

# **Our Eyes Will Adjust**

by

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BA (Dance), University of Calgary, 2008

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

in the

School for the Contemporary Arts  
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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## Declaration of Committee

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## **Abstract**

*Our Eyes Will Adjust* is an experiential immersive performance and installation. With an attention to perception and embodied seeing, this work explores the multidimensionality of our energetic and material interconnections to the visibly hidden. The work moves from the perception of the individual self at the center of experience to the Universal Self – woven into the web of Universal matrix which is cyclically governed rather than centrally focused. Influenced by ancestry, nature and new technology, the work is presented in three different settings: live in-person performance, live streamed performance and dance on film. OEWA is a dance of the in-between dualities of light and darkness, energy and matter, form and formless meet, converse, and entangle.

**Keywords:** Perception; Embodied Seeing; Interconnection; Sense-ability; Visibly Hidden

## **Dedication**

In the deepest gratitude of:

My Beloved Family and Friends

Mentors: Marsha Roddy and Ella Ferland

Indigenous Educators: Tina Robinson, Pearl Innes, Russell Mather and Patricia Sterritt

(Granny)

Senior Supervisor: Rob Kitsos

Committee Members: Peter Dickinson, Siying Duan and Cristina Bucci

Isabella Wei, Jacqueline Lo, Reina Lim, Natalie Hsu, Hattie Conway

Bronwen McVeigh

Charlie Cooper, Collaborators, Cohort and Contributors

For all those wanderers in love with Love.

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# OUR EYES WILL ADJUST

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THIS WORK WILL BE PRESENTED AT SCHOOL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, VANCOUVER, CANADA, ON THE UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE -SEW'XW Ú7MESH (SQUAMISH), STÓ:LŌ AND SĀLIO LWƏTƏ7SELILWITULH (TSLEIL-WAUTUTH) AND XWMƏKKWƏYƏM (MUSQUEAM) NATIONS. IT WAS CREATED AT SCA AND IN PRINCE RUPERT, CANADA, ON THE UNCEDED TERRITORIES OF THE TSYM'YSEN NATION.





## Defence Statement: Our Eyes Will Adjust

*Our Eyes Will Adjust* (OEWA) is an experiential immersive performance and installation. With an attention to perception and embodied seeing, this work explores the multidimensionality of our energetic and material interconnections to the visibly hidden: a felt reality that is unseeable with the eyes. The work encourages a shift in perception from the individual self as center to an experience of the universal Self—a self woven into the web of a Universal matrix that is cyclically governed rather than centrally focused. Influenced by ancestry, nature, and new technology, the work can be experienced in three different settings: as a live in-person performance, as an online streamed performance, and as dance on film. OEWA is a dance of the in-between, where the boundaries between dualities of light and darkness, energy and matter, form and formless, meet, converse, and entangle.

### Background

My work as an interdisciplinary choreographer explores the meeting grounds of physical and energetic realities – an entanglement of the real and imagined, the touchable and felt, and the visible and visibly hidden. Merleau-Ponty’s attention to the phenomenology of embodied experiences gives us a way to shift the perception of sight solely being from the eyes. This way of perceiving has opened my perception to think of our ability to feel and hear as a way of seeing. Prior to coming to SFU, I was interested in the tension that exists within dualities. For instance, a work entitled *When A Feather Falls*<sup>1</sup> examined grief in the midst of transitioning from Earth to Sky. Set in a world where spirits moved alongside humans, angels longed to intervene in the fate of the character’s death. However, fate played its hand and carried the soul home. The work ends with a spotlight on the loved ones left behind, with feathers falling from above. Additionally, a later work, *Red Divine*<sup>2</sup>, integrated Chinese fairy tales and history in the form of a love story between a Goddess of the Sky and a man on Earth. The more I

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<sup>1</sup> <http://giselleliu.com/when-a-feather-falls/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://giselleliu.com/red-divine/>

collaborated on different projects with different artists, cultures, healers, physiotherapists and athletes, the more my curiosity surrounding embodied sensing grew in my work as a choreographer.

My curiosity around interconnection began in 2017 when I experienced relapsing symptoms of a flu virus that entered my brain. The memory gaps would toss me into bouts of anxiety and there was only one thing that would calm me down: an intentional attention to my intuitive sensorial awareness. As my perceptions expanded, it was as if my heart was slowly breaking open one crack at a time. I started to experience my environments, both in the natural and technological world, differently-- like beautiful threads weaving together, more colourful, more entangled and, a lot more interconnected. Naturally, as a movement artist, I grew curious and started to intentionally train this embodied way of conscious seeing.

During the pandemic I intended to take a short visit to my hometown on Kaine Island (Prince Rupert BC) on the unceded territories of the Tsy'myssen nation. The short visit ended up being an 11 month stay in which I had the opportunity to be on the land, re-connect with family, and research. Returning home after living abroad for 11 years gave me space to reflect on the hybridity of growing up Asian in a Western world on Indigenous land. Stepping back and witnessing this realization shifted my perceptions in three significant ways: 1) it expanded my understanding of other possibilities in perception and sensorially experiencing our deep interconnections with others; 2) it opened up the phenomenological, sensorially embodied and simultaneous experience of being observer and experiencer; and 3) it pointed to the impermanent nature of our ever-shifting reality. With attention to perception and embodied seeing I started to research the questions: how else can humans potentially see? And how interconnected are we?

## Projects in MFA

When I arrived at SFU, I was directed toward Erin Manning's and Brian Massumi's research about neurodiversity. Studying Manning's and Massumi's<sup>3</sup> work introduced me to the idea of co-composition between our senses and non-typical ways of perceiving - a synaesthetic blending of the senses. According to the authors, external reality is finite, measurable, and bound while inner reality suspends space and time, unveiling the nature of its infinity. This way of experiencing my sensorial reality heavily influenced my approach to designing space-- a design approach that is an experience of inner and outer reality. I started to seek harmony in dualities to seek a place where these oppositions meet. This search launched my journey of exploring the place where light meets dark.



**Figure 1.** 'Fragments' (2019)

### Body and Architecture (Bound and Finite)

As a choreographer I naturally looked for the structure and architecture of movement of the body in relation to space and time. Moreover, my work and practice were predominately human/body centered. In my MFA studies, I wanted to explore the

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<sup>3</sup> Manning, Eric and Brian Massumi. *For Thought in the Act*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

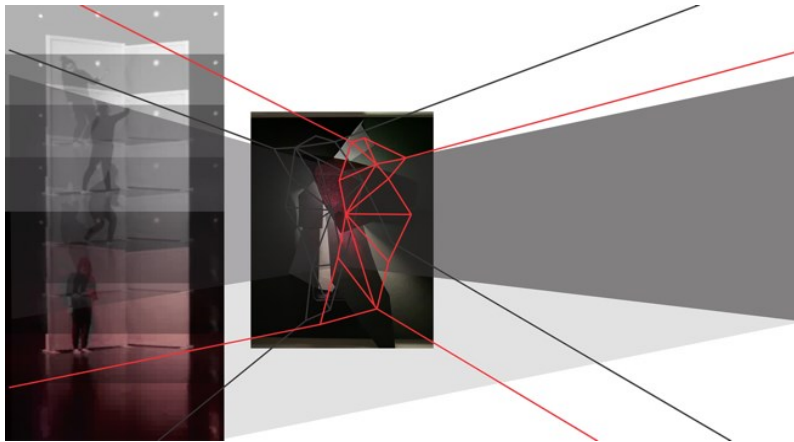
idea of what it was like to de-center the human, not to take away from value of the human body, but to draw intentional attention to what else was moving within the same environment. In exploring *otherwise*, I was curious about how I could choreograph lights, sound and form in space. I first began this exploration between body and architecture with interior designer Mansi Patel. We ventured through several explorations that gave me a better understanding of the external world of form, structure, and measurability. Furthermore, choreographer William Forsythe gave me a way to look at movement in material objects and how objects in space can choreograph movement, especially in his work *Synchronous Objects*.<sup>4</sup> In her research about *Synchronous Objects*, author Norah Zuniga Shaw writes, "...and we translate dances into choreographic objects in order to generate new expressions of the form." (Shaw, 9). In a similar way I was curious about how I could translate movement to become choreographic spaces. We worked with lines, lights, form, geometry, video, sound, and projection. In these six months of collaboration, I had the opportunity to explore a conversation between body and architecture where agency between body and structure was an entangled, simultaneous duet through structural space and time. I started to ask: *What would architecture look and feel like between materiality and immateriality and form and formlessness? Is this in-betweenness a gap, a mergence, or a place in which they meet and converse in their fullness?*

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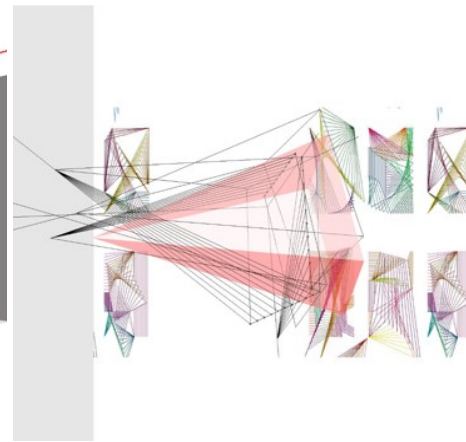
<sup>4</sup> <https://synchronousobjects.osu.edu>



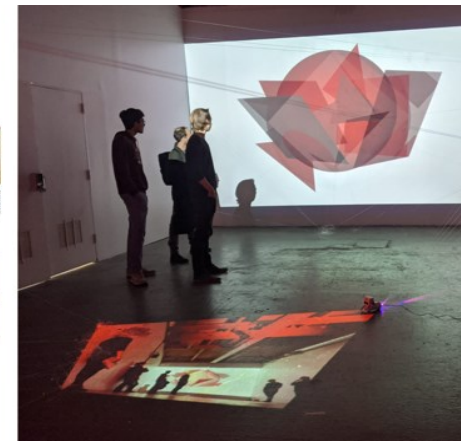
**Figure 2.** “Phase 1: Encircle” In collaboration with Charlie Cooper and Mansi Patel (2019)



