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# idea journal

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co-constructing body-environments

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vol. 17, no. 02

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2020

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the journal of IDEA: the Interior design +  
interior architecture educators' association





vol.17, no.02  
2020

co-constructing  
body-environments



# **idea journal**

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**co-constructing body-environments**

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**vol.17, no.02**

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**2020**

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**the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators' association**

**about**

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- (b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

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**co-constructing body-environments:  
provocation**

Presenters at *Body of Knowledge: Art and Embodied Cognition Conference (BoK2019)* hosted by Deakin University, Melbourne, June 2019) are invited to submit contributions to a special issue of idea journal "Co-Constructing Body-Environments" to be published in December 2020. The aim of the special issue is to extend the current discussions of art as a process of social cognition and to address the gap between descriptions of embodied cognition and the co-construction of lived experience.

We ask for papers, developed from the presentations delivered at the conference, that focus on interdisciplinary connections and on findings arising from intersections across research practices that involve art and theories of cognition. In particular, papers should emphasize how spatial art and design research approaches have enabled the articulation of a complex understanding of environments, spaces and experiences. This could involve the spatial distribution of cultural, organisational and conceptual structures and relationships, as well as the surrounding design features.

Contributions may address the questions raised at the conference and explore:

- + How do art and spatial practices increase the potential for knowledge transfer and celebrate diverse forms of embodied expertise?
- + How the examination of cultures of practice, Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity, neurodiversity, disability and social justice issues?
- + How the art and spatial practices may contribute to research perspectives from contemporary cognitive neuroscience and the philosophy of mind?
- + The dynamic between an organism and its surroundings for example: How does art and design shift the way knowledge and thinking processes are acquired, extended and distributed?
- + How art and design practices demonstrate the ways different forms of acquiring and producing knowledge intersect?

These and other initial provocations for the conference can be found on the conference web-site: <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/bok2019/cfp/>.

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# introduction: unknowingly, a threshold-crossing movement

**Julianna Preston**

Executive Editor

*idea journal*

It is in this special issue that the editorial board holds true to our promise to expand the horizons and readership of *idea journal* while reaching out to associated and adjacent art, design and performance practices and drawing connections to seemingly distant disciplines. The articles in this issue have provenance in a 2019 conference event, Bodies of Knowledge (BOK), which was guided by a similar interdisciplinary ethos. With an emphasis on cultures of practice and communities of practitioners that offer perspectives on inclusion, diversity/neurodiversity and disability, this conference, and this subsequent journal issue, aim to increase knowledge transfer between diverse forms of embodied expertise, in particular, between neuroscience and enactive theories of cognition.

This brief description suggests that there are shared issues, subjects and activities that have the potential of generating new understanding in cross-, inter- and trans-disciplinary affiliations and collaborations. My experience in these modes of inquiry points to the importance of identifying what is shared and what is not amongst vocabulary, concepts, pedagogies and methods. Holding these confluences and diverges without resorting to strict definition, competition or judgement of right and wrong often affords greater understanding and empathy amongst individuals to shape a collective that is diverse in its outlooks, and hopefully, curious as to what it generates together because of that diversity.

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The breadth of the knowledge bases represented within this issue necessitated that the peer reviewer list expanded once again like the previous issue. It was in the process of identifying reviewers with appropriate expertise that the various synapses between scholarly and artistic practices became evident. It is these synapses that shape sturdy bridges between the journal's existing readership, which is predominantly academics and students in interior design, interior architecture, spatial design and architecture, and the wide range of independent scholars and practitioners, academics, and students attracted to BOK's thematic call for papers, performative lectures and exhibitions. At the risk of being reductive to the complexity and nuances in the research to follow, I suggest that the following terms and concerns are central to this issue, aptly inferred by its title, 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments': spatiality; subjectivity; phenomenology; processual and procedural practice; artistic research; critical reflection; body: experience. All of these are frequent to research and practice specific to interiors. In this issue, however, we find how these terms and concerns are situated and employed in other fields, in other ways and for other purposes.

