived at a particular location and then opened its doors to the local artists' community for a more concentrated exchange. In 2014 the group changed its name and became known as the Artistic Research Working Group and has evolved significantly since that time.

Initially the challenge of moving beyond the mere presentation of work for each other became the question: how do we exchange? How is this work shared? How do we collaborate in moving forward? In 2017 we introduced the model of 'Performance and Response'. This meant that individuals prepared materials prior to the conference, and then at the conference there was a performative response by colleagues to the work that was presented by individual members. In 2019 we extended that model further and referred to it as 'Performance, Response, and Extraction', with the idea being that there was a presentation by each member of the working group, another member of the working group responded through performance to that initial performance, and then there was a third iteration, where an individual attempted to extract from the response a particular question, problem, or element that would be worthy of further examination and exploration, and often also possible to preserve as a document. In 2021 we then altered that further, referring to the model as 'Perform, Respond, and Extend'. Now the challenge was for each of the individuals first to present, then to respond through performance to one of the other participants' work, and then on the third day, each individual had to respond to the previous response, as well as taking something out of it and extending it even further into a performative conversation. This model is the one we are going to offer a very brief example of here. At the 2022 version of the gathering of the Artistic Research Working Group, a further evolution to this model was based on working in pairs; we asked individuals to respond and to extend in collaboration with another participant.

The video material that follows is a miniature and quite accelerated version of the 2021 model 'Perform, Respond, and Extend'. The first video compilation is the presentation of the initial performances, the second video compilation is based on the idea of responding to those initial performances, and the third compilation of video and live material is a mode of extending the relationship that was established between the first two iterations through performance.

This first iteration of videos represents the first stage in the three-stage process of 'Perform, Respond and Extend', which often takes the form of materials submitted prior to the meeting, presenting an initial basis of individual work. The three presenters also shared written abstracts with each other (see appendixes 1–3). This phase goes right back to the early days of the artists' committee, which was about creating a space to present work to each other, and in many ways that is what that first iteration represents.
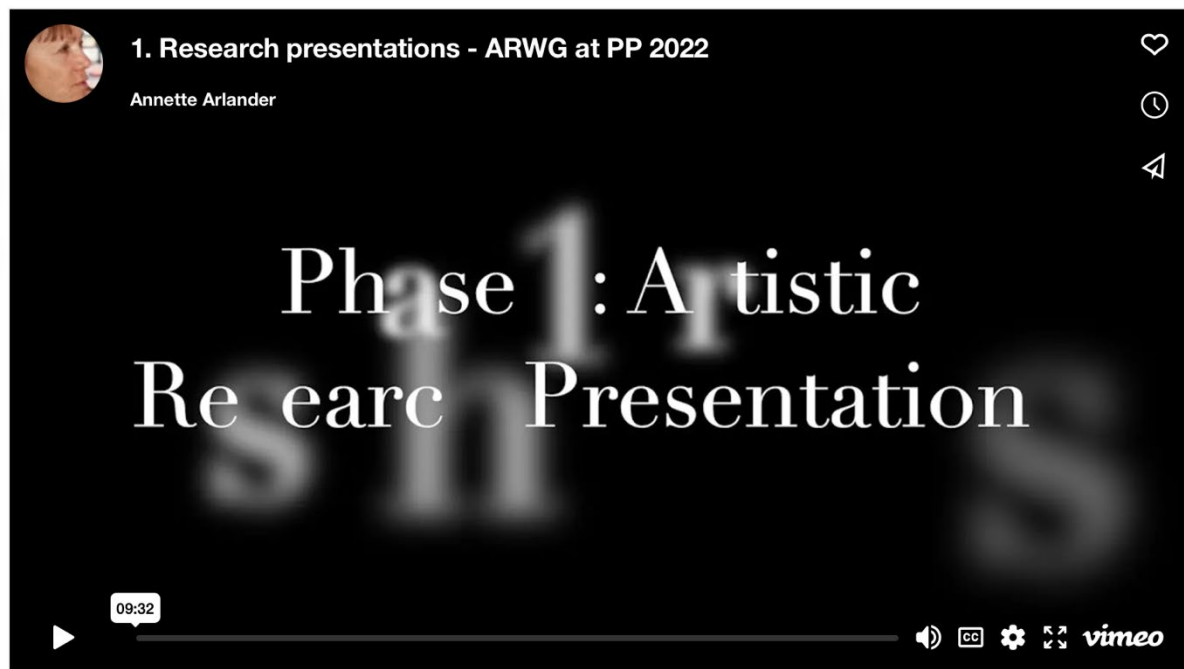
Phase 1. Artistic Research Presentations: Annette Arlander, Johanna Householder and Judith Price, and Michelle Man (Video, 9 min 32 sec). https://vimeo.com/813841510

This second compilation of videos coincides with the 'respond' phase of the working group's method, in which individuals respond to another individual's presentation and performance through performance. The person who is assigned to respond to the materials of a specific participant will have access to it leading up to the conference and will have some time to make the response over a few weeks, sometimes even longer, although sometimes they have been created overnight. This 'response' has often been performed live at the conference, although in this example the responses were also pre-recorded.

