

INTERSPACES / SCENOSTRUMENT: De-occupying Space as Choreographic Strategy and Scenographic Practice

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CINEMA KINESIS: THE FAMILY OF LIGHT_

"A syntax of the eye, a grammar of pure kinesis." _ Paul Auster

For over twenty-five years, my choreographic and digital arts practice -centred in Good Company Arts, Ōtepoti/Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand- has operated at the intersection of somatic dance, digital moving image, scenography, and music. Characterised by critics as "among the world's best" in video dance (Eggleton, 2008) and as "moving painting" (Marshall, 2010), this practice has been shaped by a deep encounter with the philosophical traditions of productive emptiness. The works documented here extend from Henge (2001) through After Dürer (2007), Matchbox (2008), Line Dances (2010), and the Asia-Pacific Trilogy (2022–2026) to the ongoing ENCOUNTER project (2024–2027).

Cinema and dance are family. Family of light. Both breathe the human into expression -cinema through the interval between frames, dance through the interval between gestures, both cultivating what Ben Okri calls Homo fabula -"we are storytelling beings" (Okri, 2015)- a formulation I have long endorsed and made my own in practice (Belton, as cited in Marshall, 2009).

¹ AUTHOR NOTE_ This paper draws from my doctoral research _*The Somatic Digital: Interspaces in Choreographing Media* (Massey University Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa, 2026)_ a practice-led thesis developing Choreographing Media as a methodology through which digital materials become active choreographic partners, orchestrating dance, music, film, objects, and scenography as a unified creative system / NOTA DE AUTOR_ Este artículo se desprende de mi investigación doctoral *The Somatic Digital: Interspaces in Choreographing Media* (Massey University Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa, 2026), una tesis guiada por la práctica que desarrolla Choreographing Media (Coreografía de Medios) como una metodología a través de la cual los materiales digitales se convierten en colaboradores coreográficos activos, orquestando la danza, la música, el cine, los objetos y la escenografía como un sistema creativo unificado.

The etymological connection between cinema and kinema -from the Greek *kinein*, to move- speaks to this family relationship. Cinema is the art of movement made visible through light. Dance is the sacred expression of e-motion — energy in motion, the full spectrum of what it means to be human coursing outward through the body's primordial language: gesture, breath, weight, time, presence. At their intersection -in the garden of consciousness where cinema and dance meet as family- Choreographing Media makes its home.

This family relationship was always present in the earliest days of cinema. Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic investigations of movement in the 1880s -capturing the invisible continuity of gesture across time, exposing the atmospheric traces the body leaves in its wake- were simultaneously the scientific origin of cinema and the philosophical origin of a methodology for making movement visible. Marey was exposing the *Zwischenwelt* -Paul Klee's term for the between-world- that the naked eye could not perceive: the force-lines and atmospheric trails the body generates through space.² What critic Jonathan Marshall recognised in this practice as lineage from "Étienne-Jules Marey and its painterly versions by Umberto Boccioni" (Marshall, 2010) was present from the beginning.

Paul Auster articulated what the silent film comedians understood instinctively -that the body, before sound arrived to supplement it, was the complete instrument of expression (Auster, 2002). Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd- navigating the grammar of pure kinesis, the syntax of the eye -showed that the moving body carries everything the story needs. This understanding is the philosophical ground of what I name scroll editing -the haptic re-choreography of filmed movement in which the hand on the trackpad becomes conductor of time itself, surging and arresting, retrograding and rhythmically accentuating filmed sequences in tempo with music through headphones. The editor as dancer. The timeline as dance floor. Kinema conducting kinema.³

The neume -from the Greek *pneuma*, meaning breath- a note or group of notes to be sung to a single syllable -offers a further bridge between music, language, and the digital image. The neume can be visually representative of the pixel: each the indivisible unit of breath from which the larger pattern emerges. As I observed in dialogue with Dr Alexandra Kolb (c.2012): "The neume connects at an early historical level to a note or group of notes to be sung to a single syllable... The neume can be visually representative of the pixel." *Pneuma* -breath- the pixel as the smallest unit of digital breath. The oscillation of presence and absence that makes the digital image possible is the same oscillation that makes the musical phrase breathe.

