

Everywhen: Creative Technology & Dance Drawing Ecologies''

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Abstract

The interface between creative technology, dance performance, choreographic process, and place ecology is a rich area for research. In particular, the interplay between dance notation and digital drawing. This paper shares a personal exploration of the convergence between body, place, movement, choreography, and digital dance drawing as art and place ecologies. Where the inherent need to connect with nature and place coexists as the everywhen.

Keywords

Site-specific, digital dance drawing, performing arts, fine art, choreography, dance notation, creative technology, Place ecology.

Introduction

This paper discusses my current research exploring interfaces between performing arts and fine arts using dance, choreographic processes, site-specific art/ dance, and digital drawing. I am exploring inter-relationships between creative technology, dance performance, and place ecology. Current manifestations of this practice-led research include digital drawing and sound sketches as expressions of choreography and immersive, technology-enabled performances.

I will present my current and future experiments using creative technologies, including digital drawing, sound exploration, and projection mapping. The convergence of digitizing my multidisciplinary arts practice and performing live dance forms a spatio-temporal relationship of both movement, choreography, drawing, and fine arts. This concurrent relationship between the digital and the physical creates a dual landscape and perception of presence merging the body, place, space/site, as a deep resonance in spatio-temporal landscapes between the dancer, choreographer, performer/ artist. This resonance creates a trace physically in deep-time where the presence of oneself and the inherent need to connect with nature and place coexist as the everywhen.

Background

I'm a dance practitioner and multi-disciplinary artist combining dance, choreography, drawing, and creative technologies in my practice. I'm passionate about exploring the relationship between the body and landscape themes through a conceptual and allegorical lens.

As a participant in the AwhiWorld Awhi Incubator project (a capacity-building programme in Te Tai Tokerau, NZ), I've been developing my practice to explore innovative technologies that enable digital dance drawing and multi-disciplinary dance performance in live and digital contexts. (The Awhi Incubator supports multi and trans-disciplinary creatives to research and develop particular aspects of their practice using emerging technology).

Site-specific performance and mapping movement using technology has been a large part of my career as an artist and dance facilitator. The interrelationship between land and the body is a long-standing theme within my practice. Questioning traces of human impact on our environment and the effects of colonization, consumerism, and sustainability as landmarks and imprints in the places we inhabit. Humans leave traces of presence in the landscape and in digital spaces in which the ecologies of place, space, and time merge.

It is in this convergence that my current research is generating a discourse in multi-disciplinary arts practices, that traverses digital drawing and choreographic processes with technology-enabled site-specific dance into an interactive art form.

Digital Drawing & Choreographic Convergence

In combining my two main disciplines: performing arts and visual arts. Investigating digital artifacts that use interactive installation for performance and simultaneously intertwine choreographic processes into an immersive experience are the basis for my current research. I am particularly interested in techniques that record movement, by extending choreographic practice beyond capturing the body into technology-enabled performances. Pushing technological interfaces that

facilitate live drawing to create choreographic scores as visual art.

The interfaces between creative technology, dance performance, and place ecology intertwine with dance notation and digital drawing through choreography and movement mapping.

I am interested in exploring my response to a selected place framed with an allegorical lens by using prose or poetry to accompany the movement. This interweaving of drawing the body's motion in response to the environment generates a movement phrase from space, shapes, patterns, forms, light, terrain, and direction. Dance is likened to being a sculptor, as both art forms are spatial. Documenting these movement responses to create a dance phrase as creative visuals and sounds are what I describe as "the process of sculpting space". This has manifested in a set of visuals and sounds, as well as experiments with live performance, projection, and initial experiments in interactive installation and immersive performance.

Choreographic Calla Lilies

Through practice-led research and the current findings using creative technology and digital drawing tools, I have generated a series of choreographic scores based on dance notation that are Calla Lily drawings as part of my submission in the Awhiworld Alternate Reality Gardening symposium and publication in May 2023. [11]

A score is a map that an artist can use as a map to reproduce an entire dance as a way of recording movements to produce parts of the dance. Each movement has symbols and shapes that show as notation. Throughout my current research, the interplay between digital drawing, dance, and the choreographic process is entwined with dance notation to produce digital dance drawings as scores that co-exist as visual artworks. Digital dance drawing uses the language of movement and symbols to generate images as choreographic scores for movement.

Dance Notation

Dance notation is a well-researched area. Some of the main people who are important to mention in this area are Rudolf Laban (1879-1958), Trisha Brown (1926-2017), Alwin Nikloais (1910-1993), and William Forsythe (1949, New York). [7,4,10,3].