This is healthy exercise. To stretch one's reach, literally and metaphorically is to travel the distance between the me and the you, to be willingly open to what might eventuate. Imagine shaking the hand of a stranger—a somatic experience known to register peaceful intent, respect, courage, warmth, pressure, humour, nervous energy, and so much more. This threshold-crossing movement is embodied and spatial; it draws on a multitude of small yet complex communication sparks well before verbal impulses ensue. This significant bodily gesture sets the tone for what might or could happen. Based on my understanding of the research presented in 'Co-Constructing Body-Environments,' I propose that this is a procedure in the Gins and Arakawa sense that integrates theory and practice as a hypothesis for 'questioning all possible ways to observe the body-environment in order to transform it.'<sup>01</sup> I call this as *unknowingly*—a process that takes the risk of not knowing, not being able to predict or predetermine, something akin to the spectrum of 'throwing caution to the wind' and 'sailing close to



the wind'. My use of the word 'unknowingly' embraces intuition where direct access to unconscious knowledge and pattern-recognition, unconscious cognition, inner sensing and insight have the ability to understand something without any need for conscious reasoning. Instinct. The word *unknowingly* also affords me to invoke the 'unknowing' element of this interaction—to not know, to not be aware of, to not have all the information (as if that was possible)—an acknowledgement of human humility. I borrow and adapt this facet of unknowingly from twentieth-century British writer Alan Watts:

This I don't know, is the same thing as, I love. I let go. I don't try to force or control. It's the same thing as humility. If you think that you understand Brahman, you do not understand. And you have yet to be instructed further. If you know that you do not understand, then you truly understand.<sup>02</sup>

*Unknowingly* also allows me to reference 'un' as a tactic of learning that suspends the engrained additive model of learning. Though I could refer to many other scholarly sources to fuel this concept, here I am indebted to Canadian author Scott H. Young's pithy advice on how to un-learn:

This is the view that what we think we know about the world is a veneer of sense-making atop a much deeper strangeness. The things we think we know, we often don't. The ideas, philosophies and truths that guide our lives may be convenient approximations, but often the more accurate picture is a lot stranger and more interesting.<sup>03</sup>

In his encouragement to unlearn—dive into strangeness, sacrifice certainty, boldly expose oneself to randomness, mental discomfort, instability, to radically rethink that place/ your place/ our place, suspend aversions to mystery—Young's examples from science remind us that:



Subatomic particles aren't billiard balls, but strange, complex-valued wavefunctions. Bodies aren't vital fluids and animating impulses, but trillions of cells, each more complex than any machine humans have invented. Minds aren't unified loci of consciousness, but the process of countless synapses firing in incredible patterns.<sup>04</sup>

In like manner to the *BOK2019* conference which was staged as a temporally infused knowledge-transfer event across several days, venues, geographies and disciplines, I too, ingested the materials submitted for this issue in this spirit of unknowingly. The process was creative, critical, intuitive, generative and reflective—all those buzz words of contemporary research—yet charged with substantial respect and curiosity for whatever unfolded, even if it went against the grain of what I had learned previously. For artists, designers, architects, musicians, and performers reading this journal issue, especially academics and students, this territory of inquiry may feel familiar to the creative experience and the increasing demands (and desires) to account for how one knows what one knows in the institutional setting. 'Explain yourself,' as the review or assessment criteria often states. If you are faced having to annotate your creative practice or to critically reflect on aspects that are so embedded in your making that you are unaware of them, I encourage you to look amongst the pages of this journal issue for examples of how others have grappled with that task such that the process is a space of coming to unknow and know, unknowingly.

**Figure 01:**

Meeting the horizon; A still image from *Shore Variations*, a 2018 film by Claudia Kappenberg that reimagines *Waning*, a 2016 live art performance by Julieanna Preston. <https://vimeo.com/user11308386>.