**Figure 3.** Body and architecture research with Mansi Patel (2020)



**Figure 3.1.** “Unbecoming” In collaboration with Mansi Patel (2019)



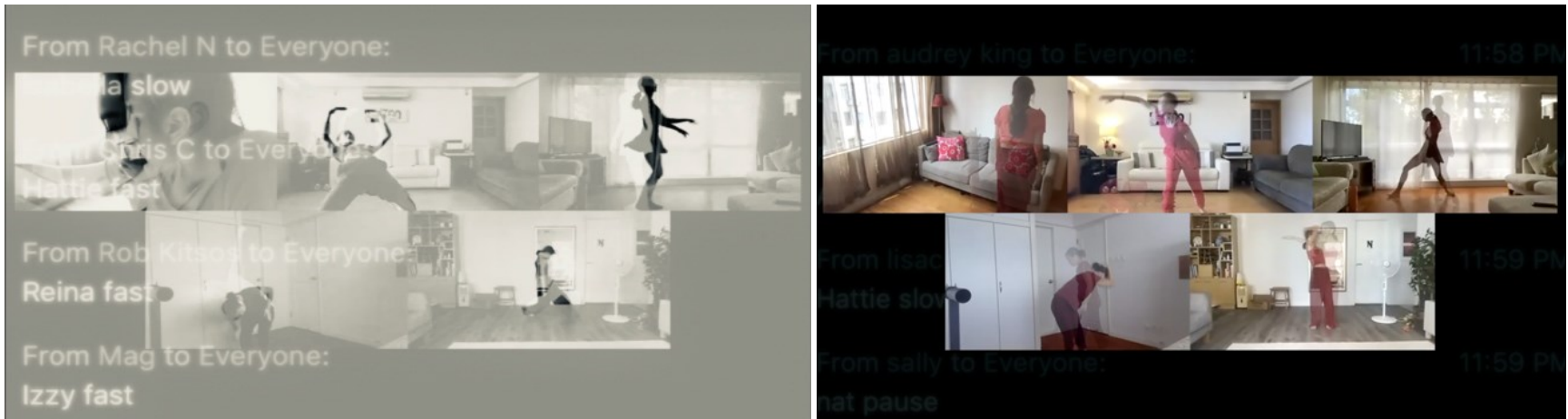
## Body and Technology (In Times of COVID)

After allowing myself time to connect my body to the structural world and the onset of COVID, I naturally moved to exploring body and technology in virtual spaces. For our spring 2020 show, *Within-Outside*, I presented “Encounter Your Experience,” a work in progress and collaboration with five beautiful dancers in Hong Kong: Hattie Conway, Natalie Hsu, Reina Lim Jacqueline Lo, and Isabella Wei. “Encounter Your Experience” explored conscious embodied seeing and telepresence: the ability to simulate, through technology, presence in one location while being in another. My research questions for this project included: *How can embodied practices uncover our interconnectedness with matter and energy? And, how can the physical felt sensation of this interconnection be sustained in a virtual/remote environment?* We presented a live virtual performance where the audience used QR codes to access pre-recorded videos and could send prompts through the zoom chat to alter, in real-time, the course of the dancers’ choreography. Dancers were given full agency as to whether or not they would receive the prompts or pass. This work re-shaped the way I approached choreography in OEWA by opening my perception around technological possibilities to invite deeper connections into the process with the audience. For OEWA, I created a process room with QR codes where the audience could scan to see different video documentations of the composition, projection, installation set up, hanfu making and movement research process. I also wrote a blog for the audience to get a glimpse of how the work unfolded along the way.

In “Encounter Your Experience,” we re-focused the body’s conscious way of seeing through focused connection by heightening the sensorial awareness of the body’s ability to intentionally and attentionally listen while shifting environments from virtual to physical, and in-person and digital. Along these lines in Susan Kozel’s book *Closer: Performance, Technologies and Phenomenology*, she writes “intention, attention, listening and concentration are not innate capacities, but are techniques informed by cultural practices and social conventions” (Kozel, p.143). Creating environments for different corporeal experiences expanded the dancers’ perception of body in relation to light,

sensorial awareness, space and time and choreography. Choreographing digitally with edited effects allowed the dancers to interpret movement and spatiality by asking themselves to open their perception to other possible ways of perceiving movement that challenged their body/mind boundaries. As an example, using video, the dancers could rewind, slow down, and repeat to break down the choreographed phrases so that they could interpret the technique in their own bodies.

The results were fascinating, as they reported a tangibly felt sensation of the other dancers' presence in their own room, even though their physical body was not in the same home. This research opened up my perception to the duality and conversation of physical body (material) and sensorial body (immaterial). This observation led to other questions, such as: *how can we cultivate an embodied human connection both physically and remotely? And, what relationships can be cultivated between the physical and digital body in these two environments? Can one define the other as being 'more real' if both experiences provoke felt sensation?* I carried these questions with me while working on OEWA. Creating this work during COVID forced us to look at how this project could be available in-person and online, as we were uncertain as to what would happen when it came time to present. Knowing that live performance had the advantage of being more physically tangible than online streams, the challenge for me in carrying this thinking over into the OEWA process was to think about how we could make the online stream as intimate as possible with a shift of perspective. What access could I give the online experience that was different from the live experience? For example, with the live performance of OEWA, the audience could physically touch the space; I also started in the audience so immediately I was connected before I went behind the scrim. With the online stream of OEWA, the audience could see what was happening behind the scrim as an effort to experience the intimacy, but in a perceptively different way.



**Figure 4. and 4.1.** Images from a work in progress, “Encounter Your Experience” (2020)  
From left to right, top row to bottom row dancers: Reina Lim, Isabella Wei, Hattie Conway, Jacqueline Lo, and Natalie Hsu



## **Body and Nature (Infinite, Timeless and Connected)**

As a way to help balance my time online following “Encounter Your Experience,” I shifted my movement practice outdoors into the natural world. With movement training, I would integrate beginner principles from the energetic practice of Qi Gong, and practices of waves and spirals from House OG and teacher Future EOF. Upon my return home to Prince Rupert, I was able to train with my father, who taught me about the push and pull principles of tai chi and energetic relationships in the body. Merging these principles of waves and spirals with my contemporary improvisational background not only helped me connect with the natural world, but in brief and passing moments, allowed me to feel completely immersed in a sense of a boundless oneness. Not in a way that I became the wind or tides, just that we somehow found our meeting place: somewhere in-between to move together and experience one another in our wholeness.

The difference of embodying structural architecture and natural architecture was monumental. I found my movement was much more linear, geometrical, and formal in structural spaces; I was small in the space, and the parameters were impermeable. Even when we used light and shadow (immaterial forms) to form structure, there was still a sense of boundary. Based on where I placed my body in space, the proximity of my body could vary between bigness in occupying a small structural confinement or smallness in a larger volumetric space; either way I was still an object in space. Perhaps due to the limitations of my own perceptions, when matter was denser the felt sensation of separation was greater and it was harder for me to sense interconnection with structural form. Immersed in the natural environment, on the other hand, if I was moving with the wind, ocean waves or trees in the forest, there were moments of meeting in our wholeness, where the felt sensation was a complete oneness of body and environment. My movement was far more fluid and connected with an internal chaos of multi-dimensional waves and possibilities travelling in various directions. A significant difference of moving in the natural environment was the simultaneous sensation of being

infinitesimally small and infinitely large as though I was immersed yet part of the space, ironically, freed in surrender.

The more time I spent in nature and witnessed its ever-shifting seasons the more I embodied my own ever-shifting nature. It made me question time and space in the physical and non-physical. *If time and space were constantly changing--yet I could still observe all these changes-- who was observing, who was asking, and who was listening?* Physically on the land I witnessed the cycle of life, the birth and decay all around me; my presence was no different in that traces of me will remain and decay just as those who have come before me and those who will come after. And yet, something experienced that cannot be explained through words sustained me like a thread that never breaks, a thread that is limited neither by time or space – un-labelable, infinite and timeless. During OEWA, I constantly engaged in a practice of moving between birth and decay and trusting the unknown as our approach was heavily process-focused. It was always a challenge to define the balance of how much needs to be revealed and what can remain a mystery to others and to ourselves. But with a knowing, that somehow, I -- we are all a part of a timelessness – it is all connected.



**Figure 5. and 5.1.** Movement training in Richmond BC (2020)

## Interconnection of Land and Spirit

Shifting my practice to the natural world led me to my encounter and research with Indigenous Chilkat artist Tina Robinson. Finding our own freedom in the uncertainty of what was to come of the year, we found ourselves immersed in one another's curiosity of the natural world; she was working to revive her cultural history and I was curious about the visibly hidden and felt interconnections when I moved with the land. Out of my curiosity with interconnection and Tina's passion to preserve her practices, I produced an experimental short film, 'Smgan,' that helped document the process of harvesting cedar. Creating this video and continuing the harvesting journeys opened our grounds to the community and led us into conversations with Chilkat artist Pearl Innes, totem artist Russell Mather and elder Granny (Patricia) Sterritt. In the richness of these conversations, the physicality of taking my body to the land and photographing and documenting the artists' processes gave me a way to sensorially embody the experience of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's description of the Nishnaabeg term 'aki', an inclusion of all aspects of creation.<sup>5</sup> Though words fail to fully describe the felt sensation of moving with Great Grand Mother Earth, I can only say it is a divine dance in the *withness* of body, spirit, and land. A dance where dualities meet, not to merge, but to acknowledge and experience one another in their fullness and highest Grace.

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<sup>5</sup> Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake, and Project Muse. *As We Have Always Done : Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance / Leanne Betasamosake Simpson*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Pg.161



**Figure 6. and 6.1.** Images from “Smgan” of Chilkat artist Tina Robinson, filmed on Lax’Kwalaams (2020)

The phenomenological and embodied experiences of these different relationships of body and architecture, technology, nature and land, has given me a new way to experience ‘other possibilities’<sup>6</sup>: to dance into a more expansive perspective and scope of human sense-ability. Bridging cognitive theory and lived experience taught me how to create permeable containers, not to cast judgement or to cause division between the bound and the boundless, but rather to allow the ever-shifting nature of these dualities to meet and flow effortlessly in between.

## **Methodology**

With the harvesting work on the land, I experienced the value of knowledge as lived experience. My methodology and practice for OEWA was thought in the act. According to Manning and Massumi, “every practice is a mode of thought in the act. To dance: a thinking in movement.” (Manning and Massumi, p. vii). As I approached the making process, I was flooded with questions: *How can I choreograph space, sound and lights? With the body as technology and technology as the body, where can they meet harmoniously as co-composers of phenomenological embodied experiences? How can I create a universe for my audience to draw their awareness to their simultaneous existence as observer and experiencer, bound and boundless, and physical and energetic? More importantly, it’s all connected, how?* With every component of the work, from sound composition to lighting, movement was the thread that connected it all. We created containers for structured improvisation to happen with installation, sound, projection, and choreography. I completed this installation based on the question of how to choreograph bodies, including the audience’s movement through the space. The projection and lighting were designed based on the play of perspective of depth in relation to the body in space. Working with sensors was a communicative medium between composer Charlie Cooper, and I for the composition of the work. The creation

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<sup>6</sup> Crawly, Ashon. “Blackpentecostal Breath.” *Fordham University Press*, 31 Oct. 2019, [www.fordhampress.com/9780823274550/blackpentecostal-breath/](http://www.fordhampress.com/9780823274550/blackpentecostal-breath/). Pg.2.

of all these components was heavily collaborative with intentional attention to our embodied intuitive felt sensation.

