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co-constructing body-environments

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2020

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



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about

IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators' Association) was formed in 1996 for the advancement and advocacy of education by encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture education and research within Australasia.

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1. Objects

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- (a) encouraging and supporting excellence in interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research globally and with specific focus on Oceania; and
- (b) being an authority on, and advocate for, interior design/interior architecture/spatial design education and research.

3.2 The specific objects of IDEA are:

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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.'⁰¹ 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.⁰²

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.⁰³

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.⁰⁴

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.
- 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.'

performance and new materialism: towards an expanded notion of a non-human agency

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abstract

This article expands on new materialist notions of material agency within the context of practice-based creative research. New materialist thinking recognises of the agency of non-human actors and enables a focus on the dynamics of human and non-human relationships. A key concept of new materialist theory is a critical perspective on the binary of human and non-human, arguing that all matter resides within a form of incessant flow, in states of constant transformation. These renewed approaches to understanding matter has drawn from developments in science and physics exploring the nature of forces and networks that constitutes matter. In a world that continues to become more technologically reliant and scientifically developed, this research paper explores a non-human agency emerging within human and non-human interactions, where human and non-human agents (spaces, materials, forces, etc) have efficacy in the co-construction of practices, events and figurations. Understanding of these agencies has been drawn from looking at the nature of these relationships that unfolded in two performances: *Material Interactions*⁰¹ and *BodyBody Experiments*.⁰²

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introduction

Materialist scholarship has received renewed attention due to developments in philosophies within natural sciences, in particular dispensing with nature and culture divisions and human centrality. This article draws on the more recent philosophical project of new materialism. Here I outline significant schools of thought in new materialist theory which have informed this practice-based research project. A key position of new materialist ontology is a critique of René Descartes' empirical consideration of materials as moved by the thinking subject, as discussed by Diana Coole's and Samantha Frost's book *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*.⁰³ They develop a fundamental critique on Cartesian dualism, which considers there to be divisions between the mind and body; in which the body is considered an inert entity, animated by the mind. In this thinking, matter is also considered inert substance, moved by the thinking subject, physically malleable, and expressive of culturally constructed concepts.

The predominant sense of matter in modern Western culture has been that it is essentially passive stuff, set in motion by human agents who use it as a means of survival, modify it as a vehicle of aesthetic expression, and impose subjective meanings upon it.⁰⁴

This dominant perception proposes matter as moved by human agents who impose meanings, centring the 'thinking subject' as the crucial force, perceiving and using matter as an expression of meaning. Coole and Frost discuss mind-body dualism as a socially and

culturally constructed practice. In contrast, a new materialist focus considers matter within a much more complex paradigm, which proposes self-organising properties and agentic and lively materialities that have the ability to make things happen.

New materialist thinking challenges various long held assumptions of the material world. Coole and Frost champion the urgent need to establish a new understanding of materialism not only according to scientific and technological advances but in the context of global climate change, genetic engineering and the saturation of virtual and digital interfaces in the everyday. Such shifts, Coole and Frost argue, require a profound reorientation of our perception of the world, of ourselves, and of each other. They propose a theoretical conception of matter as 'lively itself, exhibiting agency', in consideration of bioethical issues, and a renewed examination of our everyday relationship to things, spaces and our environment, along with the broader geopolitical and socio-economic structures affected by these.

This position is explored further in Jane Bennett's book *Vibrant Matter*,⁰⁵ which has been significant in bringing new materialist perspectives and the notion of a non-human agency into the current critical theoretical discourse. Bennett's text, like Coole and Frost's, argues for an alternate way of recognising the contribution that nonhuman forces play in events. Bennett develops a way of defining the agency of materiality in 'opposition to figures of passive, mechanistic or divinely infused substance.'⁰⁶ She does

this through a series of investigations about materiality in which heterogeneous things of all sorts are understood as existing in assemblages, where they interact. These encounters make available certain energies, and forces that have the ability to make things happen. A political theorist, Bennett argues for a greater sensitivity and attunement to recognising how the agentic capacities of non-human things can engender a more complex engagement with the political. In this scenario, responsibility for certain assumed human intentions and events can be considered as shared and distributed and include the agency of non-human things. Bennett draws from Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory,⁰⁷ in which both human and non-human actants have the ability to do things and with different forms of efficacy.

An important text that also addresses these positions is Iris van der Tuin's and Rick Dolphijn's *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*.⁰⁸ Van der Tuin and Dolphijn argue for new materialism as a re-thinking of material interactions by researchers across fields in and, therefore, it does not necessarily sit within a specific theoretical field; rather it is an applied way of thinking about matter.

