

Tactile Manoeuvres: touch and intention in dance

a movement workshop for touch-training: Sue Hawksley (PhD candidate, eca/University of Edinburgh)

Bodyworker Ida Rolf proposed that 'seeing is touch at a distance'. (Thompson, 2009) Here the question is raised whether touch can be considered as seeing close-up? Haptics are a complex set of senses, involving the proprioceptive, kinaesthetic, vestibular and visceral systems, "a singular sense that corresponds to no single organ". (Paterson, 2007, p.1). This movement workshop proposes methods for an inquiry into how information relating to movement impulse, intention, quality and dynamic may be transmitted through touch, and for training ways of 'seeing-through-touch'. **The focus is upon intention, attention and the interface between performers.**

The workshop draws on exercises from 'Body Weather,' the dance and performance training developed by Butoh dancer Min Tanaka and his company, Mai-Juku. (De Quincey, 2001). Working with partners, participants explore different qualities of touch to mediate an improvised dance, one or both dancers working with the eyes closed to enhance perception. Initially one person, the receiver, is anchored but flexible, yielding to touch-point impulses from their giving partner like a reed blown in the wind.



This develops to a partner dance guided through the space by "pushing-hands", similar to an exercise in T'ai Chi. This involves pushing-while-yielding. Initially one person leads the other; the roles gradually fold into a shared intention to both lead and be led.



"Tactile experience... adheres to the surface of our body; we cannot unfold it before us and it never quite becomes an object." (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.369)



Through a subtle process of interpretation, the dance 'seen-through-touch' flows into movement. Any text leads to a multiplicity of possible readings, but the haptic is a complex sense, it is difficult to anticipate reception of a 'touch-text'; "the tactile impression is 'interpreted' in the light of the nature and number of the parts of the body brought into play, and even of the physical circumstances under which it appears." (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.366). The touch may be experienced as directive or indicative; the impulse to respond may be immediate, or gradually come to awareness. The movement response may reflect the intention of the touched as subject or as agent. Tactility "is thus *shared out, parted, partaken of, divided, partitioned, pluralized—in a word, syncopated*" (Derrida, 2005, p.128).

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Photographs - Maria Falconer <http://www.mariafalconer.co.uk>

Dancers: Lucy Boyes, Sue Hawksley, Mo Morgan, Skye Reynolds

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