PERFORMANCE PHILOSOPHY

AN ART IN SHARING: REFLECTIONS ON SOMATIC ATTENTION AND QUEER CHOREOGRAPHIES

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> It's a shared art.
> There is an art in sharing
> This art.
>
> Forest V. Kapo (2019a, 69)

Introduction

What is to be gained by considering dance-based performance artworks to be "shared art"? (Kapo 2019a, 69) And if there is an art to such sharing, how exactly might such sharing function?. These provocations come from Naarm Melbourne based artist Forest V. Kapo (Te Atiawa and Ngāti Raukawa) a practitioner whose work and philosophies I find to be particularly rich, generative and germane to ecologically-informed approaches to choreographed artworks. I first encountered Kapo's work when they performed *John Doe* at Experimental Dance Week 2019 at the Basement Theatre, in the mid-town area of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland in Aotearoa New Zealand (Kapo 2019b). I was struck by their use of eye contact and direct address to audience members: 'Suck my bones! [...] Breathe!', they commanded. Their mobilisation of imperative forms of speech together with a cunning use of props like sleeping bags and tent poles made their work stand apart from the plethora of performances in the week-long festival. I can still clearly recall them hugging a large blue Swiss ball, telling it 'I've got you...it's OK' as though attempting to soothe our broken planet. They then bore it upon their shoulder, kneeling like Atlas. The overall affect was commanding, intense and confrontational. During *John Doe,* Kapo's precision and strength meant they implicated audience members within unbearably painful personal accounts of witnessing state-sanctioned violence, before guiding them skilfully through to a sense of collective redemption.

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Throughout the composition of this paper, Kapo played the role of sounding board, discussant and conversation partner. Although currently based in Naarm, Kapo originally comes from Aotearoa New Zealand. An artist trained in contemporary dance, their emancipatory practice has a deep sense of materiality and craft. Approaching performance in an expanded sense, for the past two decades Kapo has facilitated and choreographed community activations, collaborations, improvisation, installations, solo performance and live sound work, with a particular emphasis on the climate emergency, Indigenous identities and gender politics.

Another question I continue to be pre-occupied with is the following: how might *queer* be performed, choreographed and received in contemporary art?[1] I will argue that this area of inquiry relates to the central concerns of this special issue, particularly that of the connection of dancing and dance reception or, as Kapo would say, that which is shared. What exactly is this connection, how might it actually work and how does this relate to the sharing and reception of queer choreographies? One suitable point of departure is my own prior research into *intersubjectivity*, which, according to social theory can most simply be defined as a "between world" that connects individual human subjectivities (Wynne-Jones 2021, 13). Conveniently, in the context of this special issue, this definition posits that intersubjectivity has a connective function.

Kapo together with their colleague and fellow artist val smith provide examples and provocations that act as engines for the overall thrust of my argument. In this paper, I turn my attention to the means by which temporal communities in dance might be formed. I argue that one kind of connective tissue between members of such communities, no matter how temporal or temporary they may be, is *somatic attention.* However, it is important to note that somatics is a normative system, an ideological construction that often generalises and promotes bodies that are homogenous, a-historical and so-called natural. According to dance and performance scholar Doran George, somatics employed a "conceit of naturalness" (2020, 1). As dance theorist Isabelle Ginot has pointed out, somatics is still structured according to the prejudices and beliefs of its twentieth century founders, the ways in which it operates are far from neutral and risk being heteronormative (2010, 20).

Exploring the concept of *kinaesthetic queerness* is central to this paper, particularly as it plays a significant role in de-naturalising somatics and somatic attention. Before elaborating on how somatic attention works, I first look at the history of the term somatics and how it emerged as a discourse in the 1970s. I give a brief history of how somatics came to the shores of Aotearoa New Zealand, specifically how it was taken up in dance schools in the upper North Island from the 1980s onwards and the important role it has played in tertiary dance education. Recalling the way in which the originally slurring expression *queer* was adopted and re-appropriated in the 1980s, I look at examples in which artists reclaim movements that have historically been used to frame and marginalize certain people, including acting swish, walking flamboyantly, embracing and harnessing lowness and shame. The next section is a first-person account of my own experience encountering the choreographic artwork *Moving Backwards* (2019) by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz. Core concerns that emerge from the piece include moving backwards as a way to: physically perform resistance; challenge progress and encourage strange encounters that might

be points of departure from which the unexpected emerges. Moving in slow motion, which also occurs frequently in *Moving Backwards* is also read in terms of a temporal drag and feeling backwards as part of taking a specific approach to historical and contemporary forces of violence and oppression. In the final section of this paper I briefly outline aspects of dancing and dance reception that are *unchosen*, employing theories of encounter gleaned from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). As I explain in the final section of this paper, Levinas' account of the face-to-face encounter, when applied to an art encounter introduces the idea of a confrontation with an Other who expresses themselves with a wordless accusation so that a response is obligatory. This idea of appeal or call and response is an interesting model for the reception of dance. Kapo's reflections on the subject offer a range of alternatives from passivity and openness, a feigned ignorance through to critical support, which can often end in an "experience of multiple, tiny deaths" (Kapo 2019a, 69).

It is my belief that selected theories of alterity, otherness or "the Other" as described by philosophers like Levinas in response to the atrocities of World War II provide important levels of description for what goes on in-between subjects. I would argue that these philosophers' concepts of action, alterity, and sociality can help to construct a critical framework for understanding the structure, effects, and exchanges produced by choreographed works.

Another relevant theorist of intersubjectivity, contemporaneous with Levinas, is Hannah Arendt (1906–1975). When reflecting on the connectivity of subjectivities, I am drawn back to her 1958 publication *The Human Condition* in which she proposed "sheer human togetherness" as a situation where "people are *with* others and neither for nor against them" and where the "revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore" (Arendt 1958, 180). Pertinent to those concerned with dance, Arendt entangles her theory of intersubjectivity with that of action. For her, action always-already appeals to alterity or otherness, it "is never possible in isolation," and "needs the surrounding presence of others" (188). She argues that shared or common *inter-ests* lie "between people and therefore can relate and bind them together" (182). Action as well as speech are concerned with this binding in-between. Arendt discusses a *subjective in-between* that consists of deeds and words that originate from "men's acting and speaking directly *to* one another" (183) Such an in-between is intangible, yet according to Arendt, "We call this reality the 'web of human relationships'" (ibid.). For Arendt, action creates relationships and relationships originate from doing.

