

## Utifrån utåt

I'm writing this text a couple of weeks after having received funding from the Danish Culture Ministry for a pilot version of the Artistic Research project *Utifrån Utåt*. Therefore, my contribution to the topic of artistic research will consist of an outline of the conceptual foundation of a project that is about to start. As such, I hope the text can serve as an example of the sort of practice based and un-disciplinary (in difference to cross-disciplinary) enquiries that I find artistic research so apt to grapple with. I will be collaborating with philosopher Sven-Olof Wallenstein, visual artist Birgitta Burling and the choreographic research group Svärmen.<sup>1</sup>

### INTERFACE

Has not the artist always showed interest to the in-betweens? The chiasm. The liminal space. The about-to-be-but-not-yet-articulated. The in-between that this specific research project approaches is the interface of body/place. I use the term interface here as our everyday relation to the digital interfaces of screens – the communicational surface between a subject and a virtual world – invites to a helpful metaphor. In *The Case Against Reality*, Donald Hoffman uses this metaphor of the computer screen to describe the human's relation to reality. The case he is making is that our perception of reality is a four-dimensional rendering of a virtual world. Imagine that you drag-and-drop a PDF version of this article to your waste bin. The click-selection to pick up the file, the movement across the desktop and the release into the bin icon, all of which are function-

al representations of computational code. You know that there is no actual distance across which you drag and no waste bin in your computer where you throw the file. Now imagine that in a similar way there is no "real" waste bin where you could throw a physical copy of this article. Not to say that there is no such thing as a waste bin, nor that the presence of such an object would be a mere illusion. It does exist in the physical world and it does serve its function, but it does not look the way you see it. The properties of your perception make it look like it looks and its function is tied into your perception so that you don't just see a bin, but you see a place where you can throw things. In that sense it is a functional rendering, an icon, much like the one on your computer screen. Now, let's extrapolate this metaphor to the interface of body/place. When my body finds itself in a place, that place does exist in the physical world outside my body, but my perception of that place can be seen as an extension of my body. The body constructs its own environment. Not just by the fact that we today, more or less exclusively, move about in the man-made world, and even when venturing outside the more civilized world we tend to find ourselves in landscapes that we to some extent have formed, walking on paths created for us to walk on. Beyond that, even if I were to be dropped in a rare pristine spot on the earth, this place would appear to me through the body's perceptual rendition. I do realize that I am stating the obvious. However, just like we know that we are all going to die, without necessarily taking that into account in how we live our lives

1. I founded Svärmen in 2012 during the PhD project From Model to Module (Uniarts, Stockholm 2008–14). Svärmen also carried out the Research Project *Movement Material* (Danish National School

of Performing Arts, 2016–18) funded by the Danish Culture Ministry and performed a series of site-specific choreographic works in Uppsala 2015–17.

from day to day, I believe that there lies a radical potential in exploring this body/place interface choreographically, and it is this exploration that lies at the bottom of the project *Utifrån Utåt*.

#### HOW TO DISAPPEAR

In a series of site-specific performances in Uppsala in 2015–2018, together with Svärmen, I choreographically explored places from a point of departure similar to the one this article describes. During the PhD project *From Model to Module* I developed a sort of choreographic analysis that consisted in mapping the choreography already at work in a place. Starting from the supposition that choreography always already is happening, my choreographic input could amount to responding to an already on-going choreography. Instead of inserting choreography into a place, I would insert my body into the choreography of that place. A choreographic dialogue between my body and that place was set off and, at moments, it generated a sensation of disappearing (which gave the series the title *How to Disappear*). Maybe you have experienced a certain pull towards a void, both physically and metaphysically? Performing *How to Disappear* sometimes gave me a similar sensation of traction towards space – a desire to dissolve into the world.

#### CAMOUFLAGE AND CHOREOGRAPHY

Camouflage can be seen as yet one feature of the interface between creature and environment and Laura Levin has explored this aspect from a performance perspective (Levin 2014). Drawing on Robert Caillois she makes the case that camouflaging is not just an evolutionary bi-product of trying to avoid being eaten by one's predator, but also a non-intentional mimetic reflex. Blending into the surrounding can be seen as a response to the attraction it performs on the bodies inside of it. It is a form of over-identification with one's surrounding where one dissolves in it. One's own outside reflects one's perceived outside. It is such an externalization of an experienced externality that the title *Utifrån Utåt* refers to. Something that is experienced as an outside gets reflected outwards. Choreographic impressions become choreographic expressions. The impressions of a person – in this case a member of Svärmen – is not neutral. Some things are hard-wired in our biological bodies and then next to the obvious singularity of personal experience, we also choose to focus on certain choreographic aspects. Birgitta Burling has researched the haptic aspects in paint-

ing canvas and in her sculptural works in public spaces she has been working with haptic mapping of a site. Through our collaboration we approach the place from an affective point of departure. It is the felt sense of that space that will be explored rather than its geometries. Surely, the physical reality of the explored place creates a certain space that defines the movements that are possible to perform within it, but it is the felt experience of the place that will be choreographically reflected/expressed back out onto that same place.

#### SENSE

In the collaboration with Sven-Olov Wallenstein we will be exploring the relation between sense and sensibility (as Jane Austen entitled her novel from 1811). Dance has historically, and still today, often been coupled with sense as a prefix: sensibility, sensitivity and sensuality, but less with making sense. An aesthetic experience can sometimes make sense to us in a way that makes no sense to us (I love it! What is it?). *Utifrån Utåt* approaches the aesthetic experience of this *about-to-be-but-not-yet-articulated* as an in-between where sense is produced. The choreographic balance-act on the body/place-interface takes place on the threshold of sense-making. In understanding the relation between sense and sensibility, there are yet two aspects of sense that are worth mentioning. In the *Art Practice as Ecosystem Questionnaire*, Chrysa Parkinson opens the scope outside the usual five senses, to include anything we have a sense for such as justice, proportion, humor, language and kinesthesia.<sup>2</sup> Making sense out of something is experiencing it – getting a feel for it or developing a sense of it. The French language provides some insights to this as the term experience means both experience and experiment so that making an experiment equals having an experience. French also becomes helpful when it comes to sense, as the French *sense* also means direction. Quite intuitively we can understand that something that makes sense to us gives us a direction. For the purpose of *Utifrån Utåt* this might be the best use of the word as it puts the felt sense in relation to movement.

#### SUMMARY

*Utifrån Utåt* takes the perceived world radically seriously and choreographically explores a place from the idea that the felt sense of a place is what constitutes that place to its perceiver. This dissolution of body into place is in some ways a step away from (new) materialism. It leaves the material aspects of both place

2. <https://nivel.teak.fi/adie/art-practice-as-eco-system-questionnaire/>

and body aside, as well as the physiological divisions between senses, to instead explore the less graspable haptics and affects of a conscious mind engaged in aesthetic experience. Movement is here both the method of the exploration and its expression, and dance is understood as a sensible and senseful way of relating to movement.

*Rasmus Ölme*

#### REFERENCES

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