

A body's capacity can be bolstered through association, its potential for action amplified through the company that it keeps. Its force or energy can fluctuate and waver, depending upon its surrounds. A body knows when it is in good company, for here it can be as much as it can be. There is some truth to the adage that strength can be found in number, yet there are times when three too soon becomes a crowd. Within the public realm, individuals are often grouped through necessity or habit as much as by desire or design. Waiting flesh gets pressed into ordered lines; unspeaking assemblages form in squares during the brief reprieve between morning and afternoon; tired limbs brush and crush during the rush hour, each body compressed to fit the cut of commodified time. Classificatory regimes usher individuals into preformed groupings all too easily; tick box scales package persons by age and place of origin, by sexual proclivity, colour of skin. Bodies are routinely assembled under the nomination of increasingly complex cultural codes, acronymic coordinates that fix and position an individual within the range of a predetermined grid. Community is the term often given to any loose association of bodies connected by location or geography or by some other common bond. Experiment with new ways of becoming collective, multiple. Refuse those orders that keep the body fixed and bounded, that force allegiance against the individual's will. Gathered bodies might behave differently according to how they are named; possibilities of collective action can be augmented by a momentary change in the used noun. Practice with others the leaderless shimmer of a shoal of fish or flock of birds, a murmuration's flight caught in the light of evening gloom, or the exaltation of larks ascending. Charm like finches — wisp and drift and chatter. Avoid the unkindness of ravens, a lapwing's deceit, the pitying of the turtle dove.

#### APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

Practice demands concentration and attention, for a body is swift to return to gestures known well, to the ease of default options. Familiar locations can be the hardest to rehearse, for the rhythms of these places have been programmed into the body, are difficult to override. Practice then in places still unfamiliar, with gestures that are not your own. Seek out those districts which desire or necessity would rarely lead you to explore: the margins of the city's edge-lands; its business parks; empty lots, quiet residential streets never yet called home. On occasion, journey elsewhere to other cities or places whose shape and contour is not yet in memory stored, whose habits require learning still. Treat these as rehearsal spaces for the training body, for testing its receptivity to the push and pull of unexpected forces and pressures. Emptied of the routine that habitually governs its steps through space, a body's movements can become experimental, surprising. Space no longer appears as the ground against which a body scores, for experimental bodies collaborate *with* space on the production of new choreographies. To be truly receptive to the call of space a body must remain unmotivated in its intentions, yet alert enough to respond when the occasion seems right. Old habits must not just be replaced with habits new, the familiar gestures of one place simply traded for those of another. Before a body adapts to the customs and practices of its new surrounds, there is a brief interval where minor differences in everyday behaviour can be discerned. Attend to the smallest details of daily life, for it is through the reworking of these that the patterns of habit and convention can be collapsed and reordered. New choreographies emerge in the appropriation of behaviour. Gestures can be gleaned and borrowed; fragments of every life isolated from their context, liberated from the laws of cause and effect.

#### GLIMPING THE WHAT IF

Minor performances can be scored through the reordering of life's refrains, those barely noticeable melodies of action and inaction that collectively make up the white noise of the everyday. Extracted and condensed, even the most prosaic gesture can become alien, enchanting. Yet, the experimental body is not intent on destroying or eroding the flows and rhythms that make up daily life. Their experiments with its vocabulary and grammar attempt to augment and modify its experience, devising new melodies *within* the terms of a given situation such that it might be encountered afresh. The experimental practice of everyday life is thus not so much an attempt to change its structure or shape in any prescriptive way, but rather a set of tactics through which to temporarily alter or transform its affects. Choreographed interventions within and with space are not proposals for a new way of living a life, for they are necessarily time-bound and impermanent. Undertaken as a form of rehearsal or training, they operate in the spirit of the subjunctive, in the key of *what if*. Rehearsal is a state of suspension, time separated from the enforced productivity and performance of daily life. An experimental body endeavours to suspend the normative logic of a given space or situation, in order that they might access other frequencies of being and behaviour. This is not the quest for some alternative or counter way of existing to the norm, but an attempt to reveal *other* ways of operating alongside and in parallel. Revelations often occur along the cusp that separates the visible from the unseen, the sayable from the unspeakable. To be truly revelatory then a practice must inhabit such thresholds, abandoning the desire for audience or spectators to the hope of something unexpectedly witnessed, momentarily glimpsed.