During OEWA, the creative process with my collaborators was a dance between intentional awareness of ourselves as individuals and a co-composition with Universal forces in relation to otherness: as applied to space, materiality, energy. French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains his concept of vision doubling as follows: “The body is both the soul’s native space, and the matrix of every other existing space” (quoted in Wilson, 11).<sup>7</sup> This context of double vision gave me a Western context of the phenomenological embodiment of simultaneously being the observer (the seer) and the experiencer (the seen) from two selves, the self at the center and the Universal Self providing insight into the audience experience of OEWA. The audience could watch the performance as an observer and move through the installation as the experiencer.

In collaborations, I questioned how movement could be the connecting factor in all elements of the performance piece for both the observer and experiencer, and how movement could choreograph the sound, the animation/projections, the set, and the lights? Following this curiosity, I discovered the play between intentionality and intuition. Intentionality felt more decisive and cognitive (fixing parameters and thinking about the patterns in action) whereas intuition felt more co-compositional (permeable parameters like waves influenced by one another, more like contact improvisation). I worked to challenge my typical practice of the body as my medium of choreography and I explored how one element could inform the making of the other. I wanted in person audiences to experience the dance between self and universal Self, the body in light, and the body as light.

This mode of thinking and working allowed me to adopt a process-based approach to my collaborations. While I benefited from the insight of thinkers like Merleau-Ponty, I was deeply impacted by ideas surrounding knowledge, experience, and interconnectedness that appear in various cultures. In a conversation with Indigenous

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<sup>7</sup> Wilson, Leila. “Eye and Mind.” *Theories of Media*, 2003. Pg.11



elder Granny Sterritt, she described a concept of our timeless interconnection as one – ‘Oneness.’ She said “Giselle, we are one, one with the Earth, one with the space, and one with all things, but we also all have our individual paths to fulfil as a part of the oneness and all should be fulfilled in love and kindness.” Simultaneously, the self in its own individual journey and the universal Self are infinitely connected to All in the matrix of the interwoven web. Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson’s explanation of the Nishnaabeg term, ‘aki’ (Simpson, 161)<sup>8</sup> gives us a way to look at this interconnected knowing, an ecosystem of knowledge in the physical, emotional/mental and spiritual to and with other. Granny’s insight opened my perception to learn how to find a balance between instances when it is time to come together and when it is necessary to walk alone-- to follow the thread to the next connection.

The way Charlie and I worked on the composition of OEWA exemplifies this approach. For instance, we would rehearse a few times a week for a month, and every rehearsal together would give us a prompt to see what we could prepare on our own to bring to the table to the following rehearsal. The process unfolded naturally, and the more time we spent together the more a particular thread became apparent.



**Figure 7.** Rehearsal with composer Charlie Cooper (working with instruments and sensors, OEWA 2021)

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<sup>8</sup> Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake, and Project Muse. *As We Have Always Done : Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* / Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Pg.161



## **Other Possibilities of Sense-ability**

In my time in the MFA program I was able to touch the surface of Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied phenomenology in my explorations of: 1) body and architecture, 2) body and technology, and 3) body and nature and land. In bringing attention to the body's way of sensing, I was able to shift my movement practice and methodological approach to movement facilitation as an integration of energy and movement. The combination of these concepts prepared me for the embodied experience I had in shifting my practice of waves and spirals and spending time on the land and in nature with the spirit of Great Grand Mother Earth. Working with waves helped me make tangible the invisible force of energy that I was drawn to - it was a way to physically and visually materialize what was felt in and through the body. Moving on the land helped me embody both the infinitesimal and the infinite. At times, the forces of nature would thrust me off my feet as waves in gusts of energy crashed against my body and at other times, I could sense the multiplicity of waves moving within my body.



**Figure 8.** Movement training in Twin Falls BC (2020)



**Figure 8.1.** Movement training in Prince Rupert BC (2020)

Because connections are frequently “visibly hidden” from the eyes despite their being deeply felt in the body, it can be challenging to perceive the universal Self. Indeed, they exist and they are recognized through embodied felt sensation rather than what we are socially and typically trained to see – a way to understand how the body intuitively senses. Shifting our perspective of sight as an embodied conscious way of seeing expands the ‘other possibilities’<sup>9</sup> of experiencing the universal Self that resonates in the realm of the visibly hidden. The creation of the visual and sonic components of OEWA always began and ended with the intuitive felt sensation of the body. Whether it was knowing where to extract the strings for the set, creating the animation for the projection, or lighting the space, project creation was a conversation between the body and form, light and space. For example, there was a blue hallway light that cast diagonally across the stage. It wasn’t until my body was immersed in the light that the quality of movement for that phrase became clear. Poet Rainer Maria Rilke writes,

“Bodily delight is a sensory experience, not any different from pure looking or the pure feeling with, which a beautiful fruit fills the tongue; it is a great, an infinite learning that is given to us, a knowledge of the world, the fullness and the splendour of all knowledge. And it is not our acceptance of it that is bad; what is bad is that most people misuse this learning and squander it and apply it as a stimulant on the tired places of their lives and as a distraction rather than as a way of gathering themselves for their highest moments. (from *Letters to a Young Poet*, Letter # 4, <https://www.carrothers.com/rilke4.htm>).”

In putting these concepts together as a maker, I became more intentional about how to craft the experience for my audience. As an example, to begin and end the work I started with a minute in the dark, a quiet moment of meditation to give the audience a space to tap into sensation and body. The complexity in expanding our ability to sense, or developing sense-ability, is not in the use of our senses themselves but the willingness and courage to face the awesomeness of the unknown – to sense beyond the sense-able.

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<sup>9</sup> Crawly, Ashon. “Blackpentecostal Breath.” *Fordham University Press*, 31 Oct. 2019, [www.fordhampress.com/9780823274550/blackpentecostal-breath/](http://www.fordhampress.com/9780823274550/blackpentecostal-breath/). Pg.2.

## Body in Light

With light and sensoriality (sensorial reality) as the medium of the performance, *Our Eyes Will Adjust* integrates the relationships of body and light, sound and feeling in space and time from a choreographer's perspective. In the article, "The Eye of The Storm," Tim Ingold writes, "seeing is the experience of light, what you see is in the light" (Ingold, 101). He describes properties of surfaces (the observable) as seeing, hearing and touching and properties of experience as light, sound and feeling. He illustrates this in an example where the perception of landscape is a "mode of observation" and "perceiving the weather is a mode of being" (experience) (Ingold, 102).<sup>10</sup> Throughout the process of creating OEWA, there was a constant exchange within myself as a designer/choreographer and a mover.

With respect to perspective, looking from the outside, I would question where the body could be in that universe. Moving inside helped me ask, *what and how am I feeling in this world and how and what do I want to experience?* After deciding what I wanted to experience, I would look as the designer and ask, *how can I create that environment for that desired felt experience to happen, or how can I materialize what my body just experienced?* Understanding that this is all subjective, it was a deep dive into both the inner and outer worlds as a designer who attends to creating an environment and a mover who wants to experience the environment. Amidst several questions, I continued to ask *how can we experience the same things differently?* The three iterations of OEWA were a way of approaching this way of perceiving. It was not necessarily about the *moreness* of seeing different things, but rather about seeing the same things differently: to be with what already exists around us and to sense that light, sound and felt sensations are ever shifting in their state of being.

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<sup>10</sup> Ingold, Tim. "The Eye of the Storm: Visual Perception and the Weather." *Visual Studies* (Abingdon, England), vol. 20, no. 2, 2005, pp. 97–104.



**Figure 9.** Co-composition of light and projection process (OEWA 2021)  
Images from left to right, Giselle Liu, Giselle Liu and Jack Chipman, Giselle Liu, and Rob Kitsos and Giselle Liu

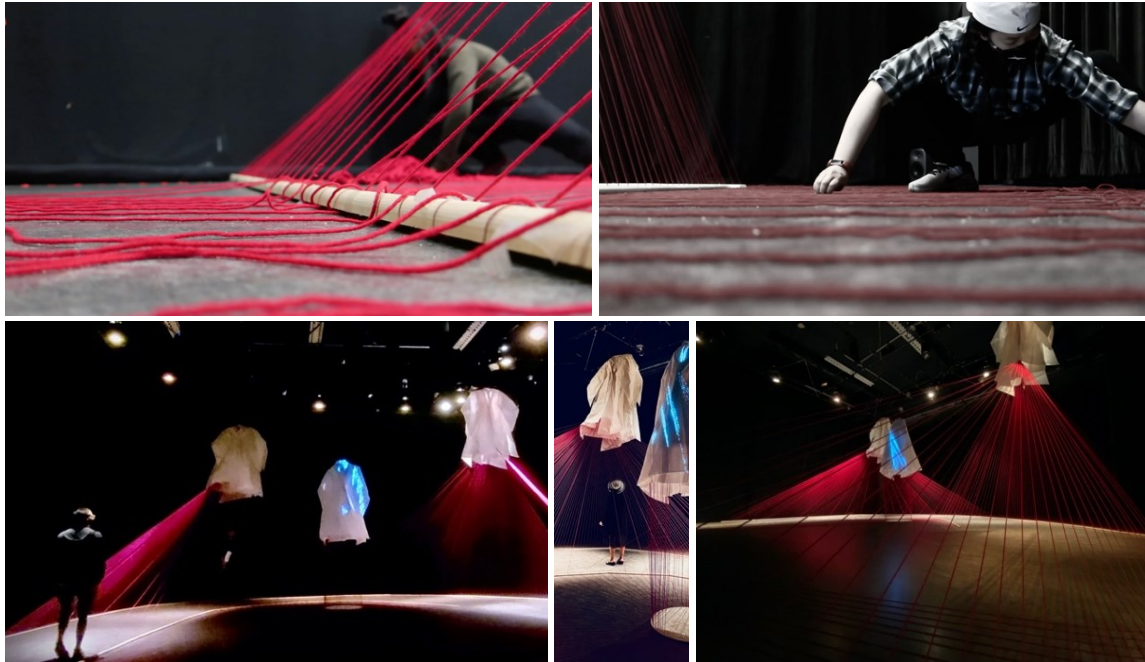
Although in OEWA there are structural forms choreographed in space with the hanfus and threads, light and sensoriality highlight, move, and continually negotiate the lines between material and immaterial, form and formlessness, and real and imagined. The use of projection allowed our eyes to move through the experience of what already exists in the space; it unveils, fades and hides the *already there* in the ever-shifting reality. The film was projected onto the curtain, with the audience peering into another dimension for approximately thirteen minutes. After, I, as performer, start to move live in the space behind the scrim, permeating the lines of definition between what is real and what is not. With respect to Ingold's properties of surface and experience, I ask, *what is surface and what is experience if the audience cannot touch the performer but can see and feel them?*

I designed the space with the team as a choreographer, not as a set designer or architect-- as a mover who has been trained to inhabit, embody and experience space. In designing the installation, I thought about what I can reveal, what is already in the space with light and sensoriality as a perspective medium. I also asked where and how body and new technology can support the experience. While the audience sits, haptic visuals using sound and perspective open them to the experience depth by shifting the perspective of light. By changing the way we used light sources, the scrims opacity created a clear boundary while the transparency of the scrim opened the space. In addition, having the space transform from a set to an installation is a way the audience can experience the light as an observer (surface) and experiencer (experience), changing where the audience is looking from and what they are looking with (optically/ haptically, eyes/body, touching/feeling). I relate light and sensoriality to Ingold's description of the experience of weather: "It is not so much as an object as a medium of perception" (Ingold, 102).

