



A collection of works

by

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Master of Fine Arts

in

Intermedia

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INTRODUCTION

“I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”

— Alice, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*¹

Just for the moment, please assume my body's position in time is in a linear constitution to it. This places all events in sequential order; past, present and, of course, the future, on a line from beginning to end. My individual life-span runs parallel to the markers of passing time, for example; my menstrual cycle, the sound of distant church bells, a transition of light over the living room wall in my apartment. These instances are as numerous as they can be meaningless, or meaningful. Markers exist everywhere, reminding me that I am moving, moving through and with Time. I tell time by the environmental patterns and accumulations in the world around me, and have learned to trust this almost as much as I trust the all-mighty clock, tick-tocking persistently, attempting to govern my every move.

Between these two modes of time telling, I find cadence in my day-to-day routines. The clock begs me to see my life as a precious commodity and Time as an invaluable currency, while the natural rhythms of life tease at the romance and subtleties of the world around me. These are tools of coordination that translate and relate my time spent in this reality.

While noting that “time is, of course, a multi-layered phenomenon that draws together a variety of experiences, materials, processes, and social conventions”, environmental philosopher Michelle Bastian, exposes one downfall of the all-encompassing nature of clock time, eventually positing that it is failing to coordinate *us* with the success of our ecological environment in favour of commercial consumption and capital gain — “when we look at a clock or a calendar we can see fairly quickly whether we are becoming out-of-sync with some worlds, but not with others”.² — citing the standard clock as an inadequate tool in context to climate change.

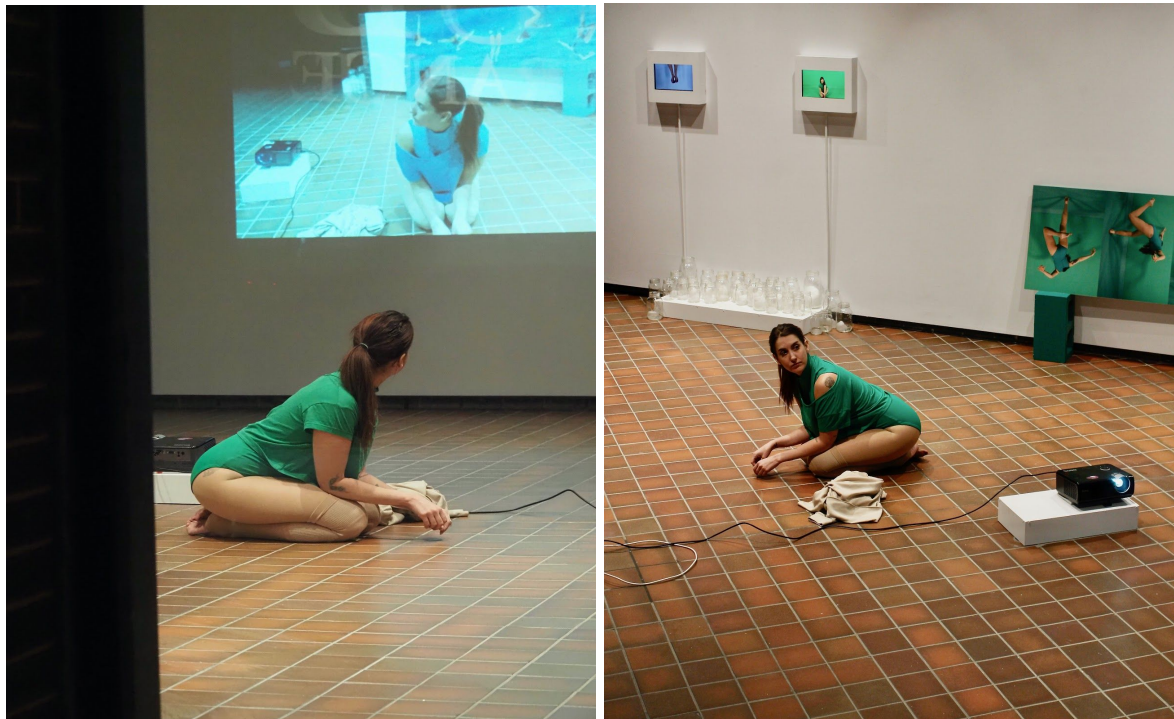
Here, I have distilled Bastian's 2012 essay to support my disillusionment towards any blanket approach to keeping time. That said, this criticism is not of the failure of the apparatus, but of the humans that use it. The political and ethical implications of relying on a single institution so entrenched in capitalism cannot possibly bring about a healthy relationship to our natural environment. The sentiment leaves me critical of obeying any one system in regards to resources so fleeting and precious.