² The Digital Kiln: a methodology developed by the author in which captured movement is transformed through post-production processes — speed manipulation, motion blur, echo and cascading visual treatments — exposing the *Zwischenwelt* — Paul Klee's term for the between-world (Klee, 1961) — that the naked eye cannot perceive: the force-lines and atmospheric trails the body generates through space. The *Ostinato Slow Shutter* — a specific technique within the Digital Kiln — fixes the camera on a tripod while the dancer's motion through the frame carries and transmits its own memory wake, a blur and drag of presence rendering the moving body as both event and archive simultaneously.

³ Scroll editing — the hand on the trackpad conducting filmed movement through time, surging and arresting, retrograding and rhythmically accentuating in tempo with music through headphones — is itself a kinetic act. The editor as dancer. The timeline as dance floor. Developed through *Soma Songs* (2005) and carried through *DRAGON*, *HORSES*, and beyond.

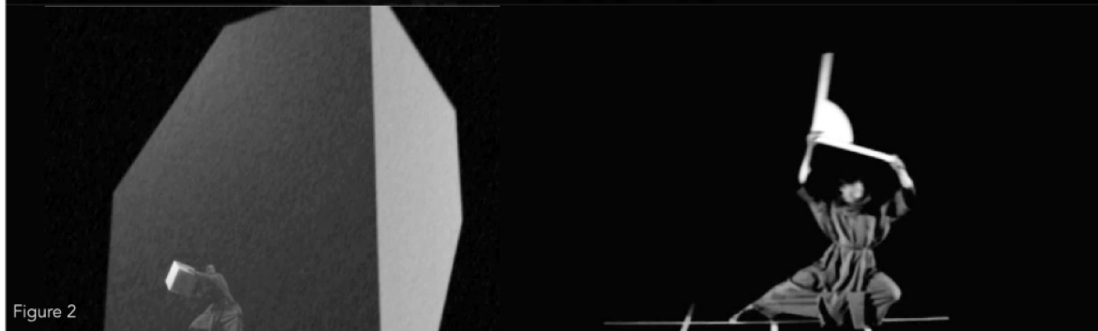
The Rückenfigur -the figure seen from behind at the threshold between the viewer's world and the world of the image- enters this practice at the close of *After Dürer* (2007): a choreographic and cinematic response to Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* (1514).⁴ The film's central figure is the author -solo dancer, alchemist, and mathematician -moving through the virtual geometric world of the Digital Kiln throughout the work, the complete sonic score composed and layered by the author from cello parts written by Martin Lodge, performed by James Tennant, and recorded by Jeremy Mayall- the original recordings transformed through the Digital Kiln: slowed, multi-layered, harmonically developed into the film's total sound design.

The objects I carried -compass, cube, ladder- were early Aistruments before the term existed: the compass drawing its circles in space, navigating by geometry; the cube carried as the mysterious polyhedron that resists resolution; the ladder as the threshold between earth and sky, the between-world made physical and traversable.

In the film's final moments, Lodge appears in the same hooded Monk's costume -filmed from behind at a coastal location, holding a small square viewing frame marked with a grid: Dürer's magic square made physical. The transition between the film's void realm and Lodge's coastal Rückenfigur is achieved through a zoom: the camera moves from a white grid cube suspended in the studio void -elastic cords attached to its six edges creating radiating perspective lines, the magic square grid painted on two facets, Donnine Harrison invisible in full blackout against the black backdrop holding the form from within the void, the author holding all the cords taut from the foreground -a cuboid extrusion from the void, an anchor stone pulled between worlds -then zooms out into Lodge's hand-held magic square frame by the sea. *Monk by the Sea*. Always at the threshold, always looking through- the Rückenfigur positions the body as the viewer's passage into the scenographic world: the back of the figure as a doorway into productive emptiness. As I stated in dialogue with Dr Kolb: "In the film window I am able to dialogue between flat two-dimensional space and suggest a greater dimensioned