Phase 2. Responses to research materials: Johanna Householder's response to Annette Arlander's work, Michelle Man's response to Johanna Householder and Judith Price's work, and Annette Arlander's response to Michelle Man's work (Video, 8 min 34 sec). https://vimeo.com/813842586

What is perhaps evident from this second set of videos, is that the response often turns into an intersection between the practices of the two artists who are in exchange. The second stage is a response to the original material, by bringing in one's own practice, one's own interest, one's own skill set into exchange and conversation with that of the individual to whom or whose work you are responding.
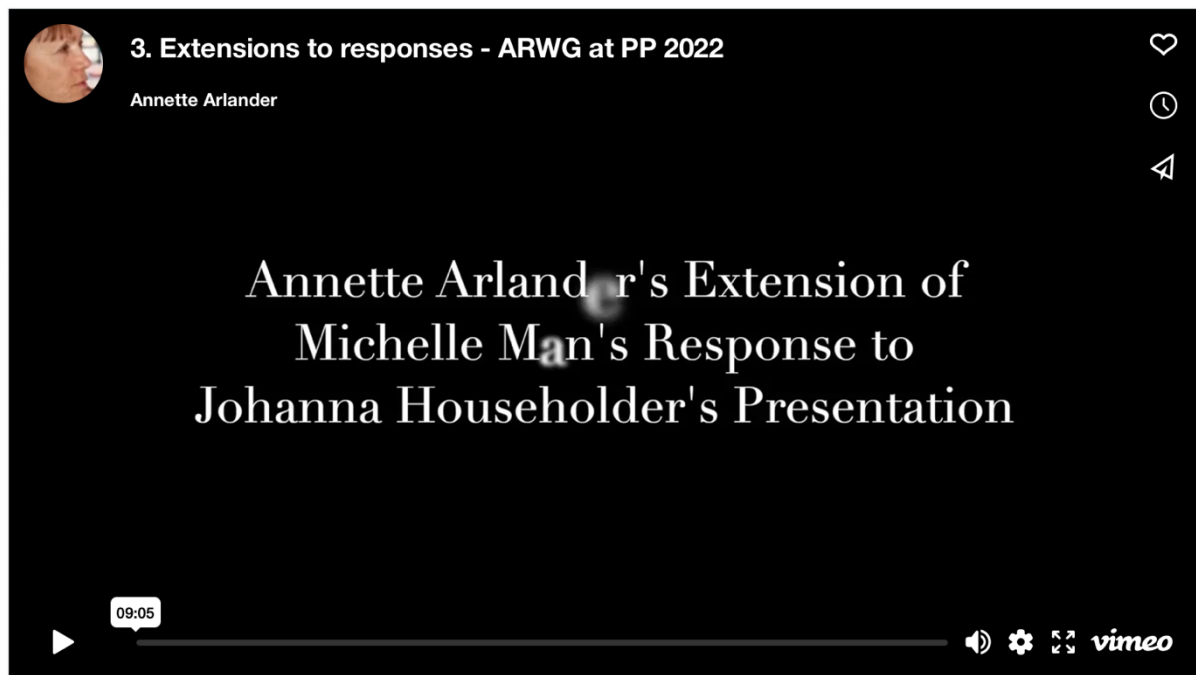
Phase 3: Extend

We refer to the next iteration in our process as 'extending'. The idea behind this phase is that a third member enters the conversation, bringing their interests, their skill sets, and their disciplinary background in order to create a response or extension—not only to the first and second participants' work, but also to the conversation between them, so that it becomes a three-way conversation.

When we first experimented with extensions, they were supposed to be something that could be documented, because the responses were live. In these miniature examples from the Helsinki conference, we were doing the opposite, because the 'responses' were pre-recorded, so a live component was included only in this third stage. Unfortunately, the live elements of the extensions were not properly videoed and are therefore here included only as a rough, unedited recording from the room. For the sake of clarity, the screened elements of the 'extensions' are included as separate clips after the live recording.