'New materialism' or 'neo-materialism' is such a new metaphysics. A plethora of contemporary scholars from heterogeneous backgrounds has, since the late 1990s up until now, been producing (re-)readings that together work towards its actualization.⁰⁹

Van der Tuin and Dolphijn develop a dialogue between new materialist scholars through a series of interviews to create an inclusive cartography across scholarly fields. From these interviews, they develop a critical analysis of new materialism through feminist critique.

Our proposition is that new materialism is itself a distinctive trend, both in feminist theory and in cultural theory more broadly, and a device or tool for opening up theory formation. This is to say that new materialism not only allows for addressing the conventional epistemic tendency to what can be summarized as classification or territorialisation (when a new trend appears on the academic stage, it is usually interpreted as a "class" that can be added to an existing classification of epistemologies), but also—and at the same time—for de-territorializing the academic territories, tribes, and temporalities traditionally considered central to scholarship.¹⁰

Here, new materialism is framed, not as a definitive field, but as an opportunity to develop further scholarship as it 'cuts across' scholarly disciplines to demonstrate transversality.

In an interview, feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti outlines her critique of post-modern cultural theory, in which there has been excessive accounting of bodily and non-bodily representations of matter in both cultural theory and popular culture at large. Cultural

theory has proved unable to effectively discuss materiality, due in part, Braidotti proposes, to postmodernist constructivism's privileging of perception and representationalism. In discussing representationalism and new materialism, the notion that matter is transformative and continually in state of flow, unravels aspects of representation and its discrete and stable status. Braidotti's thinking proposes that there is no singular representation expressed or allowed to take hold in incessant flow or motion of all things.

This notion is also applied to the human subject, which according to Braidotti, is an embodied subjectivity, a 'folding in of external influences and a simultaneous folding outward of affects.'¹¹ The sense of a social constructivist and humanist or biologically determined subject, for Braidotti is a post-humanist condition, which entails the critique of human exceptionalism. Braidotti draws on Gilles Deleuze's philosophy in her posthuman feminist scholarship in which she focuses on theories of the subject. In this article I draw from these accounts of new materialist thinking, focusing on concepts of a non-human agency.

new materialist thinking on agency

A core tenet of new materialist thinking is agency, and scholars have varied ways of conceptualising agency. Creative media arts theorist Felicity J. Colman brings together several new materialist perspectives on agency, establishing a common conceptualisation of agency as relationality rather than located.

There is no singular sense of the notion of 'agency' for new materialist positions, however we can identify a common sense of the notion of agency; as something that refers to the relationality of the political cultural position that and by which matter and things are defined, distributed, and organised – by their relationality to other matter and things; and which do not have a pre-existing ontology.¹²

In this thinking political and cultural understandings arise from a relational field rather than any sense of a given meaning from the outside. Bringing a greater focus on matter, philosopher Tim Ingold is critical of the way in which a sense of agency is imbued from the outside and matter is brought to life by exterior means. In his terms, a material agency in the new materialist sense is focused on materials within 'the generative fluxes of the world of materials in which they came into being and continue to subsist.'¹³ Ingold argues for a 'lifeworld' in which things are actively caught up in the flow and currents of the world, and thus properties and attributes of matter are not fixed but processual and relational as they are in constant contact and collision with each other. To consider and describe the properties and attributes of matter is indeed to trace its trajectories rather than its thing status.

Important scholarly work in this field is Jane Bennett's discussion of a 'distributive agency' within assemblages of human and non-human entities. While Ingold figures materials within flows, Bennett's focus is on a lively materiality,

not in a stable or fixed sense but as forceful and energetic matter within assemblages. Bennett's concept of agency is not a locatable site nor residing in human actions but considered to be in these many varied relations between human and non-human of the assemblage. Moreover, a non-human agency according to Bennett is an agency of the assemblage.

These theoretical positions present alternate ways of comprehending practices as the forms of routinized and habitual or expected ways of doing things, which engender approaches to the materiality of our world, in terms of urban environments, garments, technologies and tools etc. A new materialist way of thinking considers these as emergent relations that form an assemblage, in which non-human forces are active in co-constructing these aspects of our world. As highly theoretical concepts, these positions represent a shift in the framework of understanding and studying our relation to the material world. I am interested in undertaking an analysis of these concepts within creative practice, finding ways to activate this in live performances that afford noticing and finding moments of a shared sense of agency emergent from the creative practice. I am interested in sensitising others to forms of non-human agency in the context of performances which offer a practice-based exploration of this thinking on non-human agency and assemblages.

non-human agency and performance

Through the practice I elicit certain observations and conceptualise these in relation to new materialist thinking on non-

human agencies. I am interested in the role that materiality plays in these works, and the ways to recognise the many strivings of non-human things in concerted efforts with or against human intentions and actions. I developed performances in an effort to unravel and expand creative practices. I situated this practice in spaces where performers were interacting with materials and documented these interactions in still images and video. These performances aimed to sensitise an audience to the interactive forcefulness of the materiality of things as well as the materiality of human bodies. These activities considered the opaqueness of our routinised and habitual approaches to the materiality of spaces, bodies and materials which enable and contribute to our enactments in the world.