It is habit to lament those limits imposed upon the body, pressed against its will. Yet, self-limitations are often observed more vigilantly than the strictest order. In directing our dissatisfaction towards the rules that we have not made, we can fail to notice the ones that we have ourselves nurtured, those we have accepted as inescapable truths. There are certain limits that a body believes are undeniable fact: the boundary that separates its own interior from the rest of the world, the laws of gravity. Thus, skin is carefully guarded so to keep the self contained, a thing distinct from other things. Weight is often privileged before levity; gravitas given import against that which is considered light. We are urged to get our head from the clouds, keep our feet on the ground. Find ways of challenging the seemingly irrefutable limit, and other man-made rules and restrictions become more possible to resist. In dance a body attempts to escape the earth's magnetic pull; forgetting its fetters in momentary lines of flight, becoming aerial. Under scrutiny the skin is less impermeable than it first seems, less a line of separation keeping the self differentiated from the world, but rather a mesh through which they merge. Skin is the margin where inside becomes out and outside in. The space of the body does not end with its own physical limits. The secret interiority of self can be pressured gently beyond the skin's limits to occupy realms that are not its own; the exteriority of the world can be held in the recesses of a body, hosted within. A body is not a thing bound by its surface edge, but rather a force whose capacity is only comprehended through the intensity of its interactions. To be more capable then, a body must become less concerned with protecting its limits, defining the contours that divide and separate it from everything else. Capacity is not built by closing oneself off, but through receptivity, by becoming more *open*.

#### FOLD/UNFOLD

Openness can signal towards a neutral state or a capacity for polyvalence. Electing towards an open state, the body becomes receptive to the force of other bodies, affected by its own volition rather than against its will. However, the open body is vulnerable to both threat and promise; it will need to cultivate resilience, develop its strength. Open the body gently then, with care. Limbs set in fixed ways will need time to relax, relax. Joints locked in rigid posture must be coaxed to flex. Flesh hung heavy might want persuading of its capacity for feeling, as much as for flight. As a solid entity the body is only too aware of its edges, its physical limitations, its distinctness from other things. Untrained the body is too conscious of its mass, its weight and density. It imagines itself as molded clay, flesh worn down at the hand of gravity and the pressing of time. To shift the body from thing to force requires a little alchemy. A body must be convinced of its power to shape-shift, its capacity for modifying its own condition, changing its very nature. Elemental transformation requires heat and energy; rising temperature might turn matter into its liquid state, cause liquid to become gaseous, air-born. Warm the body through folding and unfolding, through the rub and touch of skin on skin. Register points of tension and blockage as the body's coils become untangled when extended to fullest reach. Let go of tightness of feeling; release the knotting of the hips, the clench of the jaw. Folding means to yield or surrender, it involves learning how to give. Yet this is not a passive act, for to fold the body back upon itself requires some agility, the same for the folding of thinking back onto thought. Breath makes the folding of self and the world palpable; the body holds something of the world's air within its pleats, productive gaps can be nurtured in the creases between thoughts. Once folded, the body is rendered unfamiliar, incomprehensible. Consider a body morphed into unexpected contortions; not the involuntary torque and spasm of the hysteric body bucked against her will, but a body capable — like Houdini — of twisting itself (free) to avoid becoming trapped, immobilized.