There are a few people I would like to acknowledge before you read further. First, huge gratitude to the generosity of the peer reviewers, for the time and creative energy of guest editors Jondi Keane, Rea Dennis and Meghan Kelly (who have made the process so enjoyable and professional), for the expertise of the journal's copy editor Christina Houen and Graphic Designer Jo Bailey, and to AADR for helping to expand the journal's horizons.

Okay, readers, shake hands, consider yourself introduced, welcome into the *idea journal* house, and let's share a very scrumptious meal.

### **acknowledgements**

*I am forever grateful for what life in Aotearoa/ New Zealand brings. With roots stretching across the oceans to North America, Sweden, Wales and Croatia, I make my home between Kāpiti Island and the Tararua Ranges, and in Te Whanganui-A-Tara/ Wellington. I acknowledge the privilege that comes with being educated, employed, female and Pākehā, and the prejudices and injustices that colonialism has and continues to weigh on this land and its indigenous people. I am committed to on-going learning and practicing of Kaupapa Māori.*

### **notes**

- 01 Jondi Keane, 'An Arakawa and Gins Experimental Teaching Space; A Feasibility Study,' *INFLeXions* 6 (2012), accessed 29 October 2020, [http://www.inflexions.org/n6\\_keane.html](http://www.inflexions.org/n6_keane.html).
- 02 Alan Watts, *Creating Who You Are* (Video) (n.d.), accessed 29 October 2020, <https://vimeo.com/76888920>.
- 03 Scott H. Young, 'The Art of Unlearning' (2018), accessed 29 October 2020, <https://www.scotthyoung.com/blog/2018/04/12/the-art-of-unlearning/>.
- 04 Young, 'The Art of Unlearning.'



# re-presenting a dance moment

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## abstract

This visual essay deconstructs a four-second experience within a dance performance, *In and out of time*, which was performed at Dancehouse (Melbourne, AUS) in 2018. It captures the body's movement as still moments and re-presents them through a tiled image and a video 'flip-book' work. Together with language, the visual essay aims to reveal how, over time, the memory of this experience has become magnified and thickened, drawing out new ways of knowing in relation to an embodied experience each time it is recollected.

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*idea journal* 17, no.02 (2020): 256-274,  
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## keywords:

dancing, memory, time, experience



*I found myself in a state of 'stuckness'*

*I was stuck*

*alone*

*I was dancing the set movement material – the  
accumulation*

*the others dancing their improvisations*

*I was stuck*

*spatially*

*within a specific movement pathway*

*predetermined by the structure*

*by the repetitive and accumulative movement*

*In their improvisations*

*they seemed to be intentionally obstructing my pathways*

*forcing me to constantly notice*

*where they were*

*in relation to where I was*

*and where I was about to be*

*My noticing on high*

*I momentarily fell backwards before catching myself*

*changing my facing*

*I made use of multiple senses – vision, sound and*

*kinaesthetic awareness*

*to direct my backwards fall*

*I enjoyed this moment*

*I took pleasure in momentarily falling into the unknown... 01*



**Figure 01:**

A four-second dancing experience captured in ninety singular frames and then reconstructed as a tiled image. Ashlee Barton, November 2018.



The event that is the subject of this visual essay is a four-second experience within an hour-long dance performance. Through the written word, the tiled image above, and the video work below, I have found a means through which to relive experience, to re-present the 'present moment.' The purpose of this is not dissimilar to psychotherapist Daniel Stern's rationale behind the *Micro-Analytic Interview*, which was to get a sense of 'what a present moment is probably like.'<sup>02</sup> By means of an extensive interview process, Stern's approach pieces together 'episodes of consciousness' with the 'non-conscious holes'<sup>03</sup> of an approximately five-second period. In doing so, he generates a deeper insight into what a present moment entails. I too have gained a deeper insight into my own experience; I have used language and image to piece together sensations, feelings, and thoughts which arose in what I felt to be a significant moment in the moment of performance. The following elaborates on this thinking with the support of ideas of Gilles Deleuze, Edward Hall and Babette Mangolte.