Performance proved to be a valuable methodological approach, well-suited to noticing the relations between things. Furthermore, performance scholar Mark Fleishman qualifies performance as research as well as a series of repetitions in time in search of differences. For Fleishman and Performance as Research scholarship, the positioning of the onlooker or researcher in work is in a constantly emerging; it is a space where reading performance like a text after the fact, qualifies events and activities as formal representations and undermines the emergent nature of events.

In other words, this difference is not something to be looked at from a position outside and after the fact, like a text to be read; it must be experienced from within a durational process of

continuous and multiple becoming in which the perceiver is also in a state of emergence.¹⁴

In addition, Performance as Research for Fleishman is a process of 'creative evolution' where no end-gaining or finality of an outcome is provided, but rather a performance is the process of becoming, where actions are not able to be attributable to single actors, instead they are processual and evolving.

PaR [Performance as Research] project is a process of creative evolution. It is not progressivist, building towards a finality; nor is it mechanistic in the sense that it knows what it is searching for before it begins searching. It begins with energy (an impulse, an idea, an intuition, a hunch) that is then channelled, durationally, through repetition, in variable and indeterminable directions; a series of unexpected and often accidental explosions that in turn lead to further explosions.¹⁵

Fleishman's account of Performance as Research is one that aligns with new materialist thinking and assemblage theory as it reiterates Bennett's claim, focusing on relationships rather than what these relationships may produce as representations. According to this thinking, outcomes, directions and actions are not predictable, final or discrete, but rather, there is an ongoing process of becoming that is open and unending. Performance methodologies attend to ongoing events, putting emergent

processes into place and attending to events as emergent in this way. It is not a means for showing mechanistic causation with linear and simple cause and effect paradigms, rather performance is a 'process of ontogenesis.'¹⁶

In a practice-based methodological approach, concepts such as (name them here) provide important touchstones for exploring the relations between agents in performance contexts. Performances that were developed in exploration of these concepts, focus on creating conditions which would foreground relationships between agents in a way that this can be recognized. Alongside this, it is important to notice these aspects of performances and articulate what is occurring. Fleishman argues for researchers and practitioners to attune to the movement and relations inherent to performance practices, rather than what is being represented, or the realisation of movement.

But just because it is difficult to imagine how to 'think true duration,' how to stay focused on the 'movement going on' (the flux/flow) rather than on the 'movement accomplished' (the final form or representation), is not an excuse for not trying or a reason for disqualifying the activity. What is required is conditions for seeing from a durational perspective where all of the events are brought about through movement and change.¹⁷

This perspective aligns with the project of new materialist thinking by focusing on performance as a field of activity.

The performances that I develop in this research project were focused on creating conditions that promoted constant evolution and change in movement as a means of recovering forms of agency otherwise inaccessible. What is required is a slowing down and amplifying of the flowing events in order for analysis to occur. This is central to the performance projects, which generate an on-flowing movement and interaction between bodies, materials, and encounters that are captured in photography.

performance: material interactions (2017)

In *Material Interactions* the aim was to document an encounter between a single participant and a constructed textile form. Participating contemporary dancers were invited to improvise an exploration of the textile device; they investigated the materiality of the textile shape, responding to the weight, shape and texture of the form. The performers were encouraged to at all times remain physically connected to the textile form but were undirected in how to interpret it.

The final suite of images conveys aspects of the experiential intensities that solicited the body to action through materially afforded, practical activity. The photographs capture moments in a continuum of movement. These make visible, a particular mode of body and material encounter. Images provide a means of looking at sequences of movements as well as singular arrested moments in time. Subject (performer) and object (textile device) set on a trajectory of physical exchange, realised within an embodied movement inquiry, to develop a shared sense of agency in bringing about certain interactions.

Focusing on these performance images, arranged in chronological order, shows the performer interacting with the white material. At times the performer is completely covered by the white material, others reveal an arm and hand grasping an edge and manipulating the textile form while the last image completely reveals the performer stepping away from the material (Figure 01). Within the initial images of this sequence, it is difficult to discern a body beneath the fabric, apart from

Figure 01:
Material Interactions (2017),
performance still photographs,
Sydney AUS. Performer: Antonella
Saglimbeni. Photographer: Alyssa
Choat, 2017.

a visible outstretched hand or a protruding foot emerging from beneath the white material.