¹ “Chapter Five – Advice from a Caterpillar.” *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, Oxford University Press, 2008.

² Bastian, M. (2012). Fatally Confused: Telling the time in the midst of ecological crises. *Environmental Philosophy*, 9(1), 24–25.

Now suppose I step outside of the anatomy of time completely, proposing it does not exist at all, at least not outside of my own perception of it. Proclaiming “the future” or “the past” are just human inventions, relative to life here on Earth. This has been suggested by physicists, and is a worthy meditation when pondering life’s greater meanings — but I am not a physicist.

I feel inclined to speak to my relationship to time because as a visual artist who works across a variety of media, I address time materially and conceptually throughout my projects and explorations. For me there is value in referencing the many ways in which the passage of time occurs outside of the straight line from birth to death, providing a viewer with narratives that are not always bound to chronological interpretations.



The Long Goodbye (performance still, different perspective of the same moment), FAB Gallery, 2020

Despite the proposition that time is nonexistent, “How wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress.”³ I stand in agreement with *Nobel Prize* winner; Niels Bohr. Via dismantling previous ways of thinking, there is so much potential to insight change. And, it is with this willingness to approach a chronicle from a variety of perspectives, that I attempt to address my position in the world, examining my identity in relationship to the people and places in my daily life. This curiosity asserts itself most frequently through the use of the body as a marker adjacent to interpersonal relationships, cultural ritual, societal gaze, and contemporary pop-culture.

Time, as a material, is most easily recognized in forms of art making, where motion is central to supporting visual narrative. Most recently, I work as a photographer and performance artist. Movement can determine qualities of perceived time, through a single moment, as a

³Ponomarev, L. I. *The Quantum Dice*. Institute of Physics Pub., 1993. (Quoting Niels Bohr, 1922)

static art-object and as sequences found in performance, or video. It is within this sphere that I incorporate installation artworks that use sound, noise, video, sculpture and digitally mediated reality. The work that I have created for this thesis exhibition explores the illusion of memory through still image, as well as *real* characteristics of time through improvised and durational performance art. Time weaves together reality and deception



Out of Body (detail), archival digital print, sand bags, dried grass, 40" x 96", 2020

I have been refining different approaches to fragmenting the body since beginning my MFA in Intermedia in 2018. My work then consisted primarily of still digital images of my body in the natural landscape, interrupted by illusions made with mirrored glass. At that moment, I was reflecting on a rudimentary question, *who am I, and how do I fit into the world?* – asserted in my material choice of mirrored glass, using literal reflection to explore personal reflection. Mirrors have now been replaced by live web-cams, green screens and the digital streaming platform Twitch. I enjoy creating work that changes the viewers relationship to timeline, and place.

This exhibition is a selection of live performances, photographs and installation work I have pursued over the last two years. My body, and the bodies of others, form a site of exploration, and are reflected and repeated within FAB Gallery⁴.