In order to discuss this experience, I will first give a brief background to the two practices which supported the dance performance, *In and out of time*.<sup>04</sup> The design of my MA research project, of which the performance was a part, aimed to provide a context for the magnification and thickening of this experience over time. The purpose of this creative research project was to examine the relationship between an engagement in practice (specifically, dance practice) and an encounter with being present. The project involved two weekly, studio-based, group dance practices: the first practice was an improvisation practice, and the other was one that involved set or repeatable movement material.<sup>05</sup> Both practices were undertaken concurrently over a period of eighteen months. The two practices repurposed and reinvented the working methods of improviser and scholar, Olivia Millard, and post-modern choreographer, Trisha Brown, respectively. While very different, the two practices had the common element of repetition, and subsequently, the concept of accumulation as a criterion of practice, establishing a foundation on which to explicate my experiences of 'being present.' Both repetition and accumulation are supported through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's theory of time as set out in his book, *Difference and Repetition*.<sup>06</sup> The performance of *In and out*



*of time* was the first meeting of these two practices. The work unfolded over time according to its structure—the execution of an accumulation of set movement material with the spontaneous intertwining of improvised dance.<sup>07</sup>

### **memory of time accumulated**

Before I discuss the effect of the visual representations of this experience, it is necessary that I consider how memory itself plays a key role in the dynamism of processing experience. I do so by drawing upon Deleuze's writing on the active synthesis of memory, in which he proposes that in the act of recalling a memory, one embeds the memory of the past present into the 'present present,' unifying the two dimensions of time into an experience which then passes and becomes a new memory. This new memory is then available to be deposited into a new present, by means of recollection, accumulating the number of dimensions which are, at any one time, present. He writes, '[T]he present and former presents are not, therefore, like two successive instants on the line of time; rather, the present one necessarily contains an extra dimension in which it represents the former and also represents itself.'<sup>08</sup> I would suggest that the memory of my dancing experience was thickened, or made more significant, due to the accumulation of this recollection process. Additionally, each time an experience is recalled, whether it is the initial recollection or the accumulated memories of that experience—which also contain latter presents, one is granted the opportunity to recognise the specificities of the experience that only exist, until that moment, in the hitherto unnoticed domains of the body.

A couple of weeks after the performance, while dancing in the studio, I found myself, without planning to be so, feeling like I was back in this four-second encounter and I was reminded of what I experienced within my performance: a feeling of being stuck, both temporally and spatially; the contemplation of the set movement material I was undertaking; and the sensation of falling backwards into the unknown.... This time, however, in the studio, I was not restricted by the predetermined pathway of the set movement material, nor were there other dancers who were obstructing my trajectory; I was able to experience the movement for all that it had to offer. It was then, with the accumulation of both experiences, one a past present and the other a present present, that I became aware of how dominant



the feelings of being stuck were, and how I had subsequently shut off my noticing of the sensations of 'falling into the unknown' as part of my memory. I enjoyed this sensation in both instances. It is here, in the repetition of the movement, that the active synthesis of memory has 'two correlative—albeit non-symmetrical—aspects: reproduction and reflection, remembrance and recognition, memory and understanding.'<sup>9</sup> This accumulated memory and the knowledge that emerged as a result of this process has, for the most part, been bound to the realm of my memory. However, with the help of this visual essay, I have begun to explore other ways to uncover and process my dancing experiences, much like the process of Stern's *Micro-Analytic Interview*.<sup>10</sup> Through my experimentation with the tiled image and the video 'flip book', I have been afforded the 'temporal-space' to open up the specificities within my memory of this particular experience.