Integrating body and new technology does not take away from the human experience, but enables a different perspective of the human experience. Technology gives us a way to have an embodied experience of what the mind cannot yet perceive or the eyes have yet to see. For example, the frequency we used for the introduction of the work was an inaudible frequency for humans at 4hz. When Charlie and I were working

in the space, our bodies learned to feel the vibration and to our surprise, over time, our sense-ability adjusted, and we could hear it. This shifted how I listened and embodied sound by holding my attention differently. For the composition of the work, Charlie used Max MSP to modulate the sounds generated from the movement, instruments and sensors to integrate the body's agency as the root of creation. Following this same thread of the body as the starting point of design, I created patches in touch designer, using a python code to modulate the generative geometric lines and traces of particles during the live feed. For some of the pre-recorded work I added a video input in the patch so the recorded animation was coming from dancer, I used overlays in post-production to simulate the traces in Premier Pro. As a result, the performance interweaved both live-feed as well as pre-recorded projection.

For this work, I wanted to sustain the idea of other possibilities. Some of the live-feed was projected onto the curtain and scrim, leaving it ambiguous as to whether or not the animation was live or pre-recorded, blurring the lines as to whether or not reality does or does not exist behind a screen. Sometimes we need tangible proof for our minds to conceive a possibility. This proof can come through imagination, memory, image or action, which in nature are not so different from one another. What our minds can perceive exists in a realm of possible realities, whether or not it is materialized; perhaps it is the limits we impose upon our own notions of thought that create boundaries to the other possible. The transformation of space explored the materialization of other possibilities existing in the same space/time. Indeed, as Elizabeth Grosz writes, "The limits of possible spaces are the limits of possible modes of corporeality: the body's infinite pliability is a measure of the infinite plasticity of the spatiotemporal universe in which it is housed and through which bodies become real, are lived, and have effects" (quoted in Kozel, 137).



**Figure 10. – 10.4.** Top Images: Building installation, (OEWA 2021)  
 Bottom Images: Documentation of Installation, (OEWA 2021)

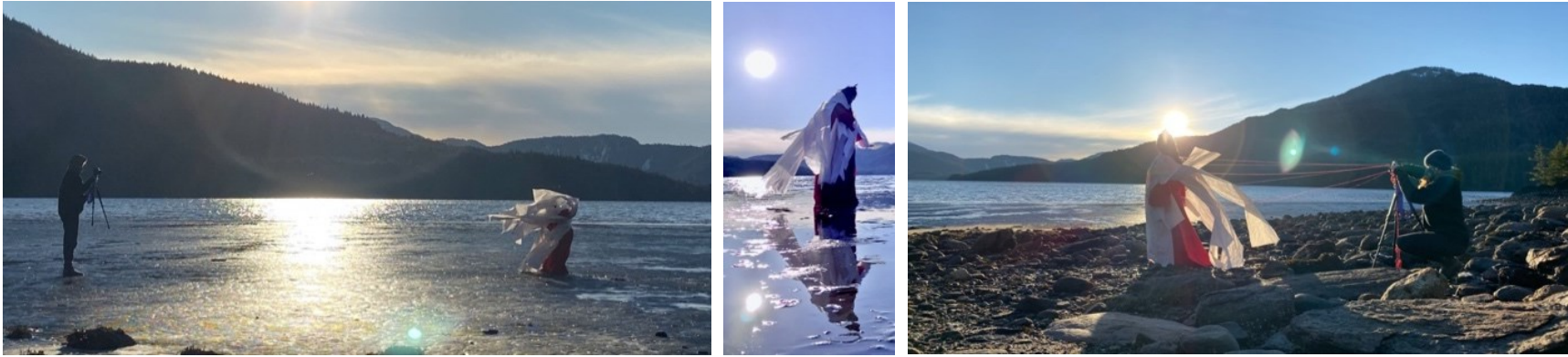
As a set, the audience sat and observed a space outside of themselves and as an installation they stepped into the world, to be a part of and to feel the aliveness of *otherness* and what *else* exists within their own perception. Sharing the work physically and virtually/digitally was not to take away from the aspects of live performance. Along these lines, Matthew Reason writes, “Screen representations of theatre and dance performance, therefore, make an implicit statement about not so much the loss or absence of liveness, but about the otherness of liveness” (Reason, p. 110). There are obvious differences between live and digital performance and within these living platforms and though a very difficult task, I asked of my audience to remove the judgement of what feels better or worse, but rather to sense and to experience all worlds in their presence and wholeness.

### **Movement, Film and Sound**

I took a phenomenological approach grounded in the work of Merleau-Ponty to the compositional process of sound, projection, video, photography and choreography. In Kozel’s book, she quotes from J.G. Ballard, who writes that phenomenology is “The



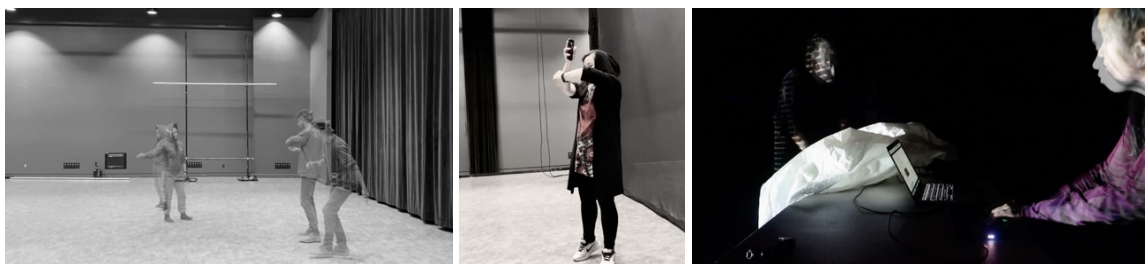
central nervous system's brave gamble that it exists" (quoted in Kozel, p.2). This observation both relates to and opposes the approach to my work. It relates in that it emerged from deep within the central nervous system – a sensed reality. And Ballard's axiom opposes the premise of OEWA in that its existence was not a gamble. The work was not about a gamble of existence, but rather about how open one can be to meeting existence. It was important for my work to embrace thought and planning while making room to encounter the unknown (structured improvisation) both for myself and the audience. The movement in the film and the process of capturing the footage was a structured improvisation. We set parameters with location, gear/equipment and images, and left space for movement improvisation for the videographer and dancer. The movement in the live performance and the online stream were also improvised, where structural parameters were created visually, spatially, temporally, and sonically.



**Figure 11. - 11.2.** Images taken by Tina Robinson with Madeline Peacock and Giselle Liu for short film component. (OEWA 20201)

To compose the sound, Charlie and I worked with movement and sensors to generate data and samples that helped us co-choreograph the final pre-recorded composition. I wanted the sound to come from the body, and the sensors gave us a place to meet, converse and to interpret what was happening, so that we could both experience and collect data of the phenomenological moment. Working with film, photography and sound artists in this way has given me the opportunity to approach and expand my perspectives around composition, choreography and telepathy. By telepathy, I refer to Merleau-Ponty's simplified perspective, understanding of how "the other's sensoriality is implicated in my own" (quoted in Kozel, p.281).

The way we compose gives us a way to teach our senses how to experience/sense differently. Working with sensors blurred the boundaries between various forces: body merged with machine and machine merged with body; sound led sensors, and sensors led sound; and sound moved the body and the body moved the sound. It was all connected. Being able to sense this dance shifted our perception of hierarchy and agency as a collaborative process. Working with inaudible frequencies (4hz) gave us a way to learn how our bodies can experience the sound by feeling to hear. Finding ways to make visible the visibly hidden in sound and sight through the body is a new way to be able to look and sense the world that is already around us. I never approached OEWA as a dance performance, but rather, as a co-composition of all components where dance was the thread in between.



**Figure 12. – 12.2.** Movement and composition with sensors with Charlie Cooper (OEWA 2021)

### **Kimonos to Hanfu, Threads and Colour**

Originally, the costume and installation were comprised of suspended Kimonos. I worked on a previous project with the paper kimonos with mentor and designer, Marsha

Roddy. The first dream I had about the costumes of this piece was one kimono suspended in space. However, my supervisor and others asked me to consider the role of the kimono and my connection to it. The image from the dream was too powerful to let go of, so I started running towards this question. Marsha sent the original kimono and a book on the history of Kimonos, from which I learned that the design originated from traditional Chinese hanfus. This opened a whole other universe: the more I researched, the more the hanfus came to life both in my physical and non-physical worlds. Hanfus, which literally translates to ‘clothes of the Han people’ were traditionally worn by all people; only later did they become clothing that represented hierarchy. The suspension of the hanfus in the space represents both my connection to my ancestry and future lineage, as well as my encounters with the cycle of life. With Marsha’s permission, I worked with my mother to alter the original design of the kimonos and transform them into the Hanfus I use in the work. The time of making together played an integral role in re-connecting with my ancestry and culture. It was not only about the conversations in between making, but the moments of stillness and silence when we lived in our flow state of being and creation.



**Figure 13. – 13.3.** Hanfu making process with Katherine Liu (OEWA 2021)

In a time I was learning to deal with grief, Marsha once explained to me that our bodies are like coats in our physical lifetime and when we face our physical death our spirit removes the coat and returns to energy, much like the concept of reincarnation in Buddhism where the cycle infinitely continues. In Qi Gong our physical existence is a place where Heaven and Earth can meet. The suspended Hanfus are ascending to sky and the single hanfu returns to earth--and I remain somewhere in between.

In Chinese mythology there's a story about the 'thread of fate.' It is a myth that describes an invisible red thread that attaches those destined to meet and fall in love – very cupid-esque. Though my work is not necessarily about two people finding each other, the red threads represent the interconnection with the *other* and the journey of self-realization, a homecoming and meeting of the self at the center and the universal Self.

Traditionally in Chinese culture red and white are not worn together as red represents celebration and happiness while white represents grief, mourning and death. I kept this in the work because somehow, the in-betweenness and the grounds of these two selves meeting, requires us to meet in the circle of death and rebirth. It is a place where joy and grief, celebration and sorrow, life and death embrace one another in all that they are. It is to experience letting go and holding on, fear of anxiety and uncertainty, and the love and grace of the *isness* of now - to truly feel how life and death are determined by a single breath.