In an earlier issue of *Performance Philosophy,* theatre scholar Luke Matthews, also responding to Arendt, proposes "to turn one's attention to the structures of human relations and to try to find collective modes of interaction which could respect, rather than curtail, the self-determination of individuals and their potential development as whole persons" (2019, 113). I also feel there is much to glean from Arendt's proposition of respectful, collective modes of interaction, ones which enable rather than constrain self-determination. I would argue that this proposition could be a generative lens through which to consider instances of contemporary art and performance. As aesthetic theorist Cecilia Sjöholm points out, Arendt was interested in "events and phenomena" rather than the "occultation of outstanding works" (2015, 2). Yet in her writings, Arendt does offer a tantalising

proposition for performance studies when she posits theatre as "the political art par excellence," where the political sphere of human life might be transposed into art. Perhaps 'theatre' might be replaced with 'performance' or 'dance' so that they too might be theorised as places for social praxis, or as "art whose sole subject is man and his relationship to others" (Arendt 1958, 188).

Turning-toward and attending to: somatic attention

One possible conceptual tool with which to theorise the ways in which connection or collective modes of interaction in dancing and dance reception function is *somatic attention*. There has been much debate about the origins of the term *somatic*, as dance theorist Lindsey Drury has pointed out. When Thomas Hanna founded somatics in the 1970s, he was unwilling to acknowledge the complexities and disunities present in its Greek roots (Drury 2022, 7). Thus the problematic, modern or retrospective definition is that somatics is derived from the Greek word *soma* meaning "the living body in its wholeness" (Brodie and Lobel 2012, 6). Here the somatic refers to processes that are inclusive of one's entire being—body, mind and the environment in which one coexists. In the context of twenty-first century contemporary dance approaches, the soma is considered a changeable, fluid entity that responds to both external and internal stimuli. Somatics emphasises physical sensation and the fundamentally unique embodied experience of each person. Dance theorist Isabelle Ginot states that the goal of all somatic methods is, in any interaction, to generally aim to be conscious and considerate of a whole person (2010, 16).

It is important to recognise that *somatics* has a complex genealogy, since the 1970s it has achieved widespread recognition as a form of bodily knowledge within dance studies. Ginot has described it as a "conceptual apparatus that enhances our understanding of pedagogy, dancer's health, and corporeal and gestural aesthetics" (12). The dance-related practice is peripheral to dance itself, but nonetheless functions as a specific form of knowledge with its own methods and practices, producing a characteristic discourse. Somatics first found its way into dance as a means to limit accidents and prevent injuries, it is increasingly integrated into dancer training and dance pedagogy. A diverse field made up of multiple schools and approaches, the most prominent examples are the technique of Fredrick Matthias Alexander (1869–1955), the method of Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984) and the *Body-Mind Centring* (BMC) of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (b.1941).

In my prior research I have observed that in much of the literature there is a confusing entanglement of concepts of somatic awareness, empathy and attention (Wynne-Jones 2021, 182). Anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas has described somatic modes of attention, with an emphasis on the importance of attention and situation. At first blush, somatic attention seems like a good candidate for what Arendt would consider respectful, collective modes of interaction. Here, attention is "a consciously turning toward" someone or something (Csordas 1993, 138) that ideally involves consideration and anticipation of the characteristics of the object of attention. For Csordas, attention involves bodily phenomena which play a constitutive role in subjectivity/intersubjectivity. Any "turning toward" involves more than mere visual perception, it includes bodily and multisensory engagement (Csordas 1993, 138). Thus somatic attention towards oneself as well as performers, dancers or fellow participants within a choreographed work involves an attending-

to that is conscious and considerate of a whole person, a multisensory engagement and attending with and through one's entire body.

Somatic researcher Felicity Molloy has recorded a brief history of how somatic studies evolved from adjunct training to becoming integrated into institutionalised dance programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand (Molloy 2014, n.p.). According to Molloy, somatic studies played a crucial role in the development of tertiary dance, as this "educable form of human movement enquiry" has involved hours of thinking through the body in a community-of-practice. Molloy summarised: "Somatic processes eventuate from a deep curiosity about movement: refinement and efficiency, and experiential nuances of performance expressivity." As Molloy explains, somatics is an "eclectically derived pedagogy of movement." She elaborates:

> Within its distinctive models of anatomical clarification, injury prevention and postural habit awareness, I think of somatics as essential to learning dance: each individual in dialogue with how and why their bodies dance in relation to environment; internal and external. (Ibid.)

Molloy tells a story of how somatic practices were disseminated to these shores: travels overseas lead to subsequent extensive resources for dance methods, and somatics was introduced by teachers as well as workshop educators from abroad. Somatics found a home at Auckland Performing Arts School's (PAS) Contemporary Dance Diploma, a future-focused programme that taught dance through experimental, contemporary methods. PAS became the first undergraduate degree in dance (Unitec, 1989) and it was here that Kapo studied. In Molloy's account of somatic studies, there are echoes of Arendt's proposition of *being-with*, a sort of human togetherness in which people are with each other, rather than for or against. A web of human relationships is woven between dancers who are in dialogue with how bodies might dance in relation to internal and external environments. There is room for revelatory action to come to the fore because such action has the surrounding presence of others it requires.