Reading these images in relation to new materialist concepts of agency allows a focus on the relations occurring between the performer and the textiles shape to develop by observing where there was a shared sense of responsibility for what is occurring. In these images the body of the performer is interfacing with the textile surface in greater intensity than observed in the final images in this sequence. Focusing on the initial images reveals an exchange between the textile and the performer that was brought about by increased physical interaction, where the performer's body is beneath the surface of the material, their shape and form revealed in the surface of the fabric.

Observed in these images is an exchange that is driven by the materiality of the textile, rather than the performer's wilful actions; such as instrumentalising the textile and manipulating it solely through human efforts. In these earlier images there is a greater sense of a reciprocal

relationship where the performer is projecting their body towards the textile realising a shared sense of agency. This shared sense of agency is also explored in the performance project *BodyBody Experiments*, which featured performers in partnerships, moving together. Following the focus on materiality I was interested in the materiality of the human body and the ways that movements were formed through a shared sense of agency.

performance: bodybody experiments, 2017

In the performance *BodyBody Experiments*, participants were invited to perform in partnerships. They were directed towards managing the shifts in weight, the velocities and movements of another body in improvised movement sequences. Participants were encouraged to not strive to achieve results or potential outcomes or to arrive at an arrangement, but rather, to develop on-flowing interactions through a sensitivity to the other body with which they are interacting much like the *Material Interactions* performance with the textile.

Figure 02:

BodyBody Experiments (2017),
performance still photographs,
Sydney, AUS. Performers: Yennah
Chang, Laura Dimas Photographer:
Alyssa Choat, 2017.

In this work, performers generated movements through a mutually supportive on-flowing succession of touch and exchange. The final suite of images shows a deliberation between a performer's own physicality, momentum, and energy and those of their partner. Weight transfer movement techniques drawing from contact improvisation dance was a helpful framework for discussing the types of movements that were produced.

Framing of the performance in still images assisted in stretching a single moment and revealing aspects of the relation between participants that would otherwise have proved difficult to view in moving images. It also captured performers in a transitory state, where bodies are shown in arrested process of emergent relations rather than a flow of activity (Figure 02).

What is observable in these images is a navigation between each of the performer's projections towards each other. These projections can be understood in terms of competition; where the actions of one performer are met with resistance by their counterpart. Observations also revealed performers in modes of collaborative effort; where performers were moving with a greater sense of alignment, in which projections towards each other showed a more equal sense of exchange. Observing these modes of interaction, I am sensitised to noticing agency in these interactions between performers movements.

A shared sense of agency is revealed in this performance via the different modes of mutual

support shown in the images. Partnerships were not always reliant on each other. In order for a fully realized, mutually supportive mode, performers were both required to be 'off-balance' while surrendering some of the control to the other- a surrendering of some agency to the other partner and receiving partial control over the partner's movements. When partnerships were able to find a flow and mutual support, there is a greater ease and power in their movement in instances where neither performer is seated wholly in their own base of support but is sustained in some fractional way by the other body.

conclusion

This article was focused on investigation into non-human agency. The two performances discussed provided a way to observe and analyse interactions between performers and materials as well as between performers in partnerships. Capturing these performances in sequences of images, enabled reading these interactions in relation to new materialist thinking which is focused on an agency brought about through strivings of varied human and non-human bodies in flows of activity. This particular way of looking at the performances revealed a shared responsibility, a co-construction of movements, events, expressions in which non-human agents such as materiality, or bodies within mutually supportive modes of exchange, are contributing to outcomes.

Performance provides a valuable context for this exploration, particularly suited to investigating dimensions of new materialist concepts that are otherwise inaccessible.

Performance sets up bodies, materials, objects within environments, in relation to each other and therefore provides an important practical framework for investigation of concepts which focus on relationality. These performance contexts enable audiences to sensitise to certain nuanced articulations that occur between bodies (human and non-human). Capturing performance in images provides an opportunity for reading phenomena in relation to conceptual frameworks, providing access to otherwise inaccessible phenomena.

Decentring of a human agency through performance approaches can engender other ways of looking at the nature of practices and events, which would typically have been attributed to human actions alone. Moreover, this practice approach makes visible an orientation away from human centredness towards flows of activities brought about by relations, in which non-human agencies are collaborative and productive. Such an approach has the potential to transform and address the prevalence of human centredness which features in our attitudes towards the material world.

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author biography

Alyssa Choat is a Lecturer in Fashion and Textiles Design. In her research she has developed interdisciplinary projects of image-based works, wearable items, sculpture works, as well as performance projects in collaboration with practitioners and performers. Her research explores forms material agency through creative practice and draws attention to the relational aspects of body and material engagements, inherent to the dressed body in fashion, drawing on new materialist theory. Alyssa has presented her research locally and internationally including Critical Costume Conference, Aalto University, Helsinki and International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes Conference, Florence. She has created several public performances as part of nationwide creative events and exhibited works.

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