Phase 3. Extensions. Documentation from the room: Annette Arlander's extension of Michelle Man's response to Johanna Householder's presentation, Johanna Householder's extension of Annette Arlander's response to Michelle Man's work, and Michelle Man's extension of Johanna Householder's response to Annette Arlander's work. (Video, 9 min 22 sec). https://vimeo.com/813843632

Phase 3. Extensions. Pre-recorded and screened material: Annette Arlander's extension of Michelle Man's response to Johanna Householder's presentation, Johanna Householder's extension of Annette Arlander's response to Michelle Man's work, Michelle Man's extension of Johanna Householder's response to Annette Arlander's work. (Video, 9 min 5 sec). https://vimeo.com/813843202

At the conference we also added one extra dimension by inviting the audience to 'extend' the problem one step further, and the panel concluded by inviting those present to further extend the work that they had witnessed with questions or discussion. However, there was less discussion than we had expected, and half of the presenters being present online complicated the exchange. This experience nevertheless confirmed our previous experiences with the third stage; the 'extract' or 'extend' phase is still in development and looking for a proper approach to its facilitation and implementation. For example, for the meetings of the Artistic Research Working Group in 2024 we have focused only on the 'perform' and 'respond' phases and have tried to work with pairs of mutual responses rather than the 'chain' demonstrated here (in which A responds to B who responds to C). For others who might be interested in applying the method, it is worth noting that the choice of emphasis in the third phase can be calibrated for the purpose it is used for. If the aim is sharing the process with a wider community—for example, via some form of online publication— the extension in the third phase can focus on creating informative documentation of the previous perform–response phases. If the goal is to stimulate the research process, the extension phase can be directed towards reflection and distilling core questions from the perform–response exchange for further exploration by the group.

Nevertheless, what was interesting in this miniature demonstration at Performance Philosophy Problems was the degree to which the work itself articulated some of the ideas that we were trying to introduce at the beginning of the presentation about the challenges of dissemination, exchange, and interaction through performance, and demonstrated that this is indeed an open-ended

process. The practical problem with the lack of proper documentation of the live elements of the third phase makes very palpable the embodied, situated, and emergent character of artistic research in performance. We did not and do not arrive at a conclusion, nor did we arrive at a set discovery, but by inviting the audience to continue the extension process, our hope was that others would embody the spirit, as well as the process, of the work that we do with each other. And with the help of this essay, we extend the invitation to the reader–viewer–listener as well.

Appendices

1. Presentation, Annette Arlander

'Hello Pine'

In order to develop and sharpen the focus of my recent artistic research project *Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees* (2020–2021) I have in 2022 commenced a three-lingual project called *Pondering with Pines – Miettii mäntyjen kanssa – Funderar med furor*. Neither the research aims, nor the artistic aims of the project are yet fully articulated, but the idea is to focus on pine trees rather than any kind of trees and on pondering rather than performing in general. For this mini presentation, with the focus on demonstrating our ways of proceeding in the Artistic Research Working Group I chose one aspect of the practice, namely experiments with talking to or with trees.

Recording my impromptu speech next to some pine trees, rather than writing a letter to the tree by the tree, and then reading, recording and adding it to the video afterwards, as I have done before, changes the approach and accentuates the real-time dimension, because the talk is recorded and added to synchronized to the video as it is. The sound files are also published as episodes in the podcast *Talking with Trees*. I suppose this kind of 'live recording' of an impromptu talk resembles the real-time, real-action ethos of performance art, despite being shared as a recording. The example to be presented is the beginning of a talk recorded on 8 April in Kaivopuisto Park in Helsinki.

The whole podcast episode (9 min) is available on Soundcloud:
https://soundcloud.com/user-90370389/pine-5-eng

And as a video with the transcript of the text on the RC, here:
https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1323410/1529168/0/0

For context, see:

- Project blog: https://ponderingwithpines.wordpress.com
- Project archive: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1323410/1323411

For background, see:

- Previous project blog: https://meetingswithtrees.com
- Previous project archive: https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/761326/761327

We humans, we animals, are mimetic beings. This quality gives choral singing, unison dancing, synchronized swimming and starling murmurations the power to enthrall, to mesmerize, and to feel.

In August 2020, veteran performance artists and former collaborators Johanna Householder and Judith Price, separated by three time zones, decided to break away from their 'lockdown Zoom calls' and instead use the calls as an opportunity for collaborative exchange.

We challenged each other to improvise a new relationality by thinking and moving spontaneously, experimenting with ways to bend the technology, to reach around and through the screen. We mapped potential and new spatial relationships. Reading the screen, we observed that architecture (both domestic and computer architecture) accrues alternative meaning when read as mise-en-scène. Recorded on laptops, between Pacific (UTC -7) and Eastern time (UTC -4), the resultant "Episodes" document our attempts to restore peripheral vision to a world condensed into a 2880 x 1800 slab of metals and electrons. The crude imprecision of our communication technologies flattens geographies and obliterates time zones. We began to inhabit a continuous architecture.