⁴ The Rückenfigur first entered this practice in *After Dürer* (2007): a choreographic and cinematic response to Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* (1514), developed with Donnine Harrison and Peter Belton, with initial research from composer Martin Lodge of Waikato University Music Department. I danced to the figure of the mathematician-alchemist — what Peter Belton describes as the melancholic in Dürer's sense: "a person given to excessive thinking... Dürer said all artists were therefore melancholics." Digital artist Jac Grenfell animated the complex Polyhedron at the centre of Dürer's engraving — the geometric body that finds its direct descendant in Grenfell's virtual sculptural interpretations of Oteiza's *Par Móvil* in *ENCOUNTER* (2024–2027), tracing a geometric lineage across seventeen years of practice. The NZ Listener's review named the Timegraft dimension before the term existed: "Time-travelling, Belton, as both alchemist and object, creates dance housed within a magic digital architecture." The work received Most Innovative Work at the XV Festival Internazionale Di Videodanza IL COREOGRAFO ELETTRONICO, Naples (2008), whose jury cited its extension to "optical-visual and perceptive level, fully showing that videodance belongs to videoart's sphere." The object genealogy of the Aistrument family runs through this work: the wooden cube first appearing in *Figure(s) of Speech* (2003) was transformed for *After Dürer* — half painted black, one face carrying Dürer's magic square as grid. A foam cube identical in appearance yet weightless allowed film illusions of gravity defied — Donnine Harrison in full black costume and gloves, invisible against the black backdrop, the hidden presence holding elastic cords taut behind the form. Stone that was weightless. Weightlessness that became stone. The between worlds generated through the tension between what the eye sees and what the body knows is there. <https://vimeo.com/dbel/after-durer>

space... the digital authored space is framed in moving image — it is printerly."
(Belton, c.2012)



THE EYE THAT FEELS: GOETHE, KLEE, AND THE LIVING BOND _

"A constant living bond between the eye of the spirit and the eyes of the body." — Goethe, as cited in Moore (1968)

There is a way of knowing that precedes language — a way of seeing that the body intuits before the mind arrives to name what has been perceived. Goethe understood this: that the eye of the spirit and the eyes of the body are indivisible, bound together in reciprocal exchange. The outer eye gathering form, colour, light, movement. The inner eye receives what the outer cannot fully hold -the feeling-tone of things, the morphological intelligence that recognises patterns across vast distances of time and culture and form.

Paul Klee distils Goethe's insight with extraordinary economy: one eye sees, the other feels. As critic Bronwyn Judge observed: "Quoting the modernist artist Paul Klee, Belton states his intention is also for 'the one eye to see, the other feel'" (Judge, 2011) — the Klee formulation operating as explicit artistic intention across the practice. In somatic digital work, both eyes are always open simultaneously — the choreographic eye reading spatial relationships, compositional geometry, the play of light and form; and the feeling eye receiving the emotional truth of what is being made. Henry Moore extends this into the sculptor's knowing: "Everything in the world of form is understood through our own bodies." The dancer's body knowing the spatial relationship before the camera sees it. The filmmaker's eye knowing the cut before the timeline receives it. And Moore's second formulation: "It is as though you have something trying to make itself come to a shape from inside itself" — the creative act as Goethe understood it: the form emerging from within, the artist's task to stay open, to provide the conditions in which what wants to exist can find its way into being.

Goethe's morphological method -Zarte Empirie, tender empiricism: participation and presence as orientation -is the philosophical foundation of the Choreographing Media methodology. A living art releases itself from fixed theory toward new order in organic fulfilment. Formation as an act of growth rather than the production of static objects.

This morphological understanding finds its choreographic equivalent in Goethe's own formulation: Alles ist Blatt — everything is leaf. Every extension of the hand into space is also a return to the seer. The shuttle of warp and weft — weaving the dancer's interior world into the surrounding space while weaving the surrounding space back into the dancer. In scroll editing — the hand on the trackpad conducting filmed movement through time — this living bond achieves its most intimate activation: the editor as dancer, the trackpad as instrument, the direct pressure of touch as felt carving of the edit timeline the way a craftsperson's hands interact with wood or stone or clay. This is listening — with both eyes open, both the seeing eye and the feeling eye — for what the material itself is trying to become.

INTERSPACES: DE-OCCUPYING SPACE AS CHOREOGRAPHIC STRATEGY

"All artistic practice surges from a void that is nothing yet eventually reaches a Nothing that is Everything." — Jorge Oteiza

All the arts we have ever known — theatre, dance, music, visual art, film, sculpture, craft — are expressions of that storytelling impulse. And all of these forms require a discipline of silences and eliminations — enabling new forms of emptiness — not void or absence, but active spatial volumes inviting participation and collaboration.

De-occupation functions as an act of breathing — rhythmic expansion and contraction allowing space itself to become choreographic partner rather than passive container. This process returns to movement, space, and time, reconstructing them through traditional craft practices and contemporary technological capabilities, creating a fusion language where somatic awareness intersects with electronic possibility.