For Kapo, somatic principles "were embraced as a way to complement formal training" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Kapo notes that during their training, somatics was never considered a disruptive influence or a replacement for conservatory-model formal dance training. Within their dance education, somatic principles were employed during the teaching of dance technique, contemporary dance and contact improvisation. As part of their training, Kapo was exposed to BMC, Feldenkrais, Alexander technique and Joan Skinner's releasing technique (SRT). Kapo observed that their exposure to a broad range of somatic approaches has lengthened their career and delayed their retirement. As an older dancer and performer, Kapo reflects that colleagues with similar training are still dancing, well into their mid-40s, as access to "regenerative re-patterning and preventative practices" (ibid.) has reduced injury, particularly when used in tandem with sports medicine. For Kapo, training in somatic practices provides dancers and performers with "a sensory language" one "that articulates a deeper physical sensitivity and connection to the body, rewarding the practitioner with ways to inhabit the body more consciously" (ibid.). Somatic attunement, indirectly embodied, is something carried into performance. Additionally, somatic instructions are often

used to direct movement qualities and vocabularies. Somatic practices and principles can also be used in dance composition, devising or choreography.

Sourcing nature and the natural in order to overhaul: critiques of somatics

As seen in the earlier section, writing on somatic practices whilst located in Tāmaki Makaruau Auckland means that the term *somatic* is inflected in particular ways and enjoys a specific genealogy, one that can be traced through certain dance schools, educators, visitors and practitioners. Therefore one cannot take the term *somatic* for granted, and this has an impact on the significance of *somatic attention*. Similarly, Ginot has argued that somatics is a *counter power,* one that acts as an "antidote to dominant dance practices" (2010, 12). Both Alexander Technique and the Feldenkrais Method work on how gestures are initiated before deconstructing and re-organising gestural *habitus.* However, Ginot also cautions that somatic models serve as paradigms and that there is a tendency for these models to become ideology (2010, 20). The methods of both Alexander and Feldenkrais aim towards the improvement of coordination and certain movement qualities necessary to this end. Attention is given to self-awareness, the improvement of coordination and certain movement qualities so that movement is reversible and mild. This is reinforced by Kapo's experience of somatic training as a way "to find and increase the ease of function, line and form" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Indeed a foundational principle is that of alteration or the virtue of variation. There are, however, risks associated with transposing the strategies of somatic practice into social norms of so-called good movement and good sensing. Ginot points out:

> Too often, it seems to me, these three conditions are interpreted as the norms of movement in general; detached from the context of the session of somatic practice, *they pass for the definition of 'good movement,' indeed of good living.* (2010, 21)

Ginot argues that somatics is a normative system, therefore it is essential to analyse its ideological construction. Although somatic practices insist on the singularity of each corporeality, most "have as a backdrop a homogenous, universal, ahistorical, and occidental body" (23). An essentialist ideal of the body brings with it illusions of the natural and organic, a political and social conscience is replaced by a so-called somatic conscience, one that views the subject as closed and autonomous. Although somatic practices have been utilised by dancers with increasing frequency since the last quarter of the twentieth century, for Ginot they have become limited by concepts of body and culture current at the specific times and places of their advent, that is the US and western Europe from the early- to late-twentieth century. The concept of a so-called natural body is never neutral; it may in fact be heteronormative, colonising as well as white supremacist. As George points out, with somatics "dancers conceived of and sourced nature and the natural to overhaul" their prior training (2020, 1). George summarises that by the end of the twentieth century, "Somatics continued to cultivate and promote the idea of a natural body as an invisible yet essential category of nature, one that, while appearing to be inclusive, nonetheless marked difference and enacted exclusion from its supposedly universal purview" (2).

In George's case, their somatic training promoted conservative and exclusionary values, particularly around so-called natural ideas about gender:

> this same education also largely excluded non-Western dance aesthetics and configured transgender expression as artificial. My effeminate movement and pronounced assibilation of words containing "s" sounds seemed not to be culturally neutral because they challenged prevailing beliefs about natural gender. So when I was told my voice was unnaturally high and was encouraged to work with male teachers to connect with my masculinity, I believed my femininity resulted from my bodily nature somehow having been thwarted. (3)

George's account provides an example of how practices that are meant to be emancipatory and rebel against prior, restrictive forms of movement training end up serving trans-exclusionary ideas about gender. Closer to home, in discussion with val smith, an artist who trained with Kapo and frequently collaborates with them, they reflected on their own somatic training, beginning with the observation:

> I'm able to recognize now that, all our teachers are white ciswomen who have held a lot of privilege. So the perspectives and ways of attending to the body come through that lens. And of course that comes with their own histories of having their bodies colonized. (smith 2023, n.p.)

In reflecting on their own experience of somatics, smith also discussed a cultural dimension, posing that "it's definitely a white lineage, a lot of those teachings don't acknowledge or invite into the space different cultural perspectives and that's still going on now." (Ibid.). According to smith, in their experience, often those running somatic workshops elide "somatics as any kind of cultural way of attending" when, in fact, "The delicate attention to sensations or relationships between the bodies and environments and stuff is deeply inbuilt in Indigenous ways of being" (Ibid.). This corresponds to Kapo's observation: "Yet cultural paradigms, indigenous, aging, female, are internally (infernally) difficult to alter in real life" (Kapo 2019a, 68).

The lived experiences and observations of both Kapo and smith chime with Ginot's call to action: "we must inquire whether the values dear to somatics should not be reconsidered, given that they ring strangely with the overshadowing ideological phobias of the powers that be" (Ginot 2010, 26). As Ginot points out, sensations are in no way exempt from ideology, exclusions, or disenfranchisement. Too often somatics champions an original, natural body or a body that is "more natural" than another, it embarks on a project of "naive meliorism" that can be normative, ableist and even ethnicised, trans-exclusionary and classist (24). Somatic practices can be widely appropriative of Indigenous embodied and healing practices and are often entangled with dated theories of cultural evolutionism that have informed colonial contexts and harmed Indigenous peoples. Additionally, Kapo has indicated that in their experience, BMC training inadvertently highlights "cultural prejudices which cannot and do not (without rigorous introspection) authentically support at this time an Indigenous queer working-class body" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Too often opportunities to develop somatic training is limited by access to financial resources and a lack of cultural diversity.