#### CONTIGUITY

Folding the body increases its elasticity; building its capacity to flex under pressure, take the strain. Rather than an obligatory practice where the body is forced to adapt to ever changing circumstance, the elective flexing of a body is undertaken pleasurablely, for the sensations generated by moving to and from taut and relaxed. Through folding, a body can reach exalted states; the rapturous bliss of a body prone or prostrate, the ecstasy of a swooning body caught at the moment of faint or fall. However, attending to the curve and bend of a body can soon fold towards the solitary excitation of self-stimuli, the self-sufficiency of a pleasure or passion gleaned only from oneself. Here, the autoerotic body risks becoming hermetic, its pleasures sealed within an affective feedback loop where it is sensitive to only itself sensing. Cut off from the affects of other forces, the culture of any system soon becomes entropic; in time a closed body loses its capacity to truly feel or act. A body must then practice folding with other bodies; its matter must be touched by the presence of other matter, its flows and rhythms plaited and interwoven with those that are not its own. It is through the play and pressure of other bodies that the individual can truly conceive of what they are themselves capable. Test the body by bringing it into proximity *with*. Work on becoming close not closed to strangers; generate warmth to nearby bodies, practice affection towards people that you don't yet know. Experiment with gradients of intensity, bringing the speeds and slowness of a body to time with others, in time allowing the rhythms to gradually fall back out of sync. The performed actions of an individual can be used to take the behavioural temperature of a chosen space or scene, test its water. Certain speeds and rhythms disappear unseen against the noise of their surroundings, or else appear in sharp relief when the possibilities of a given place are more subdued. With practice a body can measure the intensity of a given moment, comprehend the unseen nature of the rhythms and forces that give it its shape and tenor. Like a thermometer measures warmth and cold, a body can become sensitized to slight changes in the air, shifts in climate. Flesh can gauge the permissions and prohibitions of a situation much swifter than the mind.

So pay heed, for it is through our bodies that we might differentiate the rule of friend from foe. A body is an instrument capable of attending to and measuring the nature of both its own force, and the affect of other forces. Yet this skill must be practiced daily, without which it becomes lost or lapsed. On occasion, individual bodies might need to be re-attuned, else risk forgetting the art of affection. At times, we too readily forfeit or forgo our agency as affective beings, as forces amongst forces. We create rules that diminish our potential for interaction; that keep us atomized and at a distance, removed from those we don't yet know. We fiercely police the boundaries of our own personal space; keep our eyes dutifully diverted lest we catch another's glance, attract their attention. We keep ourselves to ourselves; mind our own business, look the other way. We purposefully name the other *stranger*; in turn, we too feel increasingly estranged. Our bodies are becoming unreliable; too sensitized to a sense of risk and danger, too dull or numbed to act another way. We are losing the feeling of what a body — our very being — is capable. Diminishing awareness is self-imposed, too readily accepted, for the limits of self and situation are rarely tested. So often, our own capacity remains uncharted; moreover, the limits of what we are capable have become mistaken for what is allowed. The body folds to fit the mold of how it *thinks* it should behave. Limbs forget the fullness of their reach; skin barely remembers the feel of unsolicited touch. Voice lowers so indiscernible amongst other voices; movement synchronizes to the metronomic regulation of those that were there before us, there before us, there before us. Without practice, a body's capacity to electively act is decreased. Yet, a body can also be re-trained, recalibrated; through exercise it can nurture its own affective force. With practice, a body becomes receptive (and not resistant) to situations that test its limits affirmatively, inoculated against those situations which dampen or diminish its potential or power. Here, to truly care for the self involves challenging its limits — by experimenting along the interstice where *I* encounters the world — not through the withdrawal or retreat safely away from worldly pressures.

