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Embodying Space and Text – Performative Presentation of an Academic Publication Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process

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Embodying Space and Text – Performative Presentation of an Academic Publication *Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process*

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Abstract

In my paper *Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process* (Jobbágy, 2024), I examined several possible ways of embodying space as a sculptor or performing artist, to find examples in artistic practices. Space is a process, and so is the body; especially, since the body itself — or the soma, the living body — contains inner spaces, which can and do relate to the spaces outside the body. *How do we perceive space and embody space on this multiple scale? How do we feel space, objects, and other bodies while we co-exist? What do those inside spaces transmit while the performers move or stand still through their presence? How can the director envelope and contain these dimensions and be 'holding the space' in and around the process? How to be the membrane around the fluid space, while maintain space within the membran itself?* In this paper I juxtapose thoughts of the sculptor Morris and the somatic pioneer Bainbridge Cohen. Through their writings *The Present Tense of Space* (Morris, 1995) and *The Place of Space* (Bainbridge Cohen, 2006), I have found entry points to line up sculptural, somatic, and performative practices dealing with space and/or site-specificity. My performative presentation is an experiment in which I present excerpts of this writing using my body as a tool, accompanied by a pre-recorded soundscape based on the original written publication.

Keywords: embodying space, sensing space, performative presence, body, scale

Background of the Performance

In 2024, my text *Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process* was published. The writing emerged primarily from my experiences of space and of perceiving space as a performer, choreographer, and filmmaker. In its final form, the publication focuses on aspects of embodying space in relation to sculpture and performing arts, placing less emphasis on filmmaking.

For the *Performing Space 2025* conference, I created a condensed version of the text in order to transform it into spoken language within the sound layer of my performative presentation. The excerpt was shaped with particular attention to what could be meaningfully distilled into performance: what supported my dancing and embodiment of the original ideas behind the publication, and what could contribute a sense of poesis to the overall texture of the performance.

The text presented here was developed through a careful process of selection and reduction, until it became (almost) short enough for a ten-minute soundtrack. Its format differs from conventional academic writing, as it functions less as a publication and more as a kind of musical score.

The Written Material of the Performance

Space is a scale.

Space is a difference in density.

Space is relation.

Space and its boundaries – meeting through the surface.

Trespass.

Standing still. Breathing in. The hand rise, open. Hugging the front space.

Corridor. A strong but narrow focus. Compression.

A little pause.

Breath out. Open the arms. Spread. Let it expand, open.

Guide your arms back down.

Sensation of spaciousness enveloping you.

Permeate your whole body.

Letting the space flow on and around myself. - - - Is this the space of the mind?

Letting the space flow on and around myself. - - - Is this the space of the mind?

Is this the space of the mind?

Letting the space flow on and around myself. - - - Is this the space of the mind?

A space, where something belongs to, a space that something inhibits, a space which lives inside of something, and the space which is unfolding. The space which is in transformation, and space that informs.

We need distance from ourselves, in order to let go. Space to see the larger picture.

We have spaces in our minds and can have space between our thoughts. There is space (time) before the response and space (time) between action and reaction.

Through movement, dancers constantly intervene with space, and at the same time receive information from it. What most of the spectators can see, is the motion in the outside space, but for me, the spaces inside the body are as important as the outside ones.

Your felt experience will be your truth... you have to own your experience.

“The way spaces feel, the sound and smell of these places, has equal weight to the way things look” (Holl, 2005, p.7).

Being aware of that or not, we are affected by this felt quality of space and the spatial arrangement. According to McCormack:

The relation between moving bodies and spaces is more than physical because it is always more than a relation between two discrete things: it is a relation between things already in process. [...] Certainly, space is not reducible to the status of a passive, three-dimensional container within which the intentional action of an embodied, moving subject unfolds. Space, in other words, is never a backdrop for something more dynamic (2013, p.2).

I am working with and through the moving body, or bodies, as they unfold in space and time. The body relates to space and relates to another body or object through space. The performer's body also relates to the audience's bodies and the other way around. The dialogue with space is happening towards the inside space and towards the outside space, pretty much at the same time, and the skin lays there, as boundary and borderland.

skin

membrane

the border between fluid-filled and air-filled spaces

Earth

cell

fluid

alive

a space, that expands and condenses simultaneously

a space

membrane

The skin itself consists of different layers, which come from different embryological origins: the superficial layer, epidermis, originates from the ectoderm, and the deeper layers — dermis and hypodermis or subcutaneous layer — originate from the mesoderm (mesenchyme). Therefore, the skin is a meeting of layers that orient us both towards the outside world and the inside world. Spaces are related to each other and are also within or around each other.

The Outside

*I am lying down. Lying down and grow. I feel the coolness of the floor,
and I feel as past my body,
the micro distances glide by.*

Kinesphere — “the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping away from that place which is the point of support when standing on one foot” (Laban, 1966, p.10). This spherical space around our body shifts as soon as we shift our weight (Thiriot, 2013).

Gravity is one of the basic and general forces acting upon us. It offers a very physical sensation of reality, the existence of the body on Earth with its weight and presence. At the beginning of the 20th century, new dance trends liberated the body from previous forms¹ and let gravitational force become visible in dance.

Contact Improvisation technique developed out of the exploration of the human body, in relationship to others' bodies and gravity.² Definition: two bodies create a singular one

¹ Ballet in a way is a complete illusion of weightlessness.