An open mesh of possibilities: questioning and de-naturalising somatic attention

With regard to the connection or collective modes of interaction in dancing and dance reception, I would argue that somatics is an approach often applied by the discipline of dance studies to inter-personal encounters, or what Arendt would call the "web of human relationships" (Arendt 1958, 183). Accounts of intersubjectivity taken from dance studies often emphasise somatic attention, a concept used to analyse encounters between and amongst performers/dancers and spectators/beholders. The trouble is that such bodily based attention can also obscure class structures, colonial domination as well as heteronormativity, or "the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organise homosexuality as its binary opposite" (Corber and Valocchi 2003, 4). As gender theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has pointed out, in general Western culture is "epistemologically cloven," or structured around a series of binary oppositions (2008. 12). In the case of homo/heterosexual categorisation, the opposition is a "pseudo-symmetrical" one in which the sanctity and dominance of the first term are "kept inviolate" (ibid., 67, 82). For example, the idea of the natural body crucial to processes of colonisation and somatics is entangled within these histories. Within epistemologically cloven post-Enlightenment thought, Indigenous embodiment was named 'natural' and un-civilised and such concepts of savage embodiment have often been employed by somatic language. As Australian philosopher Rosi Braidotti explains: "there are the sexualised, racialized and naturalized others, women, indigenous peoples and animals who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies (2013, 26.)

Deliberately confusing these cloven structures, in the field of queer studies the term: "'queer' names or describes identities and practices that foreground the instability inherent in the supposedly stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender and sexual desire" (Corber and Valocchi 2003, 1). Accordingly, the category of queerness takes up otherness or strangeness, deliberately and wilfully appropriating the appellation queer and its position. Queer studies scholars undermine binary logic by foregrounding the provisional and contingent—rather than fixed and coherent—antecedents identified through the terms lesbian, gay, etc. Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes: "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (1993, 8).

The issue here is that somatic attention is always-already culturally and politically inflected and is therefore at risk of operating with an unconscious bias, and it is highly likely that somatic attention is heteronormative, racialised and it may re-enact relations of dominance and authority. Australian dance theorist Philipa Rothfield points out that bodily acts of perception, described as forms of *somatic attention*, involve firstly an attending with or through the body, with the caveat that each body's mode of attention is culturally, socially and intersubjectively formed (2010, 311). Inter-corporeal understandings and kinaesthetic sensibilities are embedded in forms of practice; there are links between the embodied rituals of everyday life, ethics and aesthetics (315). Similarly for Csordas, sensory engagement to and with the body in the immediacy of an intersubjective milieu might be culturally elaborated. Attending to aspects of others' bodily forms, positions, or

movements can be visceral and might involve erotic, moral, or aesthetic sensibilities (Csordas 1993, 139–140). Crucially Csordas holds that there is a cultural patterning of bodily experience and an intersubjective constitution of meaning through that experience, attending to and with a given body involves "culturally constituted somatic modes of attention" (140–141).

Sharing Rothfield's concerns about somatic modes of attention being culturally constituted, Ginot points out that somatics are based on an ideological construction that demands conformity and as such must be examined critically. Pulling out what is relevant to the possibility of queer choreography, Ginot encourages a de-naturalisation of somatics so that it might take into account the complexity engaged each time something changes in the relation of a subject to its physical, symbolic, social, economic and political environment. Ginot asks whether somatics might deal with processes of decolonisation, prosthetics or cyborg bodies, queer practices, as well as politico-pharmaceutical or hormonal experiments. Kapo hints at similar developments, as they have observed somatic practices such as those of body-centered therapist Tadaaki Hozumi that pair somatics with social analysis in order to move "beyond individual embodied attunement," in order to adapt and develop "to include cultural and generative interventions" (Kapo 2022, n.p.).

Attention to and with a body, as well as the aim of conscious consideration of a whole person, is thereby complicated and problematized. As argued by Rothfield, bodily experience is culturally patterned, embedded in forms of practice and embodied rituals of everyday life, ethics and aesthetics (Rothfield 2010). If one perceives and understands the world in a culturally specific manner then this will affect somatic attention as the manner by which one engages with another. After Ginot, one must be critical of somatic practices as they are always-already ideologically constructed and often champion normativity (Ginot 2010). Therefore any concepts of bodily based attention must be interrogated so that the complexity of various physical, symbolic, social, economic and political environments can be taken into consideration, and somatic modes of attending to and with queer bodies can be found (Wynne-Jones 2021, 184). Therefore, one way of considering how connection operates in dancing and dance reception is by critically examining attention, which is, as argued above, always-already situated and culturally constituted whether by habits and predilections, or prejudices and power relations. Attention that is culturally-constituted is something that must be taken into consideration when thinking about dancing and kinaesthetically responsive bodies. After Rothfield and Ginot, co-presence is never neutral or straightforward and will be pre-patterned by existing biases, inclinations and orientations.

De-naturalizing somatics: moving backwards

Included in Ginot's reflections is the following proposition: "Somatics itself is a technique of fabricating the body" (Ginot 2010, 24). She supposes that if such a technique is one among many processes of physical and sexual transformation, then perhaps there is the possibility for somatic methods to be thought of as queer practices. How might such a proposal be expanded and developed? If somatic practices tend to champion the idea of "a natural body, or a body that is 'more natural' than another" (ibid.), then how might somatics be de-naturalized? It is difficult to tell; however, perhaps certain artworks and approaches taken by contemporary artists, ones that, as I

argue, enact a kind of kinaesthetic queerness, can be considered as responses to such a provocation.

Various tactics might be adopted to champion non-normative forms of identity. One is to emphasise contingency or instability in reference to Sedgwick's point about 'the queer' operating in terms of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, lapses and excess. In response to a culture that is "epistemologically cloven," another tactic is to align oneself to the second, subordinate or so-called lesser terms (Sedgwick 2008, 12). For example, where somatic practices stress the whole, natural and organic, one could deliberately become scattered, fragmented or exaggeratedly un-natural. One might wilfully appropriate difference rather than sameness, the contingent rather than the fixed, so-called low art rather than high, bodies that are untrained rather than trained or the nightclub rather than the concert hall.