### **time recalled through image**

Writing in relation to some of Warhol's films, French-American cinematographer and film director, Babette Mangolte, discusses how time is represented in film, stating that 'time is perceived in the moment when it is stopped or altered.'<sup>11</sup> After noting what I had come to understand about this four-second experience (in my performance) by means of the recollection process and language, I re-watched the documentation footage of the performance, and in doing so, I realised that there was one aspect of my memory of this dancing experience which I had not yet fully processed—my experience of time. Anthropologist Edward Hall proposes that time cannot be defined as a singular phenomenon, but instead, it is possible to identify many different kinds of time that we as humans shift between as we navigate our way through the world and how these are affected culturally. One of the kinds is 'personal time,' defined by 'the way in which people experience the flow of time in different contexts, settings and emotional and psychological states.'<sup>12</sup> In my memory of the four-second experience, in the state of performance, the flow of time felt as if it was somewhat slower than my usual perception of time, not like one's experience of time slowing down in an emergency, but more as a result of the details of the experience feeling intensely intricate and yet comprehensive, generating the feeling of fullness in the moment.



Without setting out to explicitly develop my understanding of the flow of time within this dancing experience, I began to capture all twenty-four frames of each second of this experience from the documentation footage and I then observed each one individually. For the most part, as I scanned through the images, I followed the movement in its chronological order, but sometimes, I scrolled forward and back, forward and back, across multiple images, which gave me an insight into the aesthetics that correlated with the intricate sensations I encountered. One sensation which had been particularly significant, in the moment of performance, was when I turned my head to ascertain where one of the dancers was in order to direct my backwards fall into a clear trajectory. This backwards fall was only one part of this short four-second experience, yet, in this brief moment, I managed to initiate the fall by releasing at the front of my ankles, turn my head to the right to check my pathway, before bringing my head back into alignment with my spine to experience the full sensation of falling before I had to catch myself and change my direction.

Mangolte explains that 'creating an interruption that cannot be anticipated creates a jolt and it is what makes us "think time." It is when it is interrupted that time creeps into the viewer's mind.'<sup>13</sup> Examining the video footage into singular frames has supported the possibility of bringing to light the intricate details of this dancing experience, enabling a magnification and thickening of the experience in my memory.