⁴ The Fine Art Building Gallery, University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada

STEPHANIE ANN PATSULA
A Collection of works

The work displayed in the FAB Gallery can be separated into six distinct projects. Each of these projects were made without the other in mind, and therefore stand alone as artworks. Upon entry into the MFA program at the University of Alberta, the work I created was largely represented by static objects and still images. Although the final product was often the result of documenting my body performing, the traces of those movements and sequences were largely unaccounted for — whole performances reduced to a single moment in time.

I grew self-critical of this disconnect in approaching my creative practice, and found that over time the work did not meet the richness of the narratives or concept that I was trying to describe. At first I began to create installations where videos, short photo animations, and digital stills of my body would exist together in space, a way of alluding to movement and performance without my live body in space with others. These experiments were important, but were largely unsuccessful as finished art works.

I pivoted away from my usual formula, which was primarily working with and documenting my own body, in favour of coordinating and co-authoring images with other individuals. This choice to work in a collaborative way opened me up to a kind of care and self expression that is integral to my work presently. It activated a part of my personhood that was always there in my art practice but never directly engaged. I began an untitled portrait series that spanned three-quarters of the time I spent as a graduate student.



Mikayla, inkjet print, 2019 with the question, does it hold water? on my mind.



Asstha, inkjet photo print, 2019
Luke, inkjet print, 2018



Rosie, inkjet print, 2020

I invited individuals who responded to my calls for volunteer models on my social media, to hold space with me and create images using their bodies, and some kind of ephemeral material. Through this process I learned about the unique nuances of the individual. This intimate relationship often produced sensual and captivating images that were created through consent and care. The final compositions are topographies of the body that encourage the eye to traverse along them. The final suite is 127 images that explore the materiality of the body juxtaposed with flame/wax, water/pigment, dry ice, and sod/soil.

The experience of choreographing models and materials gave me an entry point to start working with my own body in a more present way. This change in personal perspective happened synchronistically when the practices of contact improvisation and somatic movement were introduced to me. Both are forms of improvised movement practices. Contact improvisation has its roots in dance since the early 1970's. Somatics is grounded in body work and rehabilitation. The inclusion of these creative methods into my visual art practice opened a dialogue with touch and movement awareness. Through somatics, I am able to completely focus on my own internal experience, while still performing consciously in space.

