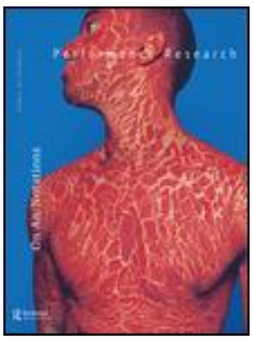

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Jealousy, Transmission and Recovery

SIMON ELLIS

RECOVERY

It started without me, and ended without me.

After a long and testing development, the performance project *Recovery* (Cursio et al. 2014) premièred at The Substation (centre for art and culture) in Melbourne (Australia) in December 2014. I was asked to direct the project after it had begun and I was also absent from its première season.

Recovery's title speaks to an event or events prior to its performance or presentation, and prior to its conception; its artists and performers are also looking back (Heathfield 2009: 16). We imagine that these people/performers are recovering from something and we know it happened sometime in the past. At the very least, the première of a work called *Recovery* marks a change, a moment when we may agree that a recovery has begun, but can never be sure if it has ended. Extension through time is implicit in recovery, that it/them/I/you continue to recover, and perhaps will never fully be recovered. If we were once covered, our re-covering persists through time.

But *Recovery* is not really gone. *Recovery*'s collaborative team now has various archival 'data pipes' (Toop 2004: 72) that are the norm for performance makers and choreographers: still images, multiple video perspectives, blog posts, reflective and analytical writing and reviews. These pipes are part of a performance's evolving modes of production and function. Together, they represent how this performance is now transmitted, but they also imply or register *Recovery*'s memory, death and archive as performance.

Shannon Bott and Natalie Cursio in *Recovery*. *Courtesy of Rachel Roberts*

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André Lepecki writes that it is the archive itself that performs its own 'endless memory "failures"' because it determines what is both included and excluded from its spaces and times. He argues that 'not all contemporary art – nor even art aimed at "connecting" – is propelled by and toward the archival' (2010: 30). In performance and dance, Lepecki's statement no longer holds. Perhaps not all performance is propelled by the archive, but all performance is propelled towards it. Performance and dance are being inhaled by archives as data-scapes, along with their various conduits, tools, forms and manifestations.[1] And with each inhalation, the nature of how performance exists in time is changed.

For all of *Recovery*'s post-performance data and inevitable dance towards the archive, and for all the seductive potential of these data, I remain jealous of the work in Melbourne.

JEALOUSY

Jealousy involves three parties: the subject, the beloved and the rival. In my physical absence from the final development and première performances of *Recovery,* I understand these to be me (the subject), *Recovery* (the beloved) and the audience (the rival). It is the beloved that is the 'jealous person's real locus of concern' (D'Arms 2002: n.p.).

You see, I know you *Recovery*. I know your tastes, your pasts and your unwillingness to keel over and stop being made. In spite or because of our intimacy, I felt – and continue to feel – jilted by your appearance and disappearance, regardless of your various audiences or who it was that you consorted with.

Soon after the première, I read a review of *Recovery* by Gracia Haby (2014: n.p.), and as I read her writing I became infected with qualities of jealousy: helplessness, resentfulness and grief (Pines 1998: 60). Haby wrote:

> Reflected in the work's steely resolve … Cursio and Bott have found a way to give movement to the loneliness of being left behind, the wrong feel of a body no longer warm by your side.
> (Haby 2014: n.p.).

In the transmission from rehearsal and development to the performances by Natalie and Shannon, to Haby's experience, and her words on a screen, I became all but erased; my absence was unmissable, and it was as if I had been torn from my beloved.

My jealousy, an acute sensation of having been excluded, has elicited a desire for me to use this writing to comprehend what has happened to my beloved *Recovery*. Is *Recovery* complete or ended? What are its marks and inscriptions beyond those best known – and felt – by the performers and co-choreographers Shannon Bott and Natalie Cursio? Why should others even care about *Recovery*'s dissolution and subsequent adaptation into data? Perhaps it is just another relatively unimportant performance project whose season has past, and it is now lost.

EPHEMERALITY AND SURVIVAL

Loss is a seductive trope of performance; in its eyes are reflected the maker's desire for performance to imprint the people who experience it. The paradox of disappearance and inscription of affect – we want to feel the power of performance to leave its mark(s) on us as it disappears – is replete with poetics of time, loss, permanence and memory. This paradox – in which the documentation and archiving of performance also amplifies its death – has been thoroughly and eloquently theorized in performance studies.[2]

Ephemerality in relation to performance is described by Adrian Heathfield as 'holding a set of disruptive consequences for historical narration, the archive, cultural memory, critical theory and documentary practice' (2009: 13). Heathfield also suggests that the problem for performance theorists is that they lift the event above its other eventual versions (2012).

In this writing – developed and considered from the perspective of the practitioner – Heathfield's trap of hierarchy is not my temptation or concern. What is at stake here are two things: evolution (or adaptation) and stewardship, both of which speak to time in similarly long-term ways. When André Lepecki

[1] There have been a number of recent high-profile dance archives, including *Motion Bank* (Forsythe 2010), and its initial outcome *Synchronous Objects* (Forsythe et al. 2009), *Siobhan Davies RePlay* (Davies and Whatley 2009), *Merce Cunningham: 65 Years* (Vaughan et al. 2012) and *A Choreographer's Score* by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Bojana Cvejić (2012).