This breathing — this expansion and contraction — relates directly to what I name Interspaces. The binary system of zeros and ones requires the void to exist. Without space between, there is no differentiation, no pulse, no breath. This is simultaneously ontological (being/non-being), temporal (presence/absence creates rhythm), and spatial — the *Zwischenwelt*, the between-world. Just as breath requires both inhalation and the space of pause, the digital requires productive emptiness. This void is not absence but active potential. The oscillation of presence and absence — 0-1-0-1 — is what I call the *wiri* of the binary: the Māori term for the trembling, oscillating motion that the body has always known and that digital computation enacts.

As critic Bronwyn Judge observed of Line Dances (2010): "They show us a 'between' world... the in-between world depends for its actuality on the interaction of the audience, what they bring to their observation and interpretation" (Judge, 2011) — the *Zwischenwelt* perceived and identified by a critical voice before doctoral terminology arrived to formalise it.

Three philosophical traditions name this same productive emptiness from different directions:

Zwischenwelt (German) — the between-world; the interspace where meaning is generated between states. The conceptual home of the somatic digital: the space where the body and the digital meet, where neither fully dominates, where new form emerges from their oscillation.

Ma 間 (Japanese) — negative space; the pause; the interval that gives form its meaning. In Japanese aesthetics, *Ma* is the most active element of any composition — the silence between notes that makes music possible, the space between pillars that makes architecture inhabitable, the pause between gestures that makes choreography legible (Isozaki, 1979; Nitschke, 1988).

Te kore (Māori) — the void; nothingness as potential; the primordial state before creation from which everything emerges. In Māori cosmology, *te kore* is not absence but generative darkness — the fertile emptiness from which *te pō* (the night) and *te ao* (the world of light) unfold.

Jorge Oteiza (1908–2003) -Basque sculptor and cultural theorist whose philosophy of *desocupación*- spatial de-occupation- resonates across all three. His basalt sculptures at the Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, Alzuza, Navarra, enact this principle in stone: every sculptural act is the discipline of removing mass until what remains is not less but more -until the emptied form achieves a spatial charge that solid material could never hold. *Par Móvil* (1956)- two moving forms generating a shared spatial vacuum between them -is the clearest articulation: the void between the pair is the work's true subject. The geometric body at the centre of Dürer's *Melencolia*- that mysterious polyhedron whose mathematical secret Terence Lynch identifies as perhaps "the *raison d'être* of the whole work" (Lynch, as cited in Belton, 2007)- carries the same quality: mathematical rigour as a path through the void, form as the vehicle for a discovery that cannot be stated directly.

In the ENCOUNTER performance project (2024–2027), this philosophy is expressed through what I formulate as the Somatic Digital: a practice in which digital materials become active choreographic partners — the media understood as bodies: bodies of dance, bodies of sound, bodies of pixels, bodies of motion graphics that become scenographies. This is not simply digital art but the artist's touch in, through, and with the digital materiality. The Digital Loom and the Digital Kiln — my original terms for the compositional workspace and the transformative methodology of digital post-production — are the sites where somatic sensibility meets digital material in the act of becoming.⁵

ENCOUNTER creates poly-dimensional choreographies — performance works existing simultaneously across multiple spatial and temporal platforms: live theatre, digital distribution, gallery installation, and hybrid physical-virtual environments. In the work's footage, a single dancer — Amit Noy — is multiplied through digital projection, working with objects and virtual sculptural forms generated from Oteiza's *Par Móvil*. When these spherical forms rotate in digital space, the convergence of spatial philosophies across cultures becomes visible: Oteiza's Basque *desocupación*, Japanese *Ma*, and Māori *te kore* meeting in the fluctuation of the binary — the *wiri* of productive emptiness pulsing through the work.