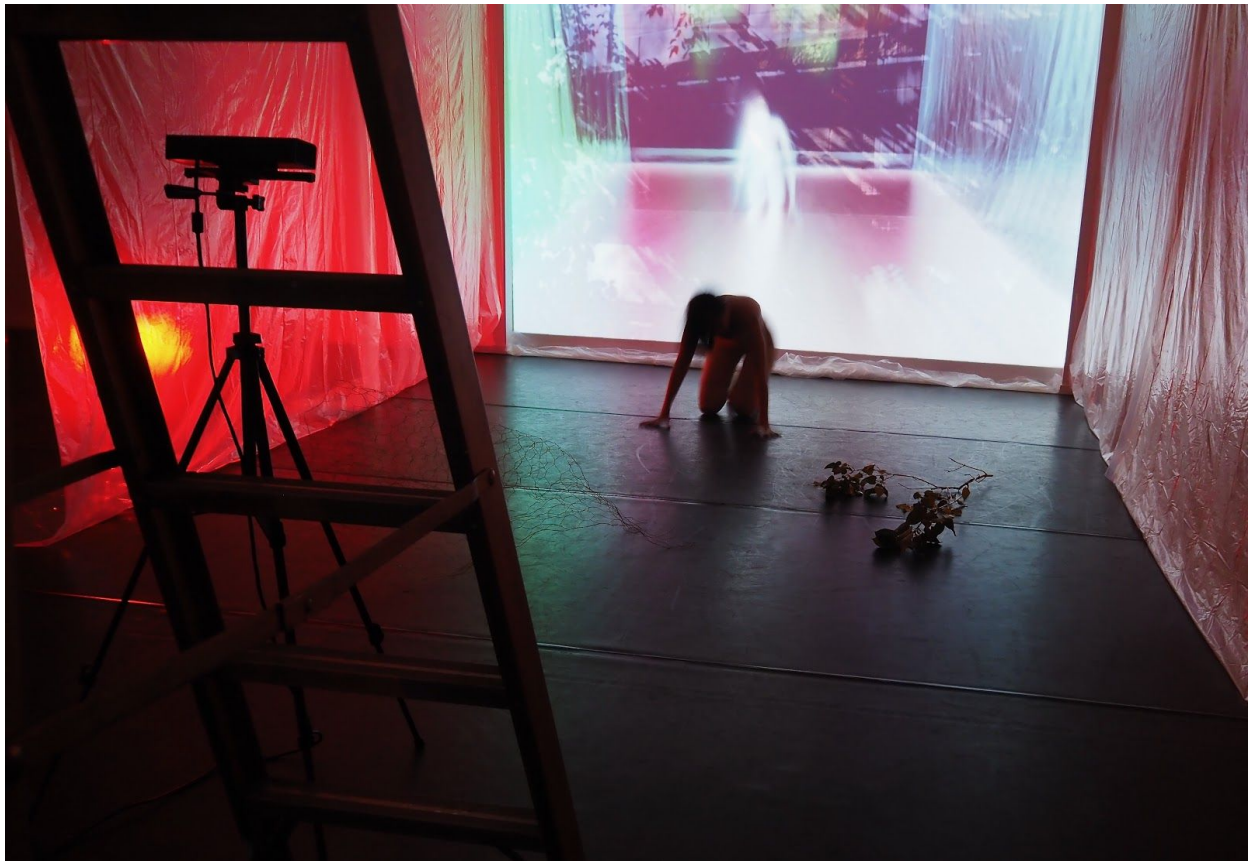
I have discovered a shift in my approach that leans toward an interest in somatic movement and improvised sound installation. This is not a stretch, as I have used elements of sound composition, dance, choreography, and sound art over the course of my artistic career. However, now more than ever, I find my approach towards the process and creation of these elements diametrically opposed to the ways in which I would have arrived at them before.

There is an exceptional freedom in creating visual art when I extract it from a place of embodiment. It is curious though, as I find approaches bookended between static moments

in photography and the sequencing of an action or performance. I explored somatics and contract improvisation in two pieces included in my thesis exhibition. I have discovered that the impulse to create these compositions came from a place of mental and physical sensation, rather than reacting from an inward place to create movement.

So “remembering forward”, as Kierkegaard wrote, is a dangerous thing. What’s our present will be the future’s past. And what’s our version of history will probably become truth.

— Milo Rau, *The Realm of the Real*, 2013⁵



Remembering Forward, Live performance still, accompanied by collaborator Alyssa Nider, Mile Zero Dance Society, 2020

In August of 2020, I participated in a 2 week research residency at the *Mile Zero Dance Society* and co-produced a 16-minute digital and somatic performance that debuted across three viewing platforms simultaneously. The project was made in collaboration with digital artist Alyssa Nider and composer Eric Fraser. At that time, I was thinking a great deal about the socio-political distress that systemic structures place onto racialized bodies in Canada, and responded to those thoughts over the course of the residency.

⁵ Bossart, R. (2013). *Die Enthüllung des Realen: Milo Rau und das International Institute of Political Murder*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit. (128)

The work was created with theatre director, Milo Rau's 2013 essay, *Realm of the Real*, in my mind. The essay assesses the re-enacted diptych of the two most known attempted assassinations of Adolf Hitler and the value of re-performing the past Historical events. The visual retelling of these moments was not to heroicize them "(...) history cannot be erased and that the notion of "history" isn't just a narrative (as postmodernist historians are used to say), but in the most positive and naive sense of the word: a fact."⁶ Further to that, Rau contrasts his own approach to artistic repetition to Andy Warhol's *Plane Crash* and *Pink Car*, in doing so he is critical of shallow reproductions of the original historical events that do not clearly represent "how things really were".