As I move in the space, I acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors as their spirit watches over me and that the future generation will stand upon my shoulders. The final scene and installation was to acknowledge the presence of those who have come before me and those who will come after. And, with an *other possible* perspective that though as the self moves through its physical death its external existence is finite, the universal Self's energetic and spiritual existence is infinite and timeless - life in full circle.

When I began this project, I had a sense I was coming to an end of a cycle, that somehow this was the completion of a full circle. I had dream after dream about empty void spaces with one light, sometimes linear, spherical, waves or particles. Often, I would be at the center or point of this light, both in and as the light. I would move between the dimensions of light and void. The more that I dreamt the more the light would change my perception, I would see generative and geometric patterns of lines, waves and particles that would change my sense of place, depth and proximity in space; every evolution led to another unfolding. It led to another cycle of death and rebirth, every cycle unfolding and enfolding into another through a multiverse of infinite layers.

Circles and spirals are subtly weaved throughout the work, in sound, movement and visuals as a way to represent a meeting of the continuous cycle of birth and death of the self at the center and the infinite nature of the universal Self. When experiencing the sorrows and joys of life, Mrs. Roddy often reminds me of the nature of impermanence, that, “We shed a thousand coats in one lifetime before our physical death and this too shall pass.”



**Figure 14.** Installation, included in image: Giselle Liu, (OEWA 2021)

## **Conclusion**

During the artist talk, Violaine asked a great question: “in one phrase, what would you want the audience to take from this work?” I was quick to respond with “trust in the unknown.” Now, with a little more time to reflect, I would add, it’s all connected – trust in the unknown, it is all connected. The process of making OEWA was less about seeking out new connections than slowly adjusting my perception to see what was already there. I wanted to expand my perceptive approach to choreography and movement, to sense them differently from my conditioned habits. Exploring the choreography of space, sound, and visual arts as a mover changed the way I see movement; it allowed me to be able to witness dance in all the aliveness that is interwoven into our daily lives. To look from the self at the center and the Universal self, as if all duality is the same but different. I don’t yet have the words to explain what is the

same and that answer may never come and so I continue to ask, how interconnected are we?

At the end of the day, I have no answers, but I have learned to ask more questions. This process has provoked curiosity of what else is already here surrounding, immersing and dancing with us and how its continuous unveiling might reveal the power and depth of our interconnections as humans with others. Technology's design was informed by nature, and as I continue my journey exploring the possibilities of human sense-ability, nature informs me in how I can apply technology to uncover the veils of human potential. From letter four in his book *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke writes,

...to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. (<https://www.carrothers.com/rilke4.htm>)

As a result of this process, I remain in the experience of my questions and ruminate in this state of interbeing between the material and immaterial, finite and the infinite, and the self and the universal Self. I approach these questions without seeking answers from my mind, but with a pure curiosity and embodied trust that we're all a lot more interconnected than we practice. Teacher and guru Moojibaba says, "We don't have to work out life, your mind is an inadequate instrument to solve the mystery of life. You are the mystery of life and that which is aware of mystery." (28:39 – 28:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRJVKIrEG5Q>). As I continue walking along my creative journey, I am in no rush to know the answers, but to witness and experience the mysteries, evolution and isness of *human-kindness* as we live in the unveiling of answers that simply lead to more questions.

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# **Project Documentation**

# OUR EYES WILL ADJUST

PRESENTED BY:  
GISELLE LIU

SUPERVISOR SUPERVISOR: ROB KITSOS  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS:  
PETER DICKINSON AND SIYING DUAN  
EXTERNAL EXAMINER: CRISTINA BUCCI

THIS WORK WILL BE PRESENTED AT SCHOOL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY, VANCOUVER, CANADA, ON THE UNCEDED TERRITORY OF THE -SKWŪW Ū7MESH (SQUAMISH), STÓ:LŌ AND SƏLIO LWƏTƏ7SELILWITULH (TSEIL-WAUTUH) AND XWMƏKKWƏYƏM (MUSQUEAM) NATIONS. IT WAS CREATED AT SCA AND IN PRINCE RUPERT, CANADA, ON THE UNCEDED TERRITORIES OF THE TSYM'YSEN NATION.



Photograph taken by Sydney Bunning



# SHORT FILM

PRINCE RUPERT BC

After the dancer enters the stage from the audience and walks into the performance area, the curtain closes and there is a two-part film that projects onto the curtain.

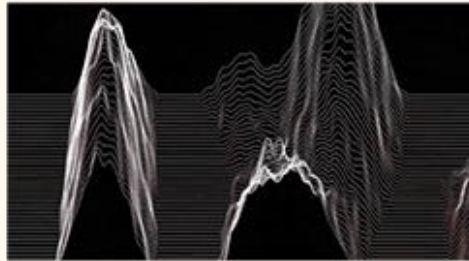
This was filmed on the unceded territories of the Tsy'mysen nation in Prince Rupert BC.

Videographer Madeline Peacock  
Photographs by Madeline Peacock and Tina Robinson



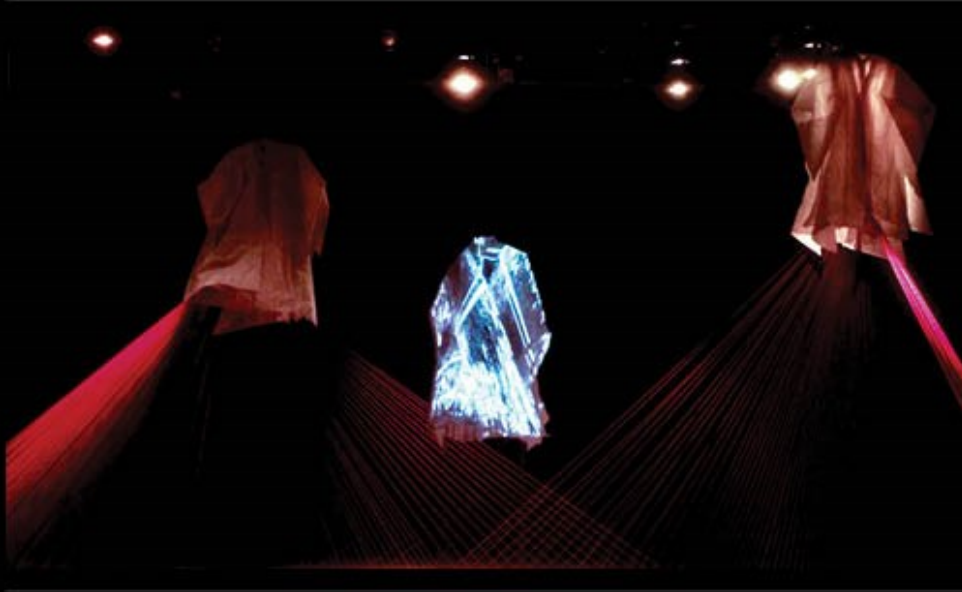


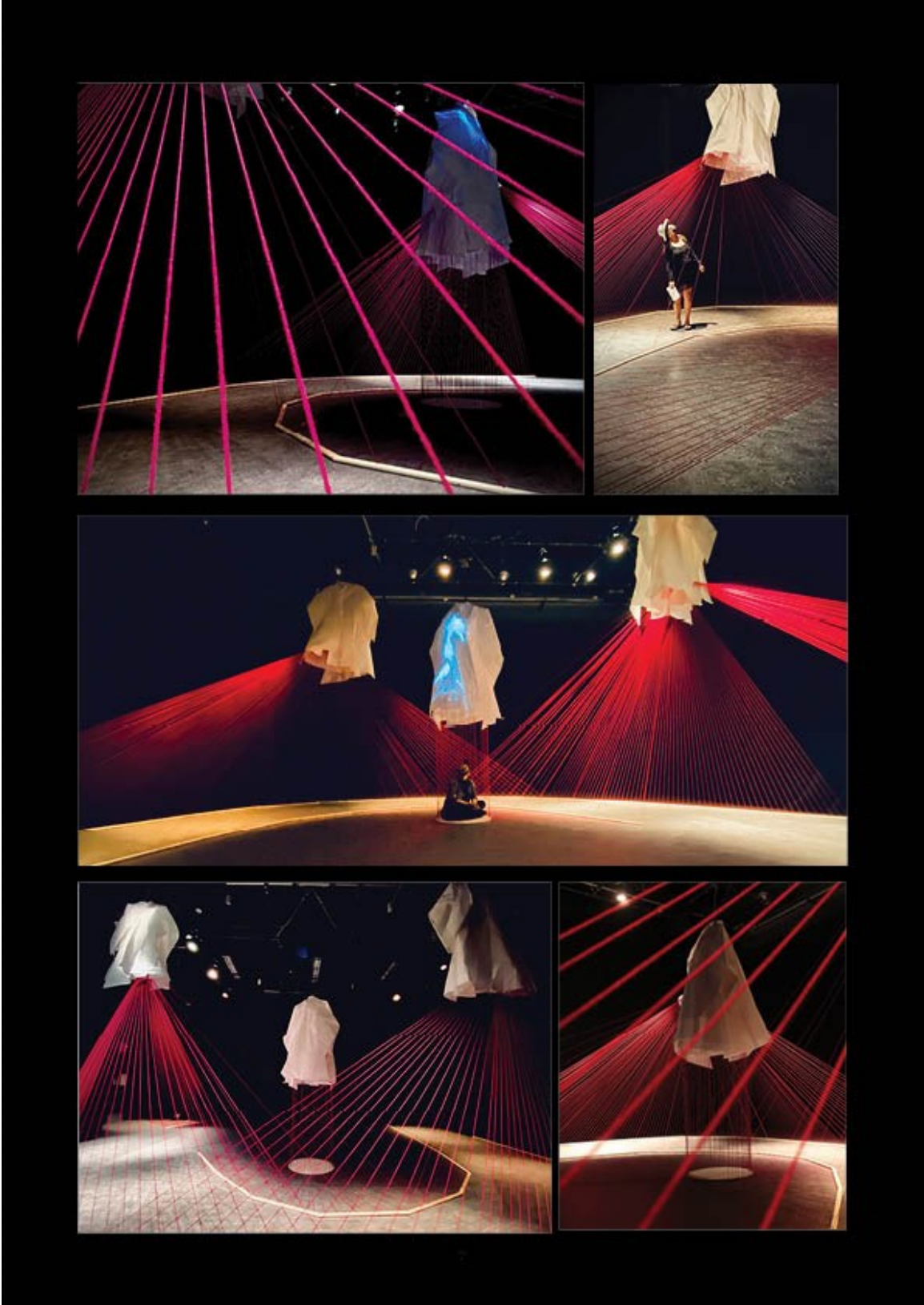
# PERFORMANCE



**THE DANCER ENTERS FROM  
BEHIND THE AUDIENCE . A BEAM OF LIGHT CASTS  
TOWARDS THE AUDIENCE THROUGH A SLIVER IN THE  
CURTAIN . THE DANCER WALKS TOWARDS THE LIGHT  
AND THE CURTAINS CLOSE . AFTER A SHORT FILM  
PROJECTED ONTO THE CURTAIN FINISHES, THE  
CURTAIN OPENS REVEALING A SCRIM CREATING A  
THIN VEIL BETWEEN THE AUDIENCE AND DANCER .  
LIGHTS AND A VARIATION BETWEEN LIVE-FEED AND  
PRE-RECORDED PROJECTIONS SHIFT THE  
TRANSLUCENCY OF THE VEIL AND THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF WHAT IS SEEN .**