The dances generated are made from a combination of movement and use recording methods that notate dance in a written form, like music. An important example of dance notation is from Pierre-Bauchamp & Feuillet (1701) who documented ballets from the 18th Century which are still performed today. [9]

To create my digital dance drawings/ scores, the dance notation methods I have drawn from are Laban Movement Analysis, (LMA 1950) and a more contemporary method called the Language of Dance (L.O.D) and its movement alphabet by Dr. Guest, (1918-2022). [7,1]

I am also inspired by the shapes and symbols from geographical maps, which map the terrain of the landscapes using cartography. The symbols and shapes found in the geographical maps are similar to the biological maps of the body. The Body Cartography Project Ramstad & Bieringa, (2006) is an example of movement mapping where dance, place, video, and cartography intersect. [6] This intertwining of the body, shape, symbols, form, distance, structure, and enmeshing of the body, place, and landscape is an exciting part of my art practice as a choreographer who creates digital dance scores using site-specific places to dance and perform.

The Calla Lilly Series

I created the Calla Lilly series parts, 1-3 as the symbolism of the Calla Lilly represents the idea of death and rebirth. In the performance and site where I was working to compose the movement, there is a spiral staircase. The Calla Lily has a spiral shape and structure with a large stem. The dance notation generated a digital dance drawing as a choreographic score, which developed a spiral dance motif (an 8-count movement sequence). The notion symbols reflect the theme and environment in (site), which shape the dance. (Figure 1).



Sound Scores as Choreographic Stanza

During my choreographic research, I have also created a sound score as a stanza - a poetic verse that builds a sound score as part of the choreography.

During a creative technology workshop on MIDI and Arduino, (a sound-based interface device). I extended this concept of a sound score. I began to create a series of voice recordings for testing some parameters of generating sound into an interactive choreographic score/using projection mapping. In my research, I recognize the interplay between place, spatio-temporality, and presence as a dual reality in physical and digital domains, specifically focusing on mapping movement, sound, and light in a multi-disciplinary arts practice. This investigation expands the understanding of site-specific dance within the context of place ecologies, encompassing performing arts, visual arts, and immersive creative technologies.



Figure 2. 'Sharyne Lewis, *Calla Lily Choreographic Scores Rehearsal*' By Sharyne Lewis, April 2023, at Awhiworld Creative Innovation Studio, Northland, New Zealand.

Live Performance and Projection Live Performance & Immersive Projection

Another aspect I am exploring is projection and its relationship to site-specific work. The presence required when choreographing and performing a dance transverses sound, space, place, and time. In performing arts, stage presence, spatial awareness, and performance skills blend with the use of modern technologies to enhance the impact and concept of the dance. This is most famously done using lighting technologies with artists such as Louis Fuller (1862-1928) and her work *Fire Fly* (1896). [10]

As light travels faster than the speed of sound, the interfacing between sound, light, and place crosses the

dual realities of the physical and digital spheres to include projection in a live dance performance. Alwin Nikolais, the godfather of multi-disciplinary dance, was one of the first artists to merge & notate projection, sound, and lighting technologies for dance in a theatre setting. My research uses an innovative confluence of creative technologies, outside a theatre setting. In which dance performance, performance with live projection, and immersive interactive installation interweave sound, light, and movement with digital drawing.

My fascination with choreographic practice and the possibilities of technology creates a merging discourse of live performance and digital presentation. This presentation extends beyond recording dance for archiving choreography. The use of technologies such as projection and sound are deeply entwined in my creative process for the creation and development movement. How dance is visually presented using projection creates an inter-relationship between the body, movement, and images projected.

In the development of documenting dance, I have come to use video as a way of building movement phrases to build movement sequences. In dance, the first stage of a choreography generally stems from a movement motif which symbolizes the main concept of the dance. The motif is then developed using the elements of dance, space, time, energy, tension, and direction. This motif was further developed using choreographic devices such as repetition, retrograde, inversion, augmentation, and fragmentation... to structure the movement into a full dance.

The use of projection in my work has created another layer of interaction, where the dance can respond to the image of video being projected. This is purposeful, in that the image interrelates to the movement being performed live. The choreographic process can add, manipulate, edit, and subtract movement phrases from the dance.