Dissonance can be found in the very usage of the term *queer.* As Philadelphia-based gender scholar Heather Love points out, the word has been a slur: "When queer was adopted in the late 1980s it was chosen because it evoked a long history of insult and abuse—you could hear the hurt in it" (2007, 2). The term is confrontational and stigmatizing, it is "forcibly bittersweet" (ibid.) Love argues that its very adoption demonstrates a "taking advantage of the reversibility of power" (ibid.). Its kinaesthetic equivalent, the limp wrist, has been taken up by various artists and performers and deliberately accentuated. US-based artist Andy Warhol (1928–1987) often performed in a feminine or dandified manner that he referred to as "acting swish" (Jones 1998, 68). Similar phenomena "act as coded moments of communication" and "elaborate on facets of queerness that are unwritten" have been described by Naarm Melbourne-based artist and writer Jeremy Eaton in his reading of contemporary drag performers:

> reclamations of movements that have derogatorily been used to frame and marginalize certain men and women as attributable to sexuality; limp-wristedness as a sign of weakness being one such movement. (Eaton 2018, n.p.)

It is this "limp-wristedness" that Warhol evoked in his account of acting swish, in contrast to the strident, hyper-masculine grip of minimalist sculptors and the brushstroke of the abstract expressionist painters. Returning to what Sedgwick has described as pseudo-symmetrical oppositions; swish, weakness, daintiness, the sissy and the queer are opposed to the strident, firm grip of the cis-heterosexual, white male painter.

Another kinaesthetic iteration of the *swish* can be seen in Mark Bradford's 2005 film *Niagara* in which the camera follows a young, African American man with a particular swish or bounce in his step as he saunters down a dilapidated pavement in South Central Los Angeles (Lord and Meyer 2013, 226–227). Bradford has described his film as a protest piece involving the swishing and sashaying (away) of a particular kind of man taking-up public space, "owning it for himself, using it as a runway" (Bradford 2008, n.p.). For this work, Bradford was inspired by a "walker" in his own neighbourhood, one known "for his fearless embodiment of flamboyance within an especially tough public sphere" (Ibid.). Bradford's film depicts an instance of walking and behaving that is queer. In *Niagara*, walking, perambulation, moving from one point in space to another, is

appropriated and then literally mobilised. Walking is thereby liberated from its latent heteronormativity. This is in contrast with the "embodied dispositions" of predominantly Somali teenagers that sociologist Will Mason observed in Northern England, understood as a performance of stylized masculinity labelled "swagger" (Mason 2018, 1117). Obviously, Mason's examples come from a very different context to Bradford's walker. Nonetheless, they chime with studies into how body shape and motion affect perceived sexual orientation. In a 2007 paper, American psychologists Johnson et al. observed the ways in which the body's motion, or *gait* plays a crucial role in judgements of sex and gender, and that the "gender typicality of body cues affects perceptions of sexual orientation" (Johnson et al. 2007, 323).

Bradford's video work indicates a kinaesthetic queerness that is spatialised, echoing Sara Ahmed's arguments about the "spatiality of sexual desire" (2006, 543) and its importance to 'orientations' and the subject-intersubjectivity relation. Recalling Bradford's walker, for Ahmed, orientation is a matter of "how one inhabits spaces and who or what one inhabits spaces with" (Ibid.). Orientations are "the effects of what we tend toward" (554). To be oriented sexually, according to Ahmed, is to dwell on something, to linger. Orientations take time. An atmosphere of compulsory or dominant heterosexuality necessitates an orientation around. For Ahmed, a queer subject within straight culture has no choice but to deviate. From this point of view, the queer body is a "failed orientation" (560). For Ahmed, to be queer is to challenge the normative line or axis. Heteronormativity is a straightening device, one that encourages a very specific trajectory. To be out of line is to destabilise these normative axes, to be oblique or slanted. Bradford's fearless walker traverses the city, walking from A to B in an idiosyncratic way. Ahmed posits "queer moments" as "moments of dis-orientation." When things come out of line the effect is "wonky," and Ahmed embraces these queer or wonky moments (562).

Due to the way in which the dominant structures of the world, including heteronormativity, are forcibly in place, queer moments occur when things "come out of line," or are "fleeting" (565). According to Ahmed, "the 'what' that flees is the very point of disorientation" (Ibid.). Ahmed emphasizes her use of the term *queer* to describe non-straight sexual practices. According to Ahmed, the root of the word queer comes from the Greek for cross, oblique or adverse and extended to mean odd, bent or twisted. Ahmed highlights how the queer potential of the oblique to make things queer is "certainly [intended] to disturb the order of things" (Ibid.). In summary, a queer politics for Ahmed involves a commitment to a certain way of inhabiting the world "at the point at which things flee" (566). Ahmed's concepts of queerness as disorientation, the oblique, slanted, wonky and fleeting have the possibility of contributing to a conception of *queer choreography.* Such concepts are echoed in theories of US-based writer Jack Halberstam, particularly those around embracing *failure* as a way to challenge the correlation of heterosexuality with wholeness and success (2011); and *wildness* as a way of resisting the orderly and heteronormative impulses of modernity (2020).

Returning to smith, their performance artworks are site-oriented, often encouraging collaboration. Ahmed's proposition of wonky, queer moments of dis-orientation can be applied to many of smith's recent performances. For example, *Gutter Matters* (2014) begins with the artist lying face

down in the gutter outside of an art gallery, "as a kind of dance practice" (smith 2015, n.p.). A helper stood above the artist with a sign that says "Gay Shame Parade," inviting passers-by to respond by lying on the footpath with smith, so as to examine the sculptural qualities of what is in the drain below with the aid of a torch. smith's horizontal placement of themselves and their participants in the gutter challenges the normative vertical axis, recalling Ahmed's conception of the queer as disorientation and a disturbance in the usual order of things.