# INSTALLATION







# DOCUMENTATION

MOVEMENT TRAINING

Documentation Room with QR Codes to videos of process



Sound Composition and Installation



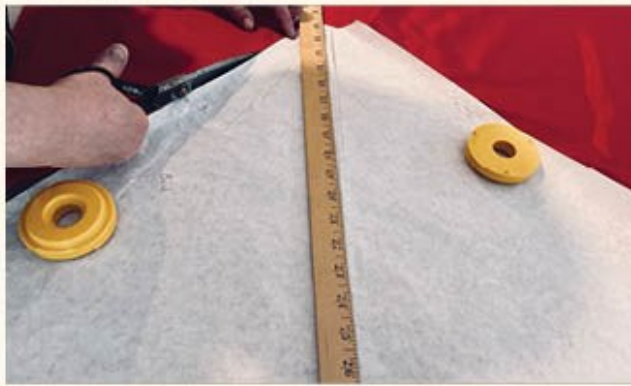
Film and Projection



# COSTUME



PROCESS





# CONTRIBUTORS

## **Senior Supervisor | Robert Kitsos**

Supervising Committee | Peter Dickinson and Siying Duan

External Supervisor | Cristina Bucci

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Aldazosa, Wladimiro Woyno Rodriguez, Jean Routhier, Rodney Fenske,

Darryl Strohan, Dylan Walmsley, Leif Liu, Bernice Paet, Zack Faulks, Kenny Sue,

Niall

## **Creative Team**

Composer | Charlie Cooper

Technical Director (Phase 2) | Kevin Kiju Kim

Costume Design | Marsha Roddy and Katherine Liu

Projection and Lighting Design | Jack Chipman

Cinematographer and Photographer | Sydney Bunning

Programmer and Technical Support | Steven Kobza

Videographer and Photographer (Short film in Performance) | Madeline Peacock

Indigenous Studies Advisor | Tina Robinson

Set and Installation (Phase 2) | Giselle Liu (Suggestions From Mansi Patel)

Set Design and Co-Technical Director (Phase 1) | Megan Lane and June Hsu

## **Special Thanks**

Katherine and Steven Liu, Marsha Roddy, Aakansha Ghosh, Mansi Patel, Olivia

Valenza, Faune Ybarra, Bronwen McVeigh, Ellen Yang, Patricia Sterritt, Pearl Innes,

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## **Support From**

BC Arts Council Scholarship Award Program

## **Appendix A: Uncovering Veils of the Visibly Hidden**

“I was going to Jodi’s, and I...[pause]...I just forgot. One minute I was trying to do too much, then I forgot...[pause]...where she lives...” (extracted from an audio journal entry, December 2017).

In 2017 I had relapsing symptoms of a flu virus that entered my brain. In the first 6 months, I was riddled with anxiety when I experienced memory gaps, numbness in my body and interrupted speech patterns. The one thing that would calm me down was to give attention to my heightened embodied sensorial awareness. This intentional attention brought me to a presence threaded to a consciousness deep within myself. The longer I continued to focus on this intimate sensorial awareness, I began to witness the ever-shifting nature of reality in the world happening around me I would experience light and colours more vibrantly, sounds more distinctly, timeless linearly, lines of geometry in structures more prominently, and waves of moving energy between immateriality and materiality. At first this way of seeing was a therapeutic practice to relieve my anxiety and fear, but as I began to heal, this way of intentional and attentive looking evolved. It transformed my perception of reality—uncovering things that were once visibly hidden to me. The more that was unveiled the more connections I felt between my body and space in an ever-shifting reality.

My sense of attention to structure, detail and perception of time began to transform. While choreographing, I would see transitions of patterns and forms in the space more clearly and infinite possibilities of movement patterns in and with other bodies. It was as if I was looking through a camera lens, one Eye that could zoom out and see the whole map or zoom in and intimately focus on one small detailed gesture. The line of the pinky mattered to me because the slight misaligned angle would break the flow of energy. This way of seeing wasn’t only an object of sight; it was an embodied experience of a synaesthetic blending of senses and an unravelling of interconnection with forces greater than me. The more I paid attention to this embodied way of looking, the more these interconnections expanded, as if I could interchange my experience of looking between an experiencer and an observer: a self at the center and an

interconnected Self that could zoom out. This way of seeing challenged the lens of a type of societal numbness I had previously experienced. A numbness that arises from an overly habitual, conditioned and limited way of perceiving daily happenings rather than being present with its beauty and ever-shifting nature. In a world where success is product driven, awakened by the experience with my brain, this new way of looking gives me an opportunity to appreciate the process as much the product, the experience as much as the event and the present as much as the *was, there and than* – the non-linear co-composition of human-based time.

As a movement artist, this alternate mode of seeing led me to ask how movement and kinesthetic awareness of lived experiences can open our body's ability to consciously see. There are a lot of pressures to maintain oneself and ensure optimal productivity in a society that really demands production. Consciously seeing through the body gives insight to a deeper sense of self, breaks the learned hierarchy of the senses and challenges the social conditions of perception. Bringing consciousness to sensation is to acknowledge that the lived embodied experience of our senses—as much as cognitive—provides us with knowledge (a way of learning and imagining) and wisdom (a way of intuitively connecting with the visibly hidden).

I use the term *seeing* interchangeably as a conscious synaesthetic embodiment of all our senses, and two ways of being and knowing through the of eyes: the internal self and the Eye of the Self (which I also refer to as the Intimate or Universal Self throughout this paper). I suggest what is visibly hidden depends on whether the experiencer is open enough to perceive and experience differently conditioned ways of seeing. The sensorial self-awareness of sense-ability I emphasize, is an intimate experience of our senses rather than an external distraction or a shopping for sensorial gratification. In pursuit of this conscious sensorial awareness the practice of *seeing is* a co-composition between the phenomenology of our ever-shifting reality and an eco-system of intelligence. The harmony of this eco-system is a co-composition of intelligences that Leanne Simpson refers to as *whole body intelligence in which Simpson describes*, “The land, Aki, is both context and process. The process of coming to know is learner led and profoundly spiritual in nature. Coming to know is the pursuit of whole-body intelligence” (Simpson,

p. 151). Paired with Ashon Crawley's phrase of *other possibilities* "otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what *is*," (Crawley, p. 2), this way of looking paves a way to ask: what other ways can humans potentially see? In addition to my practice based research I will examine four concepts: the phenomenology of '*double vision*' in *Eye And Mind* by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, '*aki*' in Leanne Simpson's *Land As Pedagogy*, and '*sovereign cyclical governance*' in Vanessa Watts' *Place Thought*, and the fourth, '*the dance of attention*' in *Thought in the Act*, by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi.

### **Opening our perception: self and Self**

Being open and heightening our conscious sense-ability can draw us closer to an intimate self-awareness. To begin, in opening our ability to consciously see it is important that we expand our *sense-abilities* to what Ashon Crawley calls *the otherwise possibilities*. Unravelling our human sense-ability for sight or seeing is to engage with the question of: what other possible ways can we see? Crawley, a teacher, writer and artist, states, "...otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what *is*... Otherwise possibilities exist alongside that which we can detect with our finite sensual capacities. Or, otherwise possibilities exist and the register of imagination, the epistemology through which sensual detection occurs—that is, the way we think the world—has to be altered in order to get at what's there" (Crawley, p.2). Typically when we think of seeing, we think of sight, a way to see an object. But what if there was another way of experiencing seeing or multiple other possibilities? Diedre Sklar, a dance ethnologist, writes that "Dance is, of course, both kinaesthetic and visual, and, whereas felt processes may be dominant for the do-er and seen products for the viewer, these are always mutually informing" (Sklar, p.4). As a choreographer I train the ability to see from the perspective of self (perceiving from the centre of the work) and the Universal Self (perceiving in co-composition with what is outside and around of the work). A pas de deux of simultaneously embracing the phenomenological movement of energy within the body, mind and soul, while designing the translation of this internal energy into an external physical world. It is an expression of movement that is



interconnected with all that surrounds us – the cycle of waves collapsing to particles, formless collapsing into form and energy collapsing into matter. In the process of creating, there is a fluidity, a transference of energy on waves between the self and the Self, mutually informing both see-ers.

## Double Vision

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory on embodied perception paves a way to examine the phenomenology of experience and thought through the body. He gives us a way to look at this dual way of seeing as the self and Self when he writes, "The body is both the soul's native space, and the matrix of every other existing space. Thus vision doubles" (Ponty, 11). For the sake of this paper I've identified Merleau-Ponty's concept of double vision's dual way of seeing as *the self* and Self (*Universal and Intimate Self*). Experiencing through the *self* is positioning the individual at the center of the experience; and the experience of the Self is woven into the web of interwoven matrixes which is cyclically governed rather than centrally focused. Merleau-Ponty describes this mutual and relational dance of vision from the perspective of a painter as a corporeal way of simultaneously seeing (body as the center of perception) and being (body as a medium of consciousness) (*Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," Annotation by Leila Wilson, n.d., p. 1*). He challenges Descartes' mind/body separation – where Descartes considers them to be interacting entities, but ultimately separate. Merleau-Ponty questions the Cartesian way of perceiving through empirical observation and thought and emphasizes the phenomenological interconnection of body and environment in space. In our Western societies today, I suggest we are more accustomed to perceiving our sensorial experience from *the self*, evident in our pursuit of individual success. In order to restore the harmony between these two ways of seeing and to heighten our self-awareness, it is important to remember and embody the intuitive intelligence of *the Universal Self*. Being able to embody our senses through *the Universal Self* strikes a balance between our current imbalanced human-centered way of being *in* the world with an entangled and interconnected way of being *with* the world; a human and nature way of

seeing as opposed to the over socialized condition of human above nature as way of looking.