#### LIFE AS GYMNASIUM

The resistance of a body is not performed by trying to escape or refuse the terms of a situation but rather by rehearsing ways for transforming its affects, for performing the situation differently, conceiving it *otherwise*. Yet, years of schooling cannot be unlearned overnight. Habits knotted into the sinew of a body take some effort to untie. The teaching of how one should be and behave is worn deeply in the muscle of both flesh and thought. It has been hard work getting the body to conform to the rules within which it is expected to operate. Long hours have been spent impressing upon it the error of its unruly ways. Social scripts pass down through generations; every era rethinks the lines yet the story stays pretty much the same. Vocabularies alter, the order of the acts remain. The habitual choreographies that determine the course of daily life are thus not easily rejected or refused, nor will they be undone with force or fury or through revolution alone. Paradoxically perhaps, discipline is undisciplined through discipline; disobedience is a delicately honed skill. True improvisation still needs some rehearsal then, for unattended the body will always fall back quickly into comforting and harmonious rhythm. Conformity is an insidious lesson; its ideas and ideals creep upon the body during the night in dream as much as when awake. Dissidence must become practiced with the same rigor as conformity then, not just through the brief intensity of protest or revolt but according to daily and continual training. The spectacle of resistance is all too easily reabsorbed; the moves of dissonant bodies underscored with a sound track and sold back as late-night T.V. So practice quietly and lightly, defy by *not* making one's resistance too visible, too assimilable. Choreograph a small part of every day against the conditions of expectation and convention; make daily life a gymnasium within which to rehearse and play. With practice a body can become pliant, not compliant. Life itself can be made malleable like plastic; existence considered material and modeled like a work of art.

#### (POROSITY) LOOKING FOR LOOPHOLES

Permissions are often inscribed through negative clause, where the body is steered away from certain actions, towards a set menu of increasingly limited choice. Conventions of a space form the idiomatic round hole, the social hoops through which the individual must attempt to jump. Yet, the dimensions of conformity's hoop are rarely consistent; every situation sets its own parameters, endlessly re-inscribing its perimeter edge. These precarious terms ensure that a body is kept on its toes, since the social standards within which it must perform are re-negotiated by the hour and are ever changing. Rather than waiting for the limit or rule to be modified at the whim of some external power, the individual might attempt to intervene in advance. Under pressure, limits can be rendered porous; the line that differentiates one state or space from another can be made to move or give. The division between private and public space becomes blurred through choice actions and interventions. Micro-performances can be staged in the gaps between properties, in the alleyways of possibility between territorialized zones. Boundary walls offer points of pressure against which to vault and somersault, jump and balance. The threshold between here and there can be dwelt in and upon, not just swiftly passed through. There are intervals of the city where the rules of behaviour have not yet been fully declared, where they still remain in flux. Between the law of one space and another, an interregnum moment of lawlessness exists where a body might briefly escape the authority of either side of the line. Act swiftly, for any breach of control is rarely lasting, is far and few between. Unruly spaces are routinely brought back under rule, or else soon governed by the law of a fear that is equally difficult to counter. Act swiftly but with intent, for whilst the opportunist recognizes the opening within every situation encountered, with haste and not intention true *kairos* often goes to waste. Begin by acting *against* impulse, for impulse is an illusory sense of liberation, nothing but the involuntary performance of an action or reaction already known, the subconscious repetition of what already is.

#### EXPERIMENTS ALONG THE BRINK OF I

##### EMMA COCKER

#### HOW A CITY FEELS

To conceive of a city in choreographic terms is less the imagining of it as a stage upon which to dance, but rather to apprehend it as a field of forces and intensities, as choreography. It is a weave or web of flows and rhythms, the live entanglement of relations between bodies and space. Attending to this choreography requires looking beyond what is habitually seen, becoming attuned to the permissions and conditions that determine the very nature of its interactions. Less concerned with the visual spectacle of how the city might appear as a dance of interlocking flows, focus must delve deeper, for invisible forces set the pace and pattern of interrelations within a specific space or site. More than mapping the traces of movements scored — the notation of existing trajectories across and through a given place — the choreography of the city must be registered in another key. Visible rhythms are merely watched from the stands, where what can be witnessed are only the effects of unknown forces and not the forces themselves. To comprehend the true nature of a force requires that it is encountered and not just observed. This enquiry cannot be practiced at a distance or through mind alone. Beyond regarding how the rhythm of the city looks, the sentient body registers how it feels, by experiencing it close up, in the flesh. A body is a force among other forces, its course determined by its capacity to affect and be affected by other things. Affect is measured through the pulse of a body, according to how it moves and is moved. Choreography attends to these interdependencies, conceptualizing the city as the temporal unfolding of fluid and ever-changing relations.