Connection or relationality is often inflected in specific ways for those who are part of queer communities, particularly in terms of spatiality, for example taking up civic spaces with parades during certain festivals like Pride and Mardi Gras. smith has written of their interest in "mapping a politics of queer pride and shame" (2016b) and, indeed, the binary opposition of pride and shame tends to characterise and form queer identities, as stated by gender theorist Sally R. Munt. (2000, 533). Shame is also deeply relational, according to US-based psychologist Silvan Tomkins (Nathanson 1997, 107–138). For Munt, shame is internally violent and contagious:

> we are ashamed of our shame, and then those around us catch it they flush and blush in awkward sympathy, vacillating, they turn their gaze upon another. (Munt 2000, 541)

Shame can refer to feelings of inferiority and discouragement. Relevant to the deliberate position of lowness adopted by smith in *Gutter Matters*, Tomkins cites physical indicators of shame such as: the lowering or tilting of one's head in defeat, lowering the eyelids as well as decreased activity in facial and neck muscles. I would argue that *Gutter Matters* produces an affect of shame so that shame may be overcome and neutralised. So although shame might be something shared by those persecuted within an intersubjective environment of heteronormativity, it can also be used as a methodology for creating choreographies. Note that Munt describes a "choreography of shame," one that involves the delivering of a gaze that deflects or cuts so that the subject is forced to turn away from the source of shame in the hope that one might be "*lost from view*" (Ibid.).

If shame is embodied primarily in the face and gaze, then a transformative moment can involve turning back and looking at the other right back in the eyes. Indeed, as smith explains in their performance reflections, the aim is to increase visibility of this state and "make friends with shame" in order to take the power out of it (2016, n.p.). Even those who do not join smith by lying in the gutter beside them bear witness to their gay shame parade. Shame is a kind of "social abjection," a result of rejection and repudiation, an operation that attempts to separate and put people into their place (Munt 2000, 536). Yet abjection and shame can both be re-worked: in Munt's writing she notes that previously much homosexual discourse has repressed shame when really its ambivalent effects need to be revisited so that potential alliances can be explored and greater agency can be gained. For Munt shame is contradictory in nature. On the one hand, it functions to produce conformity, but, on the other, it can "liberate new grammars of gender" (Ibid.). Shame has destabilising properties. Thus its performance, invocation and citation can produce a "confrontational momentum" so that shame "becomes a statement of being" until, paradoxically, "the shame is shifted off" (538). The idea is that an intervention occurs in Tomkins' cycle of

"stimulus-affect-response" (Nathanson 1997, 131) so that, via performance, responses to the affect of shame can be creatively altered and even co-created.

Returning to a queer tactic of appropriating so-called low art rather than high, and the venue of the nightclub rather than the concert hall, dance historian Clare Croft has stated that one of the broader goals of queer dance is "that social dance and concert dance hold equal import" (Croft 2017, 4). Such ideas have been extended by performance theorist Fiona Buckland who argued: "Improvised social dancing involved the incorporation and embodiment of self-knowledge, self-presentation, sociality, and self-transformation. It could embody and rehearse a powerful political imagination, which, while not always Utopian or even complete, had agency in queer world-making" (Buckland 2002, 65) In a similar vein, in a recent edited journal issue titled *Black Rave*, editors madison moore and McKenzie Wark looked at the confluence of "techno, transness, queerness and Blackness" (2022, n.p.). A similar strategy of exploring the implications of social dance was taken up recently in *Moving Backwards* by artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz at the Swiss Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2019. This exhibition saw the pavilion transformed into a nightclub that audience members entered so that they emerged backstage, upon a slick-black stage decked with tinsel curtains. As Boudry explained, the work was set in a nightclub as "a space that allows us to experiment with different forms of desire." (Boudry and Lorenz 2019a, n.p.) The video element of *Moving Backwards* involves dancers moving in slow motion and walking forwards whilst wearing their shoes backwards, undermining the backwards/forwards opposition, and the impetus for progression as advancement and improvement.

Moving around and thinking through *Moving Backwards*

In the spirit of responsiveness, what follows is an account of my own encounter with *Moving Backwards,* which was included in the 2022 exhibition *QUEER: Stories from the NGV Collection* at the National Gallery of Australia in Naarm, Melbourne. I heard the artwork before I could see it, the contagious pulse of a deep house track beckoned me through various gallery rooms, I followed the sound of analogue and digital synths, classic drum machine rhythms and grooves, meandering bassline and Latin percussion elements. The music was already making me move. As I got even closer to the source of the music, the high, pale-painted walls of the gallery gave way to the dark, black-box space of a night club. One of the first things I noticed was the ramp leading into the space, meaning that it was accessible to those of different mobilities. The generous empty space before the projection provided an ample dance-floor. The installation included long benches to sit upon, shiny plastic floor covering, a turquoise blue-green tinsel curtain on a pulley system and the video projected upon the back wall. At strategic points throughout the screening the tinsel came to life, moving backwards and forwards, passing in between the screen and viewers, interrupting the projection and acting as a kind of sparkling theatre curtain. Sometimes it hesitated, before continuing, eliciting laughs from the gathered audience.

The twenty-minute video *Moving Backwards* is made up of ten scenes, each involves either a solo, duet or group dance. All are united by the theme of "moving backwards" which is explained in an accompanying text, a letter by the artists to visitors:

> Women of the Kurdish guerrillas wore their shoes the wrong way round to walk from one place in the snowy mountains to the other. This tactic saved their lives. It seems as if you are walking backwards, but actually you are walking forwards. Or the other way around. (Boudry and Lorenz 2019b, 13)

According to Boudry and Lorenz, "collectively moving backwards" is a strategy for dealing with a feeling of "massively being forced to move backwards" (Ibid.). A way to come together, re-organise desires, exercise freedoms, they ponder "Can its feigned backwardness even fight the notion of progress' inevitability?" (Ibid.). There is a possibility that "strange encounters might be a pleasant starting point for something unforeseen to happen" (Ibid.).

One habit I have picked up over the years is to make an effort to watch video artworks in their entirety. This is due to the fact that my partner is a video artist. When we visit exhibitions together he will refrain from moving on until he has seen an entire work from start to finish (or from mid-point, to end, to start and back to mid-point which is often the case). Therefore I often enact a sort of co-presence, staying with a video work for its full length, in a small way acknowledging the labour of those who made it. In a temporal sense there is recursivity, the looping of a video work that is screened over and over again, each day the gallery is open, so that it can always be watched by those who visit. A loop also means there is no way of knowing when the video starts and ends. In *Moving Backwards*, at one point a clapper-board snaps before the camera. Although customarily this action takes place at the start of shooting and is later removed in the editing process, by self-reflexively keeping this in the video, the artists scramble ideas of before and after, preparation and execution and the mechanics of film-making are laid bare.