### Evolving movement practice

How does the ability to mutually see as the *self* and *the Intimate Self* help us with heightening our senses in pursuit of intuitive sensorial intelligence and self-awareness? I investigated this question in the cyclical evolution of my own movement practice. My dance journey began at three years old with ballet at Ms. Siroca's home basement studio, then Chinese dance under the teachings of Mr. Wong in the basement of a church in Prince Rupert, BC. Though my Chinese dance ended at ten years old or so, I continued dancing in a studio (ballet, jazz, musical theatre) and completed my BA in contemporary dance at the University of Calgary. Fast forward to now, as I come to the end of another cycle of my life, when I've returned to another traditional Chinese movement practice, Qi Gong.

In looking at the evolution of past and present movement training practices between ballet and Chinese dance and contemporary and Qi gong, I witness an evolution of this mutual dance between the self and the Universal Self. Let me begin by saying this is a subjective opinion from my personal practice-based research and I'm specifically referring to the training and not the performance aspect. In beginner levels of ballet training and Chinese dance, there is an aim for aesthetics—the perfect lines, extreme athleticism, flexibility etc. Whereas in contemporary there are techniques such as gaga that are grounded in the experiences of sensation and Qi gong, a practice of moving the energy or qi (life force) within by cultivating the energy from the outside world (Heaven and Earth) at the introduction level. Though there are specific patterns, stances, breaths and sounds in Qi gong, the connection to understanding the movement itself is not necessarily aesthetically visible. Indeed, in my experience, much of it is visibly hidden. However, in ballet and Chinese dance, there are visually distinguishable features that represent technical expertise. For example, in an arabesque in ballet there are specific mechanics-- straight back leg, leg above 90 degrees, rotation, alignment behind the shoulder, winged foot, elongated breath in the line, etc.— whereas in Qi Gong, you are

asked if you can feel the energy moving between the hands or if you can feel the heat or flow of energy increase in the body. This is an example of a difference between external sensorial aesthetic and internal sensorial energy: both are felt yet seen or witnessed in different ways. While both are physical practices – I experienced one practice as an art form designed for performance and one is a martial art/spiritual practice for self-awareness. Ballet and traditional Chinese dance allowed me to explore the *self* at the center and gaga and Qi gong practices were geared more towards experiences of the Universal *Self* surrendered to the cyclical governance of the matrix that is interconnected with physical and non-physical energies. This mutual exchange and conversation of movement can help expand our way of seeing and feeling as an immersive synaesthetic blending of our senses. Both practices are important in the pursuit of whole-body intelligence and self-awareness as a way to engage with intuitive intelligence. We can be at the center of the experiences while doing, and a part of the *whole* while observing, learning, reflecting, and evolving. For a moment, I would like to draw a focus to the Universal Self as a way to help expand this notion of witnessing our interconnection with the physical and non-physical world. Being able to zoom out in the perspective of Self offers a way to be able to see a bigger picture and reveal that maybe we're all a little more interconnected than we think. Designer, healer and mentor Marsha Roddy always reminds me that, “we are all drops of rain falling into the same ocean.” Like drops of rain in the ocean, grains of sand on the beach, and minerals in the soil, many non-western traditional cultures embrace this context of *oneness* - that we are all interconnected with the physical and non-physical worlds humans inhabit. For example, Tim Ingold writes, “Yet we cannot see things unless we first can see, and we cannot see unless we are immersed, from the start, in what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘the soil of the sensible’ – that is, in a ground of being in which self and world are initially commingled (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 160)” (Ingold, 99).

### **Interconnection: A non-human centred awareness**

Merleau-Ponty's ideas resonate with my experience of non-Western cultural beliefs that could help us better understand our sense of interconnectivity with *the other*.

Acknowledging our interconnectivity in these other ways of seeing challenge the social hierarchies of the senses. Growing up in a Chinese household, love, family and respect for our elders and ancestors were at the moral forefront of my upbringing. I spent the past 11 years abroad exploring my own cultural background and other belief systems around the world. Now, and by no coincidence, I have returned to my home town, Prince Rupert, BC, and naturally found myself collaboratively researching with Indigenous Chilkat artist Tina Robinson. Our conversations have opened my way of seeing the differences and similarities in our non-Western cultures and worldly beliefs, yet there is a particular thread that pierced my attention, a notion of interconnection in an interwoven web of *oneness*. Though I write about non-Western experiences I understand that there is no clear cut line between Western and non-Western cultures. In my own experience, the threads of oneness in non-Western cultures are perspectives that can open our ways of experiencing the harmony of self and the Universal Self. This interwoven matrix of threads includes: past, present and future, physical and non-physical, wisdom and knowledge, worldly and sacred, visible and invisible, all entangled in the present moment.

#### Indigenous practices and knowledge

Leanne Simpson gives us a way to better comprehend the context of this interconnection through Indigenous Nishnaabeg knowledge in her chapter “*Land As Pedagogy*” from her book *As We Have Always Done*. Her work also helps us understand how the unravelling of this interconnection is accessed through the act of doing (practice) and *akinoomage*. Simpson explains: “Aki includes all aspects of creation: landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, and energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies, and networks that connect these elements. Knowledge in *akinoomaage* flows through the layered spirit world above the earth, the place where spiritual beings reside and the place where our Ancestors sit.” (Simpson, n.d., p. 154)

The importance of land in indigenous culture is beyond seeing land only as place. Land is a living existence that can be experienced; it is living knowledge and wisdom that is sovereignly and cyclically governed with and not below or against humans. Vanessa

Watts' article, "*Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency Amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)*" articulates the difference between Western and non-Western sovereignty, in that Western sovereignty is human centered with focus on absolute power. She goes on to quote Sharon Venn, and writes, "for us, absolute power in the Creator and the natural order of all living things; not only in human beings...[ ]...Our sovereignty is related to our connections to the earth and is inherent" (Watts, p.8). Through the lens of traditional Indigenous knowledge and respecting sovereign cyclical governance Watts explains other possible ways of looking. Opening ourselves to Indigenous practices and cultures can expand our spectrum of seeing and harmonize the hierarchies of our senses. It sheds light into the sacredness of how vast our interconnections extend in the soil of Mother Earth. In a conversation with Lax Kw'alaams artist, Russell Mather, he taught me two very important words: *malsk*, meaning true telling; and *adaawx*, meaning sacred stories or true telling with landmarks. He made very clear that what is passed on through knowledge and wisdom of lived experience on the land is not a myth, nor imagination, but rather a sacred true telling. When practices are taken to the land, the self and Universal Self are surrendered in an intimate relationship with the sacred knowledge embedded in the soil, it is a way to learn and evolve.

Simpson writes,

"An individual's intimate relationship with the spiritual and physical elements of creation is at the center of a learning journey that is lifelong [...] there existence is ultimately dependant upon intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty and respect with all elements of creations including plants and animals" (Simpson, n.d., p. 154).

In order to acknowledge this sovereign shared existence with aki we must adapt our ways of looking, seeing, witnessing and perceiving as a way to restore the experience of sight through the Eye of the Universal Self. In addition to cognitively expanding the spectrum of our interconnection to nature and other, our vision improves with practice and learning while doing, a co-composition of intuitive sensorial intelligence and whole-body intelligence. Simpson writes about whole-body intelligence in a pursuit of a harmony

that embraces the ecosystem of knowledge including but not limited to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual intelligence.

### Experience on the land

To illustrate, as a part of my research I created a work entitled *Smgan. Smgan* (cedar) is a short film that embraces the rare opportunity to capture the intimate process of cedar harvesting with Tina Robinson. Filmed in Lax Kw'alaams on the unceded territories of Ts'mysen Nation, the short experimental documentary captures the first steps of the traditional Indigenous art form of chilkat weaving; the harvest. Prior to embarking on this journey, I asked about the process, and Robinson explained that there were so many things that couldn't be translated through words. The conversation ended with Tina saying, "I don't know you just gotta do it and you'll find out for yourself." She was right. It wasn't until I went through the process of trekking through the woods and harvesting the cedar, that I felt intimately connected with what her unspoken words were trying to convey, the profound visibly hidden and deeply felt sensation of my interconnection with Mother Earth. An interconnection that can only be felt when our body is immersed in Hers, a reminder of how infinitesimally small we are and how infinitely vast Her existence is. Simpson writes, "if you want to learn about something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it" (Simpson, n.d., p. 165).

The intention of making this film was to shine a light on the land, the work, and stories behind Tina's intricate craft of chilkat weaving; in the process my perceptions of seeing transformed and evolved. I create mini documentaries of artists' processes that inspire new ways of looking as a way to spark curiosity of the work in progress; parts of creations that are often overlooked in a society that focuses more on a calculable value based on the product of the work. This notion of calculating values based on material product extends far beyond art. As an example, success in our society is often measured by individual monetary worth, tangible accolades, trophies and awards. These individual calculable and tangible values are important however it can become imbalanced when we solely focus on the self and forget the Universal Self. Balancing the Universal Self helps us understand that the work we create is both a contribution to and because of a greater

whole. The ability to see an unfolding process and all the components that make the work possible give us a way to witness the other forces involved in the product of a singular work. As a component of my upcoming thesis project I'll be working on an experimental short film.

I've been working with footage of movement in the natural world and typical spaces such as a studio to artistically extract different perspectives of what else possibly exists in that space by changing the colour, brightness and abstracting layers of time. As a movement artist I play with composition in the scope of time, space and weight. For this project in addition to perceiving choreography in time, space and weight, I'm exploring movement composition with light, colour and layers of extraction in experimental short videos. My perspectives of light, colour and time were opened while I was working on the land. There is a required vigilance and heightening of senses in the woods as we are still respectfully with animals who inhabit the land. And in this state of heightened awareness I was particularly attentive to the way light led us to the harvest, coloured and nurtured the side of the tree that could be harvested and also dictated the time in which we could spend in one location before it became too dark. I observed these notions of knowledge in Russell's navigation and protective skills on the land and Tina and her mentor Pearl Innis's conversation, knowledge, practice and wisdom with the land that led them to what, where and when to harvest. The phenomenology of traditional harvesting, carving, spinning and weaving with the natural world is an entanglement of wisdom, knowledge, surrender and creation – a way of being and knowing in the world through the body's engagement on the land.

This insight of wisdom and knowledge of our interconnectivity to the multi-dimensional universe has transformed my compassion and the way I connect with others in and beyond this world. It has given me permission to question my own hierarchical conditions of what I think I see and what I know I feel. The embodiment of interconnectivity gives me reassurance in moments of darkness and creation. I continually lean into this wisdom during times of uncertainty in life and in making, a knowing that I belong to a Higher Power; a power that has been too faithful for me to believe that I am any more or less than a part of a greater whole.