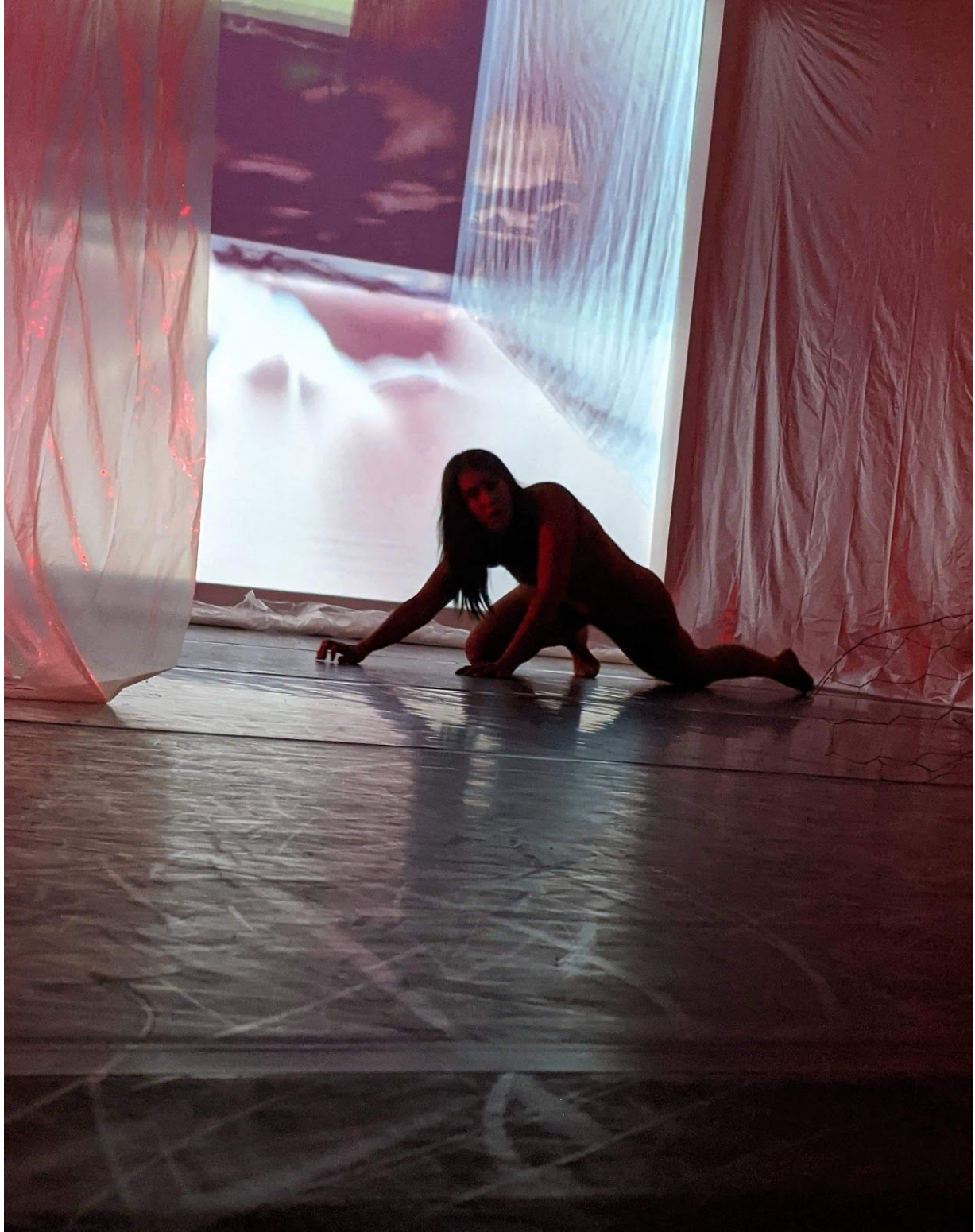
My use of repetition in this project was found through digital mediation of the performances I created. I am interested in how some digital platforms have shifted the way that I engage within them as an artist, especially when they are tools for protest and social justice. However, my choice to perform in multiple realities was more incidental. It was Rau's complex relation to memory that conceptually drove this work, citing Søren Kierkegaard whose writing explored the phenomenology of repetition and introduced the notion of *remembering forward*. Kierkegaard suggests that looking back at past experience can be a source of retraumatization, but through remembering and taking those thoughts forward you are committing to life as it is now, with that past in mind.

"repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward." An individual can remember some past event or emotional experience with intensity. That individual might try to "repeat pleasure continuously and eternalize the pleasure in the temporal".⁷

The liminal space between cast objects and shadows became a visual metaphor for the present moment. I was intrigued by the rhetorical devices placed onto the shadows themselves and set out documenting them in the urban landscape. After editing these images into video collages, one including text, and one without, I installed a two channel video projection. The same video work was also used as the digital plane that Alyssa Nider projected into the dance space. Using motion capture cameras to insert me onto the digital plane, depictions of the space and my body were captured live and manipulated so that movements trail, blend, and melt into the digital environment. This decentralized my form, allowing for multiple realities to be indexed from one significant action. By digitally mediating the somatic performance via the online streaming platform, Twitch, the work was presented as an online performance, a live performance and as part of an installation on the windows of the dance studio itself.

⁶ Bossart, R. (2013). *Die Enthüllung des Realen: Milo Rau und das International Institute of Political Murder*. Berlin: Theater der Zeit. (121)

⁷ *Repetition, A Venture in Experimental Psychology*, by Constantin Constantius, October 16, 1843, by Søren Kierkegaard, Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1983, Princeton University Press



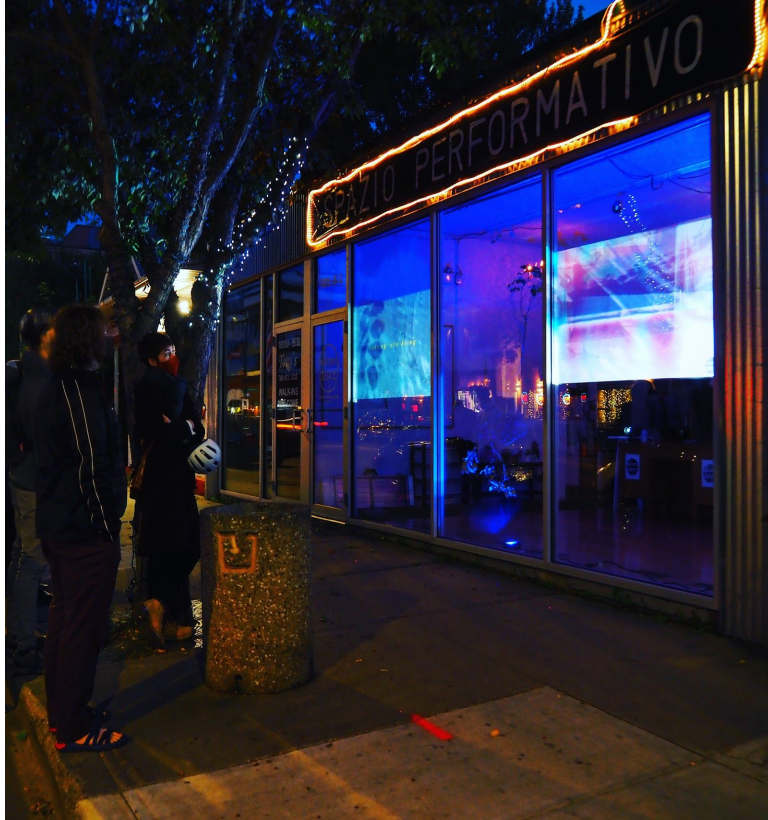
Remembering Forward, Live performance still, , Mile Zero Dance Society, 2020