By February 2021, we extended our collaborative improvisations to include working with sound artists. Each artist brought a unique way of hearing and approach to the visual material we sent them, they in turn sent sound files that influenced the image sequences. For the purposes of this conference we will use a clip from the last collaborative zoom video, titled *Episode 202122*, with sound by Jeff Morton.

For context: DIPTYCHS UTC -4 / UTC -7 the six video works by Johanna Householder & Judith Price

1. **Episodes 7, 9, 14, 15: Smoke & Mirrors**, Sound by Seth Cardinal Dodginghorse
In which we explore the architectures that we inhabit in common, uncovering perhaps a continuous household.

2. **Episode 3 & 8: Marxist Crows**, Soliloquy by Jeanne Randolph
In which we replace ourselves in order to introduce a particular outsiders' perspective on the covid lockdown situation.

3. **Episode 5: 43.6532° N, 79.3832° W / 48.4284° N, 123.3656° W**, Sound by Anne Bourne
In which we continue to explore architecture and recognize the relationship between mirrors and screens.

4. **Episode 11: Kitchen party**, Sound by Homo Monstrous
In which we explore each other's fridges and pantries, tuning into domestic concerns and exchanging recipes across time and space.

5. **Episode 20: Object lesson**, Sound by Rita McKeough
In which we give the space over to the objects at hand to find their own relationships.

6. **Episodes 202122: Zoom escapes**, Sound by Jeff Morton
In which we try to leave lockdown, to push the limits of wifi, and zoom itself takes over the editing, deciding who and what to show.

3. *Ghostlight,* Michelle Man

The *Ghostlight* project expands on my framings of *choreoluminosity*, which explores the opportunities available from coalescing energies of light and the dancing body, and that lies at the heart of my on-going thesis *Light and the Choreographic: dancing with Tungsten.* Over the course of this project my positioning sits within increasingly contentious arguments around the sustainability of theatres and Eco-design as lighting manufacturers, distributors, and designers vie with environmental policy makers over the phasing out of Tungsten lighting fixtures. Being on the brink of a post-Tungsten era, therefore shifts my approach to working with different lighting sources. As an artistic and critical way of questioning a practice of *choreoluminosity* in a world of climate emergency, *Ghostlight* is posited as a provocation of dancing with a 'last light'—what if this were the last light? A death of Tungsten? How choreographed sensibilities of preciousness towards the non-human come to manifest and to what end, is the concern of this research.

My conceptual landscape draws on theories of new vital materialisms with particular attention to political theorist Jane Bennett's critiquing of a 'sensuous enchantment' (2010: xi), as a 'strange combination of delight and disturbance' (ibid.), that can become a 'motivational energy' (ibid.) spurring a practice of care towards the other than human, in this case the choreographic dialogue with light. Resonating with the ways in which I articulate *choreoluminosity* is Bennett's insistence on the need to 'develop a language and syntax for, and thus better discernment of, the active powers issuing from the non-human' (ibid: ix). I do so, knowingly allured by the texts of Karen Barad, whose writings on touch and the experimental nature of matter and 'its agential capacities for imaginative, desiring, and affectively charged forms of bodily engagement' (2015: 388) she defines as a 'charged multisensorial dance' (2012: 206).

Viewing Artistic Research Materials of the *Ghostlight* Project

The following documentation is taken from the research and development of *Ghostlight* to date. The recordings serve to map the process, and include research practice notes which are an imbrication of reflections and observations made during and after the sessions. The online software that allows for inserting annotations that relate directly to a specific moment enables the archive to be kept as is a collection of live documents, which I can return to in order to re-view and analyse the materials uploaded. I write with a desire to capture images, or thoughts as they move through my body, rather than strive to create a logical follow through. The notes below, are extracted from the review area of the videos.