When I first encountered the video, I entered sometime just before its end, already enacting a small intervention. Sitting on the long, continuous bench with other viewers I was struck by the way the film constantly traverses or crosses. Choreographer and artist Marbles Jumbo Radio slowly walks across the frame from left to right, shod in shoes facing backwards, yet defiantly looking forwards. I witnessed dancers moving from left to right and right to left and this was accentuated by the camera's tracking shots, sliding back and forth. This ambulation harks back to the walker in Bradford's *Niagara.* All of the dancers move in such a way that one suspects footage is being played back in reverse. In fact, sometimes it is but mostly it is not. The ways of moving are deceptive, as though they are re-enacting reversed footage of certain movements. Perhaps the dancers are moving in what Elizabeth Freeman referred to as a "temporal drag" as though affected by a "stubborn identification with a set of social co-ordinates that exceeds [their] own historical moment" (Freeman 2000, 728).

What kind of historical force might be causing the dancers to move as though in slow motion? Perhaps it could be any one of scores of events and homophobic attacks that have taken place and continue to take place in night clubs which have historical significance for queer communities. Just two specific examples would be the shootings at Pulse nightclub in Orlando in 2016 or the police raids and subsequent riots initiated at the Stone Wall Inn of Greenwich Village in 1969 or the very many clubs and social spaces where LGBTQIA+ communities have sheltered, inhabited. There is a hint of what Heather Love would call "queer suffering" which is part of her theory of *feeling*

backward, a particular tradition of queer experience and representation that resists the "affirmative turn" (Love 2007, 3). For Love, an emphasis on damage in queer studies co-exists in a state of tension "with the need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence." After all, "texts that insist on social negativity underline the gap between aspiration and the actual" (Ibid.). Although there is no doubt that there are complex histories involved in gay nightclubs and queer spaces, it is important to remember that such milieux can also be celebratory and transformational.

The curtain too slid before me, its metallic strands catching the light and reflecting starbursts and sparkles like a vertical body of water. There was a sense of to and fro, of exchange, of call and response. Dancers entered, joined each other, watching, responding, moving together and separately just as one does in social dancing, in the club. Dancing alone, dancing with another, dancing all together. There is a particular moment when Latifa Laâbissi holds her arms akimbo and slowly turns her head to one side and it appears like a reversed or reversible movement. Additionally the harnesses trimmed with long wigs sported by some of the dances, are whipped around backwards and forwards. This kind of whipping movement recalls what writer and curator Legacy Russell refers to as a *glitch* or disruption:

> Here, in that disruption, with our collective congregation at that trippy and trip-wired crossroad of gender, race, and sexuality, one finds the power of the glitch. (Russell 2020, 7)

For Russell, the glitch is a way to "create space through rupture" (Ibid.), it temporarily jams the machinery of gender, society and culture. Russell's glitch harks back to Sedgwick's dissonance or Ahmed's wonkiness, it might be one way to manifest a kinaesthetic queer.

Rather than a community, what is created by *Moving Backwards* is something more provisional, temporal, or temporary. The artwork initially extends itself outwards through sound, beckoning and enticing, drawing audience members in. There is then the direct address of the letters, all of the accompanying texts are letters beginning 'Dear visitor.' There are the benches on which to sit and watch the video and there is the dance-floor, which acts as an invitation to dance. Each of these components make an offer, one that might be responded to by gallery visitors. One might choose to read the letters, watch the video and possibly move in the space of the gallery in a different way, to dance! In a way one is invited to a club, a kind of a-temporal zone, one without windows, painted all black and artificially lit. In some ways the co-presence created by the video installation is temporary, lasting only the time one spends with it, or maybe it gets deferred in some way, persisting through time in reflection and memory. Curator Charlotte Laubard refers to artworks as "technologies of enchantment" (Boudry and Lorenz 2019b, 51):

> A work of art isn't merely a passive vehicle of symbolic communication for us to decode or interpret, it is a social actor, an agent, that articulates and engages in relations with the world. It acts as a catalyst on a collective. (Ibid.)

Just as the video loops, playing again and again, I return to the installation, watching it over and over, mesmerised. This idea of recursivity is in fact central to Māori philosophy, as novelist Witi Ihimarea ponders whilst looking at the rotary dial of a telephone:

> The dial reminds me, however, that Māori have a concept of spiralling time: at the same moment as the spiral goes forward it is returning, at the same time as it goes ahead it is coming back. (Ihimaera 1973/2023, 19–20)

The very idea of moving backwards challenges the idea of progress, of perpetually moving forwards, getting somewhere, making it from A to B. Dance theorist (and *Moving Backwards* respondent) André Lepecki argues "that modernity's project is fundamentally kinetic [...] ontologically, modernity is pure being-toward-movement" (Lepecki 2006, 7). Therefore by moving backwards one is challenging a central tenet of modernity, destabilising or deterritorialising it, with all of its attending histories of expansion, destruction, exploitation and extraction. Lepecki points out that the "first temporal consequence of the double movement in *Moving Backwards*" is "a total questioning of the accepted axiomatic that time is a one-way street" (Lepecki 2019, 83).

> Two simultaneous movements then, from the start: backward motions as a way out of the straight arrow of time and history, and strange encounters as starting points for the unforeseen to happen. All bundled up by a backwards motion. But backward in relation to what exactly? What exactly gives the 'proper' direction, the 'right' direction, the 'correct' or normative way, so that one can say then that the current movement is not actually a forward one? (Ibid., 83)

Returning to Ahmed's conception of queer, to move backwards is to "come out of line" (2006, 565) to dis-orient, disturb the order of things, be oblique, slanted, wonky and fleeting. This flicker or shimmer back and forth is repeated in the twinkle of sequinned costumes and the way light winks off strands of tinsel curtains.