This principle of de-occupation operates within the practice. In *TAIAO (POIPOI)* (2020), dancer Xiao Ke moves through constructed montages of China's Yellow Mountains — misty, high altitude scenographic vistas that function as a virtual theatre: curated space rather than moving choreography, the mountain stills creating a shifting backdrop whose atmospheric qualities echo the ancient Greek *periaktoi* — those rotating triangular prisms used since antiquity to transform stage scenery instantaneously. In film, the scene shift becomes digital: dissolves, glides, horizontal pushes, rotations — an underlying theatrical system operating beneath the work's organic surface. Xiao Ke is a floating solo figure within this world — at times replicated into a temporal triplet, one figure divided across three time moments and retimed into a canon of motion, a platform of figures negotiating levitation through the high altitude zone. She pulses within and through these

⁵ The Digital Loom is the compositional workspace at the edit suite's two-dimensional timeline — a weaving field where human figures, motion graphics, sound, and scenography are interlaced into unified relationship. The Digital Kiln transforms captured movement through its heat — creating memory sensations within the image, revealing the energy trail that follows gesture. Both are original methodological terms developed through the author's doctoral research: *The Somatic Digital: Interspaces in Choreographing Media*, Massey University Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa, 2026.

scenographic vistas, appearing and dissolving, the environment changing gradually around her.

Zhou Zihan's score deepens this de-occupation into the sonic dimension: at moments the pulse pulls back to a liminal thread of low frequency clicks and beats -sonic beads in near-silence- the acoustic equivalent of submersion, of hearing the outside world through water. This is the internal gaze made audible: the subconscious primed and engaged, intuition heightened, all senses activated at the macro and micro level simultaneously -the circuitboard of the human being alive in both directions at once.



TAIAO (POIPOI) film Link: <https://vimeo.com/dbel/taiao-poipoi-cny>

THE AIRSTRUMENT FAMILY AND THE TRANSFIGURATION OF FORM _

"The history of the theatre is the history of the transfiguration of the human form."
- Oskar Schlemmer, 1925

Schlemmer's declaration finds new resonance in digitally augmented practice. The materials of transfiguration -form and colour, the tools of painter and sculptor- expand to include digital space itself. In the Bauhaus workshops of the 1920s and 1930s, Schlemmer advocated replacing human performers with what he called art figures -"personifications of the loftiest concepts and ideas, made of the most exquisite material"- that would permit "a theater of shape, material and movement, not tethered to the physical and aesthetic limitations of the human being" (as cited in Blumenthal, 2005, p. 113).

The 1917 Ballet Parade — bringing together Jean Cocteau's scenario, Pablo Picasso's Cubist designs, Erik Satie's score, Léonide Massine's choreography, and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes — confirmed what the practice had always comprehended: that the collaborative vehicle of theatre, the shifting scenography, the costumed figures, the music, the light, and the choreographic skill of gesture could cohere into a total artwork whose sum exceeded every individual part. Picasso's enormous body puppets — oversized costume-structures within which dancers were concealed — speak to this most radically: the human body as the unseen source of the form's movement and life. The puppeteer's principle at architectural scale. The dancer as the world's hidden breath. As I have observed: "working with the human body for film is like puppeteering. You craft a choreographic story with the bodies of the dancers you are working with, but in post-production you revisit that" (Belton, as cited in Marshall, 2009). Massine's insight that expression reaches from the movement — not the movement from the expression (PBS, 2012) — arrives as revelation within digitally augmented practice.⁶

The philosophical positions traced above — productive emptiness, the living bond between somatic knowing and digital possibility, de-occupation as active spatial intelligence — find their practical ground in a methodology developed across years of choreographic practice and teaching: the Conductor-Receiver (C-R) Method.

The C-R Method is a somatic system for generating movement, performance, and choreographic architecture from relationship. Its premise: every body carries inherent movement intelligence, and this sensibility can be encouraged, shaped, and given form through a structured, reciprocal exchange between participants. One person conducts — through touch, gesture, or language. Another receives — responding with body, breath, and movement. Roles shift. What emerges is a repeatable movement architecture: a built construction of phrases, stillnesses, and patterns generated from the body rather than imposed upon it.

Developed initially in workshop contexts at the University of Otago in the late 1990s, the method found its fullest development across residencies at the New Zealand School of Dance (2000–2019). It has extended internationally through workshops at Sapienza University Roma (2012), Bauhaus University Weimar (2013), and Nanyang Technological University Singapore (2015).