***Ghostlight* 2i**, August 2021 04'49 minutes

https://vimeo.com/user27982055/review/581359922/b405667047

starting from the edges of self, tips of fingers dipping in and with the light, as if a first soft stroke picks up light's dust to play in the soft, velvet like silence of this darkness shimmering with light; the feeling is of easy articulation and a flow with ease, awareness of bones' edginess, everything feels liquid

allowing this to ripple through the body with quicksilver speed; what my hands are eager to play with is passed across the body; I do my best to avoid what I feel is a hierarchy within the body, where the hands hold attention, tension, their own rapid intelligence, like the brain on the skin

avoiding face to face contact with the light source, I clasp my hands open behind my back knowing that the light beams into my palms - what private dialogue ensues?

if my movements become worded then it is with language of light - that falls, tenses and then releases - what weight this light? then how to stir the light dust as it brushes off my skin as it sweeps through the atmosphere of the black box space

I notice the neatness of pausing in parallel again, a physical rectilineal projection, my ensuing movements then seek to criss cross myself and wrap and unwrap around my body and kinesphere

top of head, or crown wants to make some kind of poetical union with the light; so far I have avoiding looking directly at the ghostlight source; I bathe, play, listen, work and dance with the

 refracted light. I am not sure I can sense the closeness of the light here; it is as if I am breathing through the top of my head, breathing in the light, breathing with the light.

the energy that I believe I absorb from the light opens onto the front of my neck, long-throated stream of electro-magnetic energy pulsating as I pause

gesture of insistence that I will not look directly at the light source, whilst at the same time knowing that the light radiates and fills the lines in the palm of my hands

each liquid-like drop a reminder of 'light falls', so soft-seed/egg -like body clustering in on self, knowing where the ghost light's luminosity extends

articulating through sensing the undersides of the body, knowing that light arrives everywhere - under, beneath and though every surface

bones of hand on bones of face, edges of bones and light? inner lumens and light?

coalescing energies of light and the flowing body; what sense of sensing hair in the glow, hair that moves with the body and can be projected in other ways.

Ghostlight *2v 06'19 minutes*

https://vimeo.com/user27982055/review/581365361/e3d8cf753d

I have started in what I have referred to in my previous project as a minor light; I am conscious of the reduced visibility in what I do, and revel in this

from fluttering bony fingertips to elbows light, tips of elbows with tips of light, folding and enfolding articulations to transfer, spread and merge this light energy

Ghostlight, **Workers up, blanketing the ghostlight 01'39**

https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/649818969/8cccf62559

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Biographies

Annette Arlander, visiting researcher, University of the Arts Helsinki (Finland), is an artist, researcher, and a pedagogue, one of the pioneers of Finnish performance art and a trailblazer of artistic research. Former professor in performance art and theory at University of the Arts Helsinki, principal investigator of the Academy of Finland funded research project *How to Do Things with Performance* (2016–2020). Professor in performance, art, and theory at Stockholm University of the Arts with the artistic research project *Performing with Plants* (2017–2019). At present she is visiting researcher at Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Helsinki with the project *Meetings with Remarkable and Unremarkable Trees* (2020–2021) and *Pondering with Pines* (2022–2024) . Her research interests include artistic research, performance-as-research and the environment. Her artwork moves between the traditions of performance art, video art, and environmental art.

Bruce Barton is a director, playwright, dramaturg, and scholar whose creative practice, practice-based research, and teaching focuses on physical dramaturgies in devised and intermedial performance. His writing on performance has been published in major scholarly and professional journals in Canada and internationally, and he is the author or contributing editor of seven books. He is the Co-Artistic Director of the award-winning Vertical City, an interdisciplinary performance hub preoccupied with exploring the potential of/in/for intimacy in immersive and participatory performance contexts. He is also the Director of the School of Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Calgary, and a co-convenor of the Artistic Research Working Group of Performance Studies international (PSi).

Johanna Householder (professor emerita, OCAD University, Canada), works at the intersection of popular and unpopular culture, making performance art, audio, video, film and choreography. Her interest in how ideas move through bodies has led her often collaborative practice. She has performed across Canada and at international venues for 40 years. One of the founders of the 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art, she co-edited two books with Tanya Mars: *Caught in the Act: An anthology of performance art by Canadian women* (2004), and More *Caught in the Act* (2016). Her current work concerns the vexations of the anthropocene. She has taken refuge in T:Karonto on Treaty 13 territory.

Michelle Man is a Senior Lecturer in Dance and has been working at Edge Hill University since 2012. Her teaching practice has spanned over more than a quarter of a century and across a range of professional, institutional, and community contexts in Europe and the UK. She holds an MA in Making Performance and her doctoral research explores *Light and the Choreographic: Dancing with Tungsten*. On graduating from Elmhurst Ballet School in 1989, Michelle pursued her professional career as a dancer, choreographer, pedagogue, and eventually director of her

own company in Spain. Her work has been seen in Brazil, Chile, France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Italy, Korea, and the UK in both theatre and site-sensitive contexts. Michelle fosters interdisciplinary practice, working extensively with architects, composers, designers, musicians, and circus artists, and is a frequent collaborator with the Basque electro-acoustic collective Espacio Sinkro.