Digital technology creates an additional layer to the choreographic process within my own practice as the addition and subtraction of movement from a dance is similar to editing film. The recorded dance can be rearranged just like the choreographic process. With innovative technologies such as projection mapping, and MIDI the choreographic process becomes interactive.

The conversation between the live performance and the projection can build multiple layers just like a duet, or an ensemble dance. The use of projection mapping provides opportunities to build movement motifs and recording movement then project the recording while using a live feed camera. In the digitization of site-specific dance recordings, I can build a relay of movements in a space, to compose a movement map 'score' using creative technology.

Site-specific Dance Ecology of Place.

All of these digital interfaces combine with a strong site-specific focus for my work. For me, site-specific dance is deeply embedded in the relationship between site, place, and history, and inevitably considers the environment in which one is dancing. Dance ecology has deep connections to the place and the environment in which one dances, which also refers to one's body as an inner landscape. In indigenous cultures, the body and landscape are deeply entwined in mind, body, and soul in connection to a place. The ecology of dance in a specific place and or spaces, has new paradigm shifts when it comes to the digitization of dance.

The inter-connectedness between people, places, and spaces is deeply infused in the fascia, the bones the cells of our body. As much as technology can develop the way we live, it can not replace the absolute need for human connection. For the elements of nature to soothe the nervous system and calm the electromagnetic connectivity of our brain. It is within nature and in place we find meaning and can connect deeply to the everywhen.

Each choreographic score that is created generates a body response as a movement conversation, similar to that of a jazz musician. Each person will read each score differently and create a new sequence of movements based on the same image. This multitude of layers of interpretation and digitization of the scores is looped through space and time like the cycles of nature. The ecology of dance and choreographic practices form deeper relationships to places and space through an ethereal perception of time and the spaces in which technologies inhabit our physical world.

Site-specific dance and the digital dance score generate two worlds: the world of the present time and the spatio-temporal space where time is a data analysis of a moment, of memory/ resonance in space of what was, what is, and the now.

Current Practice and Next Steps

I am continuing my research as I write this submission. Continuing to explore interactive interfaces embedded in choreographic processes across the intersection of digital drawing, digital and live spheres of "sculpting space".

The process of live digital dance drawing is currently undergoing an intensive testing phase over the next five months. Where the body movement will generate digital dance drawings/ choreographic scores for performance and as an interactive installation. The digital dance drawings will be based on dance notation and cartography. To be projected live into a specific site (using creative technologies- such as projection mapping, MIDI, Aduino, and Isadora) as the performance unfolds. The dance notation symbols used will develop and build the choreography within the site. This will build an

interface as a score for the public to interact with the notation using movement and reflect the dual conversation between the landscape, place, and the body in motion.

The interplay between sensor-based interactive projections and digital dance drawings provides a choreographic puzzle. The conversation between the dancer creating the image and the digital dance score, generates the movement.

My recent multidisciplinary dance performance "*Calla Lily Digital Dance Scores & Digital Dance Drawing Performance Project: "Portals to Venus"*" was presented as part of the Awhiworld Lab in 2024 in Tai Tokerau, New Zealand. This performance and research demonstrates a multidisciplinary intersection with dance, choreographic practice, visual arts, and digital dance drawing and video projection through the lens of the everywhen.

In "*Portals to Venus*" the Calla Lilies digital dance drawings are developed movement phrases exploring time, place, and space extenuating scenes or states and movement sequences with technology. Each state is activated by the dancer, using pressure sensors to present video images of digital drawings/ scores, environments, and movement sequences. This interplay presents a deep dialogue between creative technologies, digital dance, place, space, and time.

At ISEA, I will present findings from my explorative practice to other multidisciplinary practitioners attending - particularly those with a movement-based practice.

Summary

This paper discusses my current research exploring interfaces between creative technology, dance performance, and place ecology.

This resonance of the body creates a dual landscape with an inherent need to connect with nature and place through the everywhen.

I intend to present my current practice-led research and innovative new findings as a dance practitioner and multidisciplinary artist. My work demonstrates the convergence between performing arts, visual arts, interactive installations, digital artifacts, and immersive, technology-enabled performances.

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Biography

Multi-disciplinary artist Sharyne Lewis, (*bailartheskies*) has been exhibiting and performing since 1998. Lewis's arts practice is strongly influenced by her passion for dance, choreographic practice, drawing, and sculpture. Her work explores themes through a conceptual and allegorical lens, delving deeply to merge her two practices in fine arts and performing arts. She currently lives in Te Tai Tokerau, Northland, New Zealand.