> The final say of how well the processes above have gone goes to the wilful fickle minds of the audience and their dance writers. (Kapo 2019a, 69)

Boudry and Lorenz' *Moving Backwards* makes manifest a particular co-presence of dancing and kinaesthetically responding bodies as well as temporal communities that in moving backwards, might also be *feeling backwards*, transcending the present or recorded moment of dancing in disrupting, glitching, moving back and forth. Looping and recursivity make time an uncoiled spiral rather than a normative thrust onwards. However, there is some sense of ever-moving outwards, of futurity, as Love argues:

> Although many queer critics take exception to the idea of a linear, triumphalist view of history, we are in practice deeply committed to the notion of a better life for queer people. (Love 2007, 3)

On responsibility, passing and deathliness

The dancers in *Moving Backwards,* as well as those who attend the choregraphed artwork, attend to each other or answer in some way, practicing responses or response-ability as gleaned from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. I would argue that a performance philosophy has much to gain from Levinas' theories of alterity, otherness or the Other, and that these can provide important levels of description for what goes on in-between subjects, including performer and observer.

Concepts of action, alterity and sociality from thinkers like Levinas and Arendt can help to construct a critical framework for understanding the structure, effects, and exchanges produced by choreographed works. Judith Butler concurs stating that Arendt and Levinas "take issue with the classically liberal conception of individualism" that one is only responsible for relations that have been entered into knowingly and willingly (Butler 2015, 111). For Arendt, the very condition of existence as ethical and political beings is "the unchosen character of earthly cohabitation" (Ibid.).

For Levinas, the face-to-face encounter is the ethical encounter par excellence, one that has important implications for art as encounter. As outlined in his 1961 work *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* the face of the Other opens up a confrontation with someone who is absolutely other, so that discourse begins. Once the face has spoken or expressed itself, a response or response-ability is obligatory (Levinas 1969). In his 1968 essay "Substitution," Levinas posited subjectivity as "being hostage" so that any "presence" is "undone by the other" and a subject is confounded by a wordless accusation for which one cannot decline responsibility (1989, 88, 110). Thus Levinas furnishes performance art history with an account of obligatory responsibility. As argued in the previous section, there are many ways in which an artwork might also beg response-ability, appeals are made in a variety of different ways: through music, space to rest, to dance and to re-consider dominant concepts of history and progression.

Kapo has also reflected on this notion of response-ability in those who behold dance, is it a passive openness? Must one completely suspend disbelief and criticality?

> As a dance witness I have become curious about the job of the audience member. Is it to be; if possible an open, aware receptacle? (and just watch…) If this is all the job description contains, then I've come to believe that re-education is required. Wilful ignorance may be the best approach. As a critical supporter you are often, unapologetically, put through a fucking mill. Left alone to experience multiple tiny deaths. #movement is the language of the individuated soul. (what is movement in captivity)? (Kapo 2019a, 69)

As part of our ongoing discussion, Kapo and I teased out the prejudices of a certain kind of responsibility, that of somatic attention. We reflected on how somatics is gendered and heteronormative as well as how it could be otherwise. Kapo suggested one approach could be that of cultural somatics innovator Tadaaki Hozumi, one that harks back to Rothfield's concerns about the cultural constitution of bodily-based attention. Hozumi's approach involves political analysis and an acknowledgement of the ways inequality and distributions of power affect the social conditions in which we live. (Though it is important to note that Hozumi too has some questionable ideas relating to race). Additionally an eco-somatics is required to reposition communities within their environment and upon a planet that is in the midst of a climate emergency.

In terms of temporality, Kapo themselves has a special relationship to futurity as they are employed as a nurse working in palliative care, with those at the end of their lives. Thus their response-ability is shaped by working with those who have a limited amount of time left to live. In their personal communication to the author Kapo ponders: "Somatic practice in the world of dying isn't a thing, it could be but it isn't. Much would have to change in the world before somatics could

become a daily component of clinical care, particularly within the public health system" (Kapo 2022, n.p.). Such changes would involve greater access to those of limited financial means, a re-orientation away from a capitalist model of care, decolonization and importantly, consideration of the agency and will of patients.

On Kapo's point about the relationship between somatic practices and dying, as well as their description of a critical supporter of dance often experiencing "multiple little deaths," it is worth noting that in Drury's counter-reading of somatics she creates an account taken from multiple scholars who make the argument that over many centuries the meaning of *soma* has transformed from a Homeric corpse denied burial rites after battle to a Hesiodic description of living bodies in states of subjection, until in Koine Greek it came to mean slave (Drury 2022, 22). Tying into Kapo's concerns, as well as her occupation as a care-giver, a common thread throughout these permutations in the ancient use of this term is a concern with the care taken with bodies.

Perhaps somatic training, as Kapo conceives of it, provides one method of caring as responding and practicing response-ability:

> The work is impactful in how it provides the body agency. It advances the relationship we can have and with our bodies, allowing us to perceive ourselves as highly intelligent and generative systems with symbiotic relationships that respond wholesomely to our environments. With somatics we remove the propaganda of the body as machinery and begin the work of honouring it as a cooperative within a collective and with the expansion of somatic principles into community and collective agency it appears it is no longer resistive to its own cultural habitat. (Kapo 2022, n.p.)

Thus Kapo gleans from their somatic practices important insight into ecological registers of human subjectivity, social relations and the environment, so that bodies operate with agency in a co-operative way within broader collectivities. Perhaps such agency is also what is being exercised by the dancers in *Moving Backwards*. As Kapo writes, attending to choreographed artworks is "a shared art, there is an art in sharing, this art." An openness and willingness to be moved to respond:

> As theatre ally I go to experience a passing. Witness my own death. My boring self hopes to be moved into different sensations, a more spacious body, bewitched into an alchemy. This lamb opens up to the altar, in the sacrificial space it feigns innocence. Looking forward with anticipation to complete seduction. When lights do go low, it is the dreamer who eagerly submits to the womb/tomb and hands in all. Longing for a resurrection that inwardly will bring bittersweet enlightenment. Pulling myself and my people up, to knowing feet. This multiplicitous purveyor knows the world of performance holds the key to bringing close the final exaltation. (Kapo 2019a, 69)

Notes

[1] This essay builds on my earlier chapter "Articulating Alternatives: val smith's Queer Choreographies" as part of my 2021 monograph (Wynne-Jones 2021).

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Biography

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