Remembering Forward, video still, 2020



Remembering Forward, video still, 2020



1. Remembering Forward, two-channel video installation, Text Collage (Left), Twitch live stream (Right), Mile Zero Dance, 2020
2. Remembering Forward, floor monitors with text collage, projection of Twitch performance recording, FAB Gallery, 2020

Sympathetic Resonance, is the second instance in my thesis exhibition where I integrate somatics into my performance. This sound installation and performance is informed by the conventions of contact improvisation. This style of dance was created by the American dancer and choreographer, Steve Paxton, and explores the bodies of others using the fundamentals of movement awareness in spaces, physical sensation, and shared weight.

Although *Sympathetic Resonance* is not explored with another being in a conventional way, I use the sound created by my movements to sonically interact with other individuals, architecture and ambient sounds in the room. With the use of water filled glass instruments amplified by a hydrophone, and two contact microphones, I am able to use the resonance of the room to create an immersive sound sculpture.

The harmonic phenomenon of sympathetic vibration is achieved when a passive body responds to external vibrations in a similar harmonic range – the most cited example of this is demonstrated when two similar tuning forks are side-by-side, the first is struck and the second will pick up and adopt the former's vibration. By creating a live feedback loop with these instruments and the acoustics of the room, I create improvisational soundscapes with the intention for vibrational reciprocity with the individuals, objects and architecture of the room. The act of listening to sensations in my body to create an experience for others, opens up channels of emotional empathy. At a moment in history (Fall 2020), where it is nearly impossible to ethically navigate people and places in a way that we once have, this exchange of vibration and energy is a precious resource to explore, placing a new importance on the live body rather than images that represent movement or happenings.



Sympathetic Resonance, performance still, 2020



Sympathetic Resonance, performance still, FAB Gallery, 2020

The last work I will discuss is titled *The Long Good-bye*, an installation-performance that debuted in February of 2020, at Parallel Space Gallery in Edmonton, Alberta. The piece explores themes of grieving and acceptance in tandem with a loose account of natural disaster outside of an anthropocentric timeline. By juxtaposing the deeply personal narrative of devastation felt over my estranged brother, to the reoccurring and impending super tsunamis caused by the *Juan de Fuca* fault line, I examine hierarchy in mourning processes and a tendency to devalue personal grief in deference to the environmental and socio-political disaster. This project also explores anxiety felt through anticipation from waiting for something to happen. Embedded in heightened anxiety, is almost always the irrational belief that an undesired outcome will not be manageable. I interweave my live body into space alongside live greenscreen projections, video and photo sculpture that are centred on my image, and attempt to point to the inevitability of time: despite a desire to freeze or change its outcome, it must move forward. By bringing together a variety of media and processes to technically explore these ideas, I hope to support a multitude of potential entry points for the viewer to simultaneously experience.



The Long Goodbye, performance still, FAB Gallery, 2020
At the type-writer alternating between two statements.

1. I can hear the Westminster chime.
2. Salt water puddles remind me of the last time I saw you.



The Long Goodbye, three part video still, FAB Gallery, 2020

1. *Looking + waiting in the green room, 00:19:43 duration*
2. *Meditation balls stand in for 5 minutes of Earthquake, 00:05:00 duration*
3. *Confession to my brother, 00:07:57 duration*



The Long Goodbye, installation still, FAB Gallery, 2020 ft. two-channel monitors, snow clocks, and tsunami print

Snow clocks set an arbitrary duration for The Long Goodbye performance, once the snow melts the performance is over.



The Long Goodbye, FAB Gallery, 2020 ft. live body of the artist, two- channel monitors, snow clocks, and tsunami print



The Long Goodbye, performance still, FAB Gallery, 2020

Over the duration of the performance I add rock salt to the snow to expedite the melt time,



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