#### HELMSMAN'S KNOWLEDGE

Movement through any space is shaped as the desires of the individual body meet with the pressures of its surrounds; performed through the negotiation of different forces as the helmsman steers against the pressure of the water and the wind. At times, it seems that we are losing our grasp of helmsman's knowledge, our capacity to harness the momentum of forces that are outside of our control. Sometimes perhaps, we give in too soon, surrendering too quick and easily to the force of the situation in which we find ourselves. Too often, our bodies seem at the mercy of powers that cannot fully be discerned, our movements conform to the call of unspoken laws and a logic that we seem unable to resist. Here, the body is experienced only through the pressures acting upon it, seemingly unable to recognize its own internal force or agency, its capacity to withstand or tolerate as much as yield. Certain spaces push towards specific kinds of performance, direct a body to behave in a fixed or scripted way. The possibilities of what a body *could do* shrink to fit the template of expectation; options narrow to the standards of a pre-set score, where the individual body can express itself only through the slightest embellishment of the norm. Over time, our navigation of a space congeals towards a set pattern of routinized gestures, as day-after-day we dutifully repeat and repeat our chosen groove, rarely missing a beat. Pattern sediments towards protocol, an unspoken rulebook that tacitly moderates the limits of what is allowed. It is tempting to imagine that rules are drawn from elsewhere, laws cooked-up by faceless government hooked on curbing the enthusiasm of our wayward desires. And *yet* we author and enforce the limitations that determine how we live our lives; our complicity and obedience maintains their authority, strengthens their hold. Then, to be more discerning, for any rule is good only as long as it protects and affirms life, failing if it only curtails or constrains.

**EXTRACTS FROM A DIALOGUE ON  
MOVEMENT, TECHNIQUES AND  
THE CITY AS EXPERIENCE**

Bianca Scliar Mancini and Sara Wookey reflect on the ideas and concerns underpinning the research project-workshop *Movement and the City*.

*Movement and the City* is an ongoing research project-workshop for investigating ways that the body moves and performs with the city. Activating physical and kinesthetic awareness skills, *Movement and the City* explores urban space through embodied practices, placing the city at the center of its focus as a studio to research the layers of infrastructure, phenomena, interaction and inhabitation that comprise its network of spaces.

**POETICS:** I am interested in the poetics of everyday movements (walking, sitting, etc.), in being sensitive to the origin of movement and its ability to perform. My interests are in developing and learning techniques for experiential temporalities and spatialities of site to emerge, a process that usually implies a transformation of the preexisting flows.

**AMPLIFICATION:** I prefer to enhance or amplify existing movements in subtle ways ... magnifying what is there in nuanced ways, calling attention to the everyday as performance. My interest is not in 'disrupting flows' but in investigating how body movement *creates* flows.

**RESEMBLANCE:** I am inclined towards actions that resemble or are of the same family as the movements already in existence in a site, already a part of the environment.

**RESPONSIVENESS:** I think that people, by instinct, are site responsive; human beings sense when they feel 'good' or 'welcome' or 'at home' in a space — where it becomes place.

**REHEARSAL:** I am developing 'trainings' or 'rehearsals' wherein participants engage with strategies for moving with quotidian gesture one step further, literally 'stretching' the action to reveal other possibilities.

**COLLECTIVITY:** I would say that community is a group of people who share something in common. Dance and performance, by nature, are social practices. To move together demands *to be suspended by ...* a shared experience of being with, for sharing inventiveness and experience through movement.

**MOBILITY:** I see the roles of performer and audience/witness/observer playing out in multiple ways. There are various layers of participation and spectatorship that happen and vanish with time

**INTERACTION:** I am in collaboration with other people; the live act of performing is always interactive.

**COMMITMENT:** I am developing longer-term commitments to a site. This does not require that I am a resident but, perhaps, that I return to a place over time.

**COLLABORATION:** I like to think of the city as a 'collaborator'. We sense the city as experience by intuition. There remains always an invitation for improvisation; the question is how to open up this invitation with artistic gestures.