## Invisible red thread

Opening myself to these conscious ways of seeing and experiencing my interconnectivity with the world around me gave me a way to trace the invisible thread to the Intimate Self. In between relapses I started to learn about neuroplasticity, that our brains have the ability to re-wire. Inspired by two quotes, the lines of Leonard Cohen's song *Anthem*, "There is a crack, a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in" and Sufi poet Rumi's quote, 'You have to keep breaking your heart until it opens - I wrote on several post-it notes plastered all over my walls, *'Your heart is breaking in the dark to let the light in'*. I wore a ring of a feather and two bracelets: one was a rose gold band that read *'fearless'* and the other was a red threaded bracelet. There was an ongoing story unfolding in the materiality of the words, ring and bracelets that brought an awareness of the Self to the self. These simple reminders brought me back to that deep co-compositional space of presence and kept me grounded in times of overwhelm during this transformative process of seeing.

The colour red has always been a part of my work; I always snuck red thread into my costumes somewhere somehow, and when I started building models of my installation for the graduate project, I found myself working with red threads again. After conversations with my family, I realized that red thread is a very significant part of Chinese culture, also known as the 'thread of fate' – it's a whole Chinese version of the cupid story. Because of this new way of working through practice-based research I started to research red thread and discovered that in Buddhism, invisible red thread symbolizes interconnectivity. Whether it's through tales of connections to your destined life partner or our interconnectivity to All – it significantly represents a form of interconnection. As a second component to the project, I am working on an installation of hanfus (traditional Chinese clothing) and red threads where light will design the architectural frame of the space that the audience can move through after the performance.



## Non-typical ways of looking

When I first arrived at SFU and was applying for a grant, Rob Kitsos, my supervisor, and Peter Dickinson, our graduate chair, both suggested I read *Thought in the Act* by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi. In the book, Tito Mukhopadhyay, a poet with autism writes, “I could see the night jasmines wet with morning dew, lit with fresh sunshine, trying to form a story with their jasmine-petal smell. I would see the story spread in the air...I would see that the moment I put my shadow above the flowers, the story would immediately stop forming (2008, 22)” (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 5). Manning and Massumi describe this as a dance of attention and in a way, there was a dance of attention of invisible threads connecting the words, ring and bracelets that unveiled a conversation of an unfolding story between myself and my Intimate Self. Through the synaesthetic co-compositional nature of our senses in mutual relations, a *dance of attention* opens us to non-typical ways of experiencing human potential of ways of seeing.

## **I am Light: Neurodiversity**

Looking through this lens challenges us to see beyond our socially constructed conditions and perceptive experience of *reality*. I connect embodied seeing and unveiling the visibly hidden to light as an object: that is, not as something you see with, but in. In his article “*The Eye Of The Storm: Visual Perception And The Weather*”, Tim Ingold writes, “Though we do not see light, we do see in light.” (Ingold, p.97).

What does Tim Ingold mean when he says that we see *in* light? To be honest, to unpack the complexity of this question is an entire research question of its own. However, we can attempt to understand the scope of what it means to be able to experience a synaesthetic blending of our senses through non-typical and neurodiverse ways of perceiving and experiencing light. For example, what are some other ways and possibilities of seeing light beyond our typical way of looking at light as an object? Philosophers Erin Manning and Brian Massumi’s concept of a *dance of attention* (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 4) illuminates this question. In their chapter “*Coming*

*Alive In A World Of Texture (For Neurodiversity)*” Manning and Massumi gives us a way to look at our sensorial experiences as a mutual and relational dance, that our senses are not necessarily a hierarchical experience but rather a synaesthetic one.

Neurodiversity gives us way to expand the unique human capacity to see and engage with our senses beyond the typical. As an example, Manning and Massumi write, “Autistic perception dances attention, affirming the interconnectedness of modes of existence, foregrounding the relationality at the heart of perception, emphasizing how experience unfolds through the matrix of qualitative fields of overlap...”(Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 6–7). Manning and Massumi describe attention in the *dance of attention* as “the holding pattern of an immersive, almost unidentifiable set of forces that modulate the event in the immediateness of its coming to expression. Attention not to, but with and toward, in and around” (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 4) The ‘Attention not to, but with and toward, in and around,’ is a way we can understand our body’s immersion in light when we look at “light as an experience of being” (Ingold, 99). Further, Manning’s and Massumi suggest that “a dance of attention is not attentiveness of the human *to* the environment but attentiveness *of* the environment to its own flowering, at the very limit where experience and imagination, immediacy and cross-checking overlap”(Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 6) The dance between the *selves* does not only relate to the root of our interconnected nature, but also the phenomenology of our presence in every moment, a presence that is always moving on a wave harmoniously ‘in between,’ – harmoniously in between all duality: experience and imagination, the happenings and possibilities, the doing and the evolving etc. This non-hierarchical harmony of our senses allows us to witness what Merleau-Ponty discovered when he explains vision as “the sense that at every moment one is opening one’s eyes for the first time upon a world-in-formation”(Ingold, p.99). Light’s ability to unveil our reality in-formation in this experience of our ever-shifting perception is nothing new to the history of art. Light, space and perception artists such as Olafur Eliasson and James Turrell, have paved a way for light as object, materiality, experience, and being to challenge our ways of seeing. These artists have sparked my curiosity about how the *Self* in the body experiences seeing in and as light and how it could possibly help us navigate through this period of this non-random chaos of uncertainty as we march on into the unknown.

## Light as object, experience and materiality

After spending time researching and exploring different embodiments of light, a third component of my work will be exploring light as object, experience, materiality and architecture. My methodology in designing an experiential and immersive (EI) performance works through three phases: the invitation, the experience and the closing. Typically in performances, lights go out and you expect the show to start, and at the end lights go out, and you expect the light to come on for the final bow. With the EI performance I am working towards, I want to explore durational periods of being in the dark for the invitation and the closing of the performance. Beginning in the dark is an opportunity to cleanse the palate of the senses and ending in the dark gives the audience a choice possibly to reflect or settle the senses after the experience. The audience will be informed prior to the performance so it doesn't get mistaken for technical difficulties. In the experience I use light as: an object of sight when I introduce a sliver of light as the first visual stimulus, light as the experience of being in the film as light and body become the materiality of the work, and light as the architectural frame shaping the space of the hanfus and red threads.

Since April 26<sup>th</sup> 2020, a part of my research has been a weekly conversation with a dear friend, expressive art therapist, Ellen Yang. Ms. Yang's incredible expressive art therapist practice focuses predominantly on the neurodiverse population; more specifically, her work focuses on the autistic community. Throughout our conversations and exchange of research, I've grown to understand that the more possibilities of seeing we come to explore the more we are able to see. Expanding our ways of seeing opens us to other ways of learning, communicating and connecting beyond the typical hierarchies accepted in our society. It offers validity as to why and how creativity and practice based research could advance how we engage with our current educational and social systems.

Evolving my ways of seeing have impacted my role as a facilitator to question the traditional practices of dance pedagogy and the expectations of performance as a source of entertainment. Pedagogically I ask myself how I can use the platform of dance as a way to train sense-ability of the Intimate Self. Creatively, I ask how I can create EI

experiences that invite the audience to transition from viewing art as way of escaping into outer realities to a way of exploring and venturing into the interconnected nature of our inner reality. My time at SFU and the support of these greater forces—my supervisors, committee, faculty, mentor, cohort, family and friends - has shown me the value of practice based research as a way to explore the visibly hidden and uncover more ways humans can potentially see. I came to SFU as a choreographer predominately working with dancers and after my time in the program and integrating interdisciplinary practices into my work, my spectrum of choreography has expanded to seek the poetry of movement in energy, objects, light, sound and space.

In conclusion, opening our perception and experience to different ways of seeing, such as seeing through the duality of the self and Universal Self, helps us expand the spectrum of how we can engage with our senses in pursuit of intuitive sensorial intelligence. Raising our sensorial awareness by challenging our conditioned and hierarchical ways of seeing through movement and embodied practices is one of many ways we can engage with our senses towards a more intimate evolution of self-awareness. I have suggested one practice as a process of opening our minds to other possible ways of seeing that asks us to tap into the Universal Self's knowing of our divine interconnectivity and nature of our ever-shifting reality. Through Merleau-Ponty's concept of double vision, we are able to experience a way of finding balance in the duality of the self and *Self*. To identify the individual characteristics of these dualities is not to separate one above the other, but rather to identify the imbalance in our current society. Rebalancing our de-centered human way of seeing gives us a way to invite attention and care for aki and the natural world we inhabit. Strengthening the awareness of our interconnectivity is a way to open the perception of our deeper belonging and visibly hidden connections in our multi-dimensional reality of the physical and non-physical worlds. Finally, the waves of energy flowing in between the synesthetic nature of our senses, gives us a way to experience our infinitely ever-shifting and impermeant reality. In the nature of our ever-shifting reality, we can come to understand that uncertainty is a part of life and that no thing, movement, moment or experience is or will ever be the same.

Understanding impermanence is not meant to take away from the discomfort, pain or confusion of uncertainty, but to open our vision to the other possibilities. Perhaps taking a breath to revel in the miracles of the phenomenological moment and a presence of our interconnection that transcends the linearity of time, is a way to find where we are dancing on the waves in between dualities. Not to identify one polarity as being better than other, but rather having the ability to see that we are all where we need to be on the transient waves of the interconnected web of existence. Given our current situation of the pandemic and the ongoing ever-present political chaos, we are more aware of the impermanent nature of our reality and are positioned to examine this great uncertainty more than ever before – which is simultaneously daunting and liberating. It is a *pas de deux* in the in betweenness of the *isness of fear* and the *isness of love* - in fear of the uncertainty, in love with the possibilities. Either way as we embrace the unknown, it is more vital than ever to remember the nature of our interconnectivity with others and to re-cognize our relationship to the ever-shifting nature of our reality. The times are changing, and so shall we.

Transformation and evolution are not the narrow straight path I once imagined. It is a call to witness the mysteries beyond the veils of our waking consciousness, not necessarily about past or future, but a mutual existence and co-composition of human based time. It is through the imaginings of other possibilities in which we can begin to see differently; to experience light, the visibly hidden, the formless, the movement of energy and time in the timeless. It is in the invisible in which the interwoven matrixes of our interconnected multiverse dance beyond typical sense-ability. It is here we are fully present with our own being, unveiled, surrendered and whole. To harmonize the self and the Intimate self is to breathe in deep redemption from the tainted conditions of the world. The sense-ability to see the unseeable is to touch the heart of the visibly hidden.

I'll leave you with the words of James Turrell,

"Every evening we unfold the light and every morning we fold it back to return the blue to the sky. This is the light that's just passing through just beneath that usually seen, who owns it? You who look, not to be held but known" (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017).

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## **Appendix B. Video Documentation**

**Creator/Director: Giselle Liu**

**Description: OUR EYES WILL ADJUST IS AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENTIAL LIVE AND DIGITAL PERFORMANCE. INCLUDING DANCE, FILM, NEW TECHNOLOGIES, LIVE STREAMING, AND A SET DESIGN THAT TRANSFORMS INTO AN INSTALLATION**

**File Name:**

Our Eyes Will Adjust\_Performative Short Film.mp4