² This form of improvised partner dance roots back to 1972 and credited mainly to Steven Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, and Lisa Nelson.

through a point of contact (for example back to wrist, shoulder to thigh, head to foot, back to back) so they can share the weight equally between themselves and then create a movement dialogue that can last as long as both of them are completely engaged in it. Therefore, it is about the weight exchange with the other person and a dialogue with the floor and space. Moreover, dancers are aware not only of their individual centre of gravity but also of the centre of gravity of the dance itself.

Becoming aware of weight, gravity, and space ...
to feel the embodiedness of our physical reality...

A way of embodying space is through working with gravity and anti-gravity — relating to earth and heaven. This entails sensing, feeling, and acting upon the weight of the body, or being pulled by the space around.

“Most of us walk around in a split universe, the sensorial one in which the sun rises, and the rational one in which the earth turns” — writes Paxton in his book *Gravity* (p. 41).

In physics, gravity is a fundamental interaction that causes mutual attraction between all bodies with mass or energy.

... mutual attraction between all bodies with mass or energy.
... mutual attraction between all bodies with mass or energy.

Gravitational force is registered in the inner ear, in the labyrinthine system, and also in every cell of the body. Perception of touch, proprioception together with the vestibular system is the first sense to develop and underly the development of other senses³. Based on and supported by the senses, our reflexes develop:

Primitive reflexes, righting reactions and equilibrium responses are a continuum of automatic patterns of movement that underlines our volitional movement. These patterns develop in response to the interaction between our internal state of being and gravity, other people and space. (Cohen, 2012, p.124)

Speaking about the process of dance and creation, [...] one thing is, [...] that in a learning process, dancers practice movements (choreography or training material) again and again, as many times, that they don't have to *think about it* – that's the moment when they actually learned it, embodied it: the moment from when the body remembers. The pattern is created and already sunk to subcortical levels. What has entered, or *passed into the body* can be recalled in a faster response cycle. It is the way to master any movement-based skill, from drawing to dance, and the way to release higher brain capacity for creative thinking. The other thing [...] is that in our developmental process, we embody and integrate

³ Later, the development of our movement toward space is supported by all senses – the taste and smell orient us in the near space; while hearing and vision connects to the space further away.

primitive reflexes, righting reactions, and equilibrium responses, but oftentimes dancers have to unlearn (re-write) some, to make themselves able to do multiple movement patterns and qualities. The head righting reaction is definitely one to unlearn, so that the head can drop if we imagine so, or explore space as a limb.

On Baghramian's voice:

To take a pose, is in itself a temporary state, that needs the act of releasing to be able to formulate or form the next pose. You need a rest, at least to release the joints. The act between the two poses, that uncertain moment of contemplation captures my full attention.

To get out of any kind of static mechanism, and frozen poses, and rethink our position, seems to be an important part taking further in our societies in general. The whole idea of poses and releasing the poses is actually to re-question every time our position, and not to get stiff. (BOSS, 2020, 00:21–1:10).

and not to get stiff... the act between the two poses, that uncertain moment of contemplation is something Morris (1978/1995), and the philosopher Mead (1934/2015) calls:

- the *I mode* of the self;
- *the present-time experiencing self, consciously reacting* (Morris, 1995, p.177).

Experience of physical space is inseparable from an *ongoing immediate present*. “*Real space is not experienced except in real time*” (Morris, 1995, p.177) He also refers to this as a *filmic experience*, in contrast to a *series of stills* when one recalls the spatial experience from the mind's space, from memory.

Relating Baghramian's thoughts to a state of mind that Bainbridge Cohen names as sitting in the synapse, this is the prereduced state in performing art, and more generally, for being present in any action.

Process of Creation

After distilling one possible essence of the original publication, developing the sound layer of the performance became another challenging yet inspiring phase of the process. As an editor, I am capable of basic sound editing and often use my own voice as a tool, though I do not consider myself a musician.

Following the text recordings, I also made field recordings of everyday sounds — such as stirring chia pudding in the kitchen or my cat licking its bowl. These recordings were later transformed using digital effects including reverb, echo, and distortion in certain sections, along with subtle noise reduction.

For the atmospheric music, I worked with an AI-based tool, generating soundscapes through the Riffusion⁴ online generator. I used prompts such as *electronic/synthesizer music, no vocals, no lyrics, space-themed, ambient atmosphere*. This iterative process produced multiple variations, with selected results serving as the basis for subsequent prompts.

Media

sound of the performance: <https://youtu.be/4Aa1gsnvE98>

video documentation: <https://vimeo.com/1114627813/e7ccce6a91?share=copy>

Feedback and Conclusion

This process of double translation was one of the most exciting experiences of my research at the HUFA Doctoral School. About a year after writing a publication grounded in bodily experiences of space, I found it deeply rewarding to translate that text back into spatial movement and bodily presence. Performing it felt like a gift and the audience's response was unexpectedly warm and supportive. Rather than approaching me with handshakes or formal congratulations, colleagues from the conference came to hug me from their heart and excitement. Some told me "what a beautiful presence" I had, while others suggested that the piece could be further developed into a full solo performance, with the "hard-core academic text" remaining as a sound layer in the background.

Taking into account both the feedback and the experience of creating and presenting the work within the framework of *Performing Space 2025*, I consider this event a genuine research moment — in the strongest sense of practice-based artistic research: one that naturally generates new questions and initiates the next phase of inquiry.

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⁴ At the time I used the sound generator, it was available on <https://www.riffusion.com>, which is now landing at [Producer.ai](https://www.producer.ai/) <https://www.producer.ai/> and the original Riffusion can still be reached at classic.riffusion.com

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