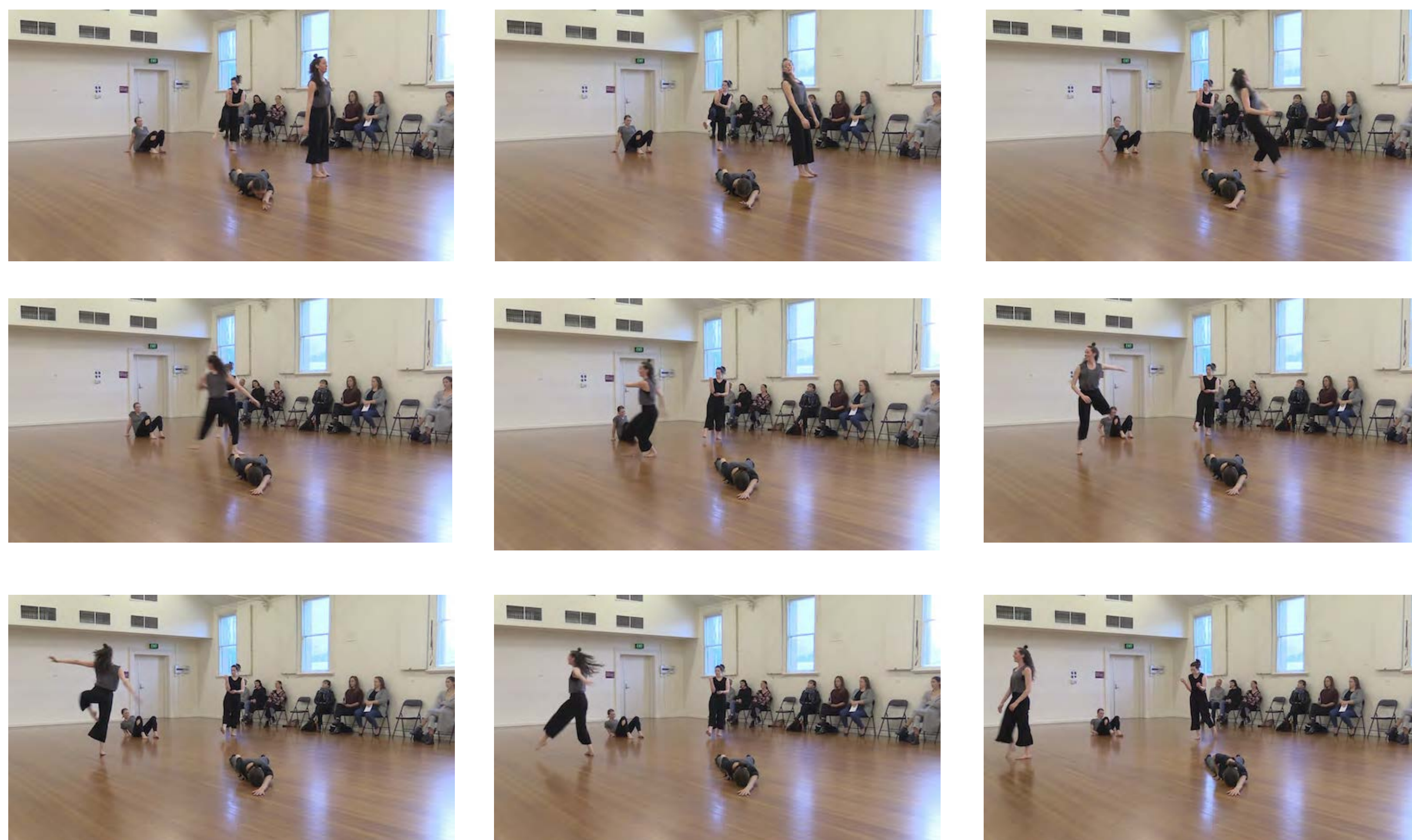




**Figure 02:**

A four-second dancing experience captured in a hundred and fifteen singular frames and then reconstructed as a digital 'flip book'. Ashlee Barton, November 2018.

View the video at [https://idea-edu.com/media/2020/ideajournal\\_17\\_02\\_2020\\_Barton\\_figure02.mp4](https://idea-edu.com/media/2020/ideajournal_17_02_2020_Barton_figure02.mp4).





**author biography**

*Ashlee Barton* is a dancer, dance maker/ researcher and dance teacher who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Dance) from the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2009. As a dancer, she has worked with and performed alongside artists such as Emma Fishwick, Roslyn Wythes and Olivia Millard, and her work has been presented in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth and Canberra. Since 2016, Ashlee has been undertaking post-graduate study at Deakin University, graduating with first class Honours in 2016 and then going on to do a Master of Arts (Research), which was conferred in February 2020. Alongside her study, she has also been teaching as a sessional staff member within the undergraduate Art and Performance program and is now also a PhD candidate.



## notes

- 01 Ashlee Barton, 'Dancing in and out of time: noticing the present through repetition' (MA Thesis, Deakin University, 2020), 3. <http://dro.deakin.edu.au/eserv/DU:30143276/barton-dancing-2019.pdf>.
- 02 Daniel Stern, *The Present Moment: In Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (New York: W.W Norton, 2004), 11.
- 03 Stern, *The Present Moment*, 10.
- 04 *In and out of time* was performed in November 2018 at Dancehouse (Melbourne, AUS).
- 05 The dancers in my MA research project were Evie Ball, Amber Riches, Emma Riches and myself.
- 06 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- 07 Barton, 'Dancing in and out of time', 7-10.
- 08 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 80.
- 09 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 80.
- 10 Stern, *The Present Moment*, 9-22.
- 11 Babette Mangolte, *Selected Writings: 1998-2015* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 285.
- 12 Edward Hall, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimensions of Time* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1983), 14-20.
- 13 Mangolte, *Selected Writings: 1998-2015*, 288.