[2] See, for example, Reason (2006), Lepecki (2010) and Jones and Heathfield (2012).

theorizes the archive (after Foucault) as a 'system of transforming simultaneously past, present, and future – that is, a system for recreating a whole economy of the temporal' (2010:30), I recognize the importance of understanding and testing the nature of such an economy.

With my jealousy, I reconsider the role of the choreographer in time, and theorize choreography's temporal value beyond annotation, archives or even performance itself. My concern is less with transience or ephemerality or reproduction. It is about determination, resilience, existence and survival–not survival for commercial purposes, but rather a last ditch effort to be.

SPILLOVER

In his 2012 biological page-turner *Spillover* (2012), David Quammen writes about the interspecies leaps – *zoonoses* – from non-human animals into humans. He says: 'When a pathogen leaps from some nonhuman animal into a person, and succeeds there in establishing itself as an infectious presence, sometimes causing illness or death, the result is a zoonosis' (Quammen 2012:25).

Such interspecies leaps in which an organism finds itself by chance in an alien environment are very common. The moment of spillover – when a pathogen passes from members of one species into members of another – represents what Quammen calls a 'sweepstakes ticket … for a new and more grandiose existence. It's a long-shot chance to transcend the dead end' (2012:164).

We are familiar with viruses that have spilled over: Black Death plague, Ebola and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). These are the pandemics that litter human history, and the capacity of zoonotic organisms to transcend species and adapt is the key to their success. Zoonoses are a reminder that '[p]eople and gorillas, horses and duikers and pigs, monkeys and chimps and bats and viruses: *We're all in this together*' (Quammen 2012:258, my emphasis).

I am imagining the change from performance to data as being akin to biological spillover:

■ Shannon Bott and Natalie Cursio in *Recovery*. *Courtesy of Rachel Roberts*

a leap between species hell-bent on adaptation and survival. In a radically different environment, the project (or species) has the potential to adapt to make other types of transmissions possible. And like the horses, pigs and monkeys, we – performance, data, memory, presence, annotations and archives – are all in this together.

The suffix *-osis* (as in zoonosis) refers to an action, formation, (abnormal) increase or an infestation, and in the inter-species leap between performance and data, it is movement itself that is reflexively activated. The leap reflects a stirring up or excitation of the possibilities of performance to extend and adapt itself. To excite, rouse or stir up is *cieo* or *ciere* in Latin and perhaps the neologism *cieosis* is to performance and data what zoonosis is to non-human and human animals. If cieosis names the stirring up of action, or an infestation of movement, the moment at which the organism of performance adapts itself to data, then what forms are generated or made and how may these forms matter in an extended choreography of time?

MAKING

Anthropologist Tim Ingold adopts a long-term or wide-angle approach to understanding processes – and outcomes – of change and making.

> To read making longitudinally, as a confluence of forces and materials, rather than laterally, as a transposition from [internal] image to object, is to regard it as such a form-generating – or morphogenetic – process. This is to soften any distinction we might draw between organism and artefact.
> (Ingold 2013: 21)

Ingold's understanding of making is more flexible and broad and it asks that we consider the life history of a project as extending beyond the traditional understanding of its beginning and end. Although Ingold is referring to a singular thing, or event or process, the terms of that singularity are more difficult to reconcile with any desire to mark, delineate, contain or author the life of something or someone. Instead, Ingold's ideas of morphogenesis – based on the work of Gilbert Simondon (2005) – afford remarkable change, adaptation and becoming. His thinking chimes with biological systems in which time is measured in centuries and millennia. As we are being, we are made: our lives, our objects, our performances, our recovery, our destruction and death, our rebuilding and our changing is ongoing.

The imperative is to make sense of what is inbetween performance and archival data; to recognize the 'continuous modulation that goes on in the midst of form-taking activity, in the becoming of things' (Ingold 2013: 25). The process of becoming data is unavoidable; all materials – performative or otherwise – 'are always and already on their ways to becoming something else' (Ingold 2013: 31).

What is marked at the point of recovery, at the point of death, at the moment of transmission – between performance and data, between the breath and inexplicable stillness – is a radical change. But is it so radical that we can't imagine it to be part of a singular making: a singular system of pressures, adaptation and evolution?

STEWARDSHIP

A steward is someone who accepts responsibility for taking care of something that is deemed worthy of care. Stewardship implies a lightness of touch and time in which the steward – at the request of someone else, or acting on their behalf – may manage resources, frames or contexts, materials and even culture. A steward is accountable and responsible. If even simply watching a performance can be conceived as an integral part of – or intervention into – a work's stewardship and coming into being, then in the case of *Recovery* my stewardship has been productively askew.[3]

At any stage of the life cycle of a performance work, the steward (and there are many of us/them, even in the smallest and briefest of productions) possesses key responsibilities of observation, care, imagination, patience and willingness to change. The steward's brief encounters with a performance are at odds with the forming and re-forming of that performance's insistence, persistence, adaptation and collapse over time. I understand that performance (like the natural world) is beyond me; its scale is such that I can only serve it for the briefest of moments.

The kind of scale I am referring to is easy to imagine in the work of a visual artist like John F. Simon whose work is developed from – or in response to – twenty-five years of daily meditation.[4]

Such slipperiness between process and objects is less common in performance and choreography. The conventions and economies of production expect discrete objects or outcomes, and to imagine the life cycle of performances far beyond their prized and valorized temporal edges – to celebrate the ghosts and decays, the reluctant, determined or even incidental stewards, the others of performance – compromises authorial presence and purpose in performance making.

As performance adapts and persists, who do I – the steward/maker – become to *Recovery*

[3] My use of the word 'stewardship' was provoked by its use in an entirely different context – the care of the natural world – in Randall Szott's blog, *Lebenskünstler* (2013).

[4] John F. Simon's work was discussed by Xiaoying Yuan in response to a discussion on 'Issues surrounding "Object" and the process-based art curating in music and sound' (*New-Media-Curating listserv* 2015).

when it has morphed into something other, into forms that may easily be dismissed as cheapened data-scapes of complex experiences?

My stewardship, however brief, remains a gift, a gift to now and the future. The work – the thing – and its adaptation is ongoing as it steps and tumbles towards dust. It is much bigger, greater, longer and important than I can ever hope to be. From the perspective of the maker-choreographer, I understand this long-term transience to be the value of performance. This is precisely the opposite of celebrating performance's apparent and short-term ephemerality and singularity.

CHOREOGRAPHY

For Adrian Heathfield, 'the multiple lives of performance … suggest that one of performance's most consistent and recurring conditions is transformation'. He suggests that it is possible to look for the many lives (or life forces) of performances without assuming that they 'constitute its "only life"' (2012: 32). I understand 'adaptation' to be a more useful term than 'transformation' because it remembers and foregrounds how environmental contexts – such as, economic, curatorial, devising, physical, technological – have afforded change and difference. Such contexts are how performance persists and survives; they are its adaptive reasoning, and at the same time they reveal the possibilities for what is transmitted – and how – as performance is recast and re-choreographed as data.

At its most pragmatic, choreography is 'writing with the body' (Hoghe 2007: n.p.), and yet André Lepecki demands that dance itself 'loses many of its possibilities of becoming [when] it falls prey to a powerful apparatus of capture called "choreography"' (2007: 122). The recasting of performance as data involves an already captured becoming – twice captured – twice restrained.

As the concept and practice of choreography is stretched, it is increasingly marked by the dissolution of the body. The borders of choreographic practices have become profoundly permeable: membranes through which materials, ideas, people, objects, time, experience and audiences pass back and forth. A choreography is not a singular event, and nor is it made by a single person.

Chroeographer Astad Deboo writes that choreography 'has several choreographers, some animate, some inanimate' (2001: n.p.). Deboo's thinking is akin to how I understand the nature of choreographic or directorial stewardship. As a steward, I recognize that I am only one of many in the emergence of a (choreographic and performative) form, and the way in which it extends through time. And although I am talking specifically about the making and choreography of performance, our lives are also thus made, and they are also transmitted through multiple forms in spite of the apparent singularity of our corporeal form. This analogy – between the making of our lives as we live them, and the making of performance as it is performed – repositions longitudinal thinking, practice and attitudes as being vital to how we make sense of what we do and what remains.

The material manifestations of *Recovery* have changed. The project has become redundant back-up systems: RAID (redundant array of independent disks) level 1 (mirrored) hard

Shannon Bott and Natalie Cursio in *Recovery*. *Courtesy of Rachel Roberts*

drives and/or cloud storage. The degree of abstraction from the suchness of the experience is stretched, cajoled, and bent into a difference by kind, a living system with a different digital host, which in turn affords genetic mutation and adaptation.

In March 2015, I returned to Melbourne for the first time since *Recovery*'s première. I took with me a portable external hard drive in order to collect *Recovery*'s digital remains. There were nearly 500 GB of video and photographic data – traces of a performance, the memories of others, a digital taste of my beloved. I returned to the UK, with hard drive as urn, in order to sprinkle what was left of *Recovery* over (most likely) the internet. These hard drives and their contents – along with all of my choreographic work as data – appear in my will: 'I GIVE all my digital data and hard drives relating to my artistic life including my web materials to DAVID CORBET of … AUSTRALIA absolutely.'

Where once I was its steward, I now appear to be haunting *Recovery* in a living version of how writer and editor Steve Rogers haunts *While You Are With Us Here Tonight* (Etchells et al. 2014). Rogers' is a delicate yet brutal kind of absence that marks time, and intervenes with death, while I am more of a distant shadow, holding on to the detritus of *Recovery*'s state of liveness. Regardless, after the long haul, these adaptations and data-scapes, the cienotic leap from performance to data, will all eventually and inevitably be shadows. It's just a matter of time, and this seems perfect.

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