From the C-R Method's foundational gesture — one body conducting another through space — a family of conducting agents has emerged across the practice, named as they arrived:

Aistrument (coined 2012) — a hand-held object deployed as a choreographic conducting agent and bridge to the scenographic. The Aistruments move between the deliberately spare and the culturally specific — some neutral: painted wooden rods, fibreglass rods, cut discs, some with one mirrored face — in the Bauhaus tradition of the object freed from cultural specificity; others culturally charged and particular — woven raranga objects, an Aboriginal throw stick, the

⁶ My engagement with these historical precedents came through Jennifer Shennan — dance history tutor at the New Zealand School of Dance — who directed me toward the NZSD library where literature on the 1917 Ballet Parade waited. The Equilibrist wireframe costume remains the most complete space suit in the practice's history — the dancer fully inside the linear world of Klee's *Seiltänzer*, the human form and the digital figure as one unified being, the Conductor-Receiver methodology as live performance event with the body conducting the digital figure into existence before an audience. See: <https://www.goodcompanyarts.com/equilibrist>

3D-printed shell of Pōtaka Nautilus — carrying their own whakapapa (genealogy, layered lineage) into the work.⁷ The spare and the complex, the neutral and the particular, all calibrated to the human figure and the world being made. Like the shuttle of warp and weft, each gesture weaves the dancer's interior world into the surrounding space while weaving the surrounding space back into the dancer — the Aistrument as compass, navigating simultaneously outward into the digital environment and inward toward the heart. The whakapapa (genealogy/lineage) of Aistruments extends from elastic cords in *Henge* (2001) through unnamed hand-held objects in *Line Dances* (2010) to *Time Dance* (2012) — where the term Aistrument was coined in direct response to Marey's chronophotographic investigations — and onward to the arc rods, paddles, and hei tiki hand forms of *ENCOUNTER* (2024–2027).

In *Matchbox* (2008) — critically recognised for its "complex... mise en scène" (Marshall, 2009) — two scales of object work coexist: board-game-scale tubular rods within the Jukebox, a scenographic machine that projects both sound and moving image with a miniature band of musicians, and 1–3 metre tubes within which dancers perform C-R Method Object Triads. The Jukebox is a Scenostrument *avant la lettre*: an environment that conducts meaning, that plays story through its architecture and its sonic and visual presence simultaneously.

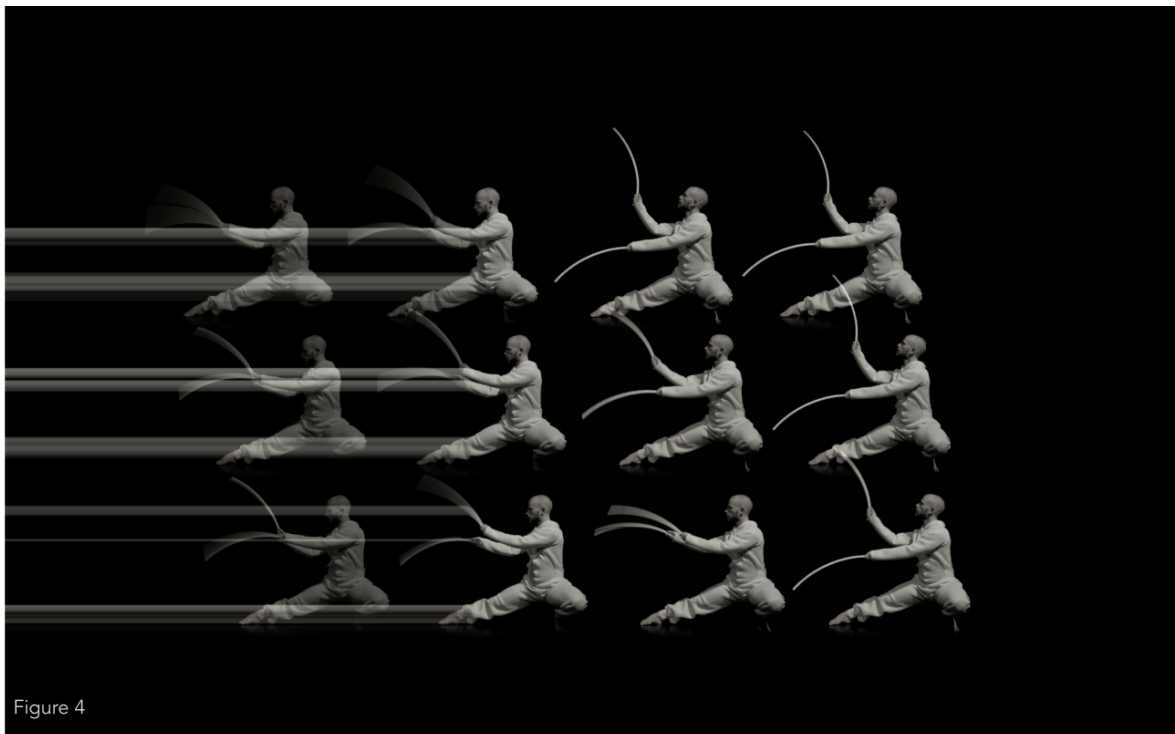
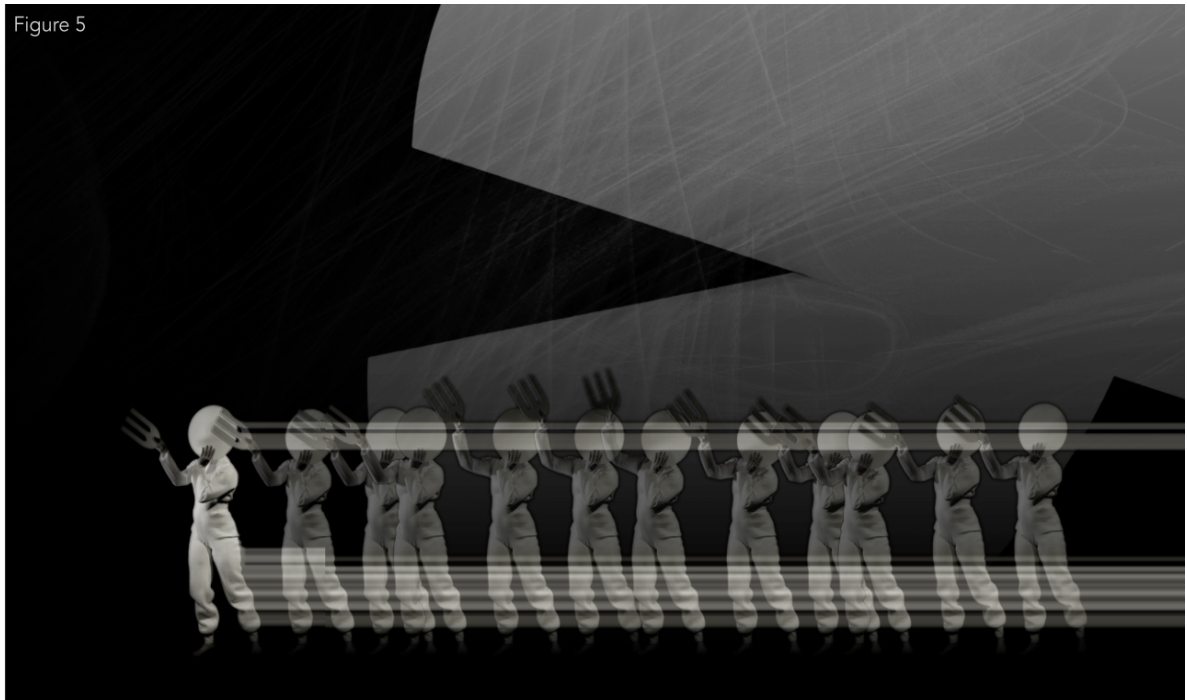


Figure 4

⁷ The relationship between the Aistrument and the sonic and visual fields it appears to conduct is crafted in post-production — the dancer imagines and embodies the influence of their gesture on the digital realm during filming, prompted by the director, while the actual correspondence between motion graphics, atmospheric elements, and musical score is shaped carefully in the Digital Kiln. For the viewer, the illusion is complete: the wielded Aistrument appears to conduct its environment — visual ripple and sonic ripple simultaneously, like a stone thrown into water, seen and heard as one event. The visual science of cymatics — the study of wave phenomena and vibration as developed by Hans Jenny (1904–1972) — offers empirical grounding for this perceptual relationship: sound frequencies generating geometric patterns in matter, the body-as-standing-wave, the Aistrument as the visible gesture of an invisible sonic force. See Jenny, H. (2001). *Cymatics: A Study of Wave Phenomena and Vibration*. MACROmedia.

Wordstrument (coined 2026) — spoken language deployed as choreographic and sonic conducting agent. The voice becomes a sculptor. The word becomes baton. Sound arriving in the body of the receiver before meaning is consciously processed — emotion preceding cognition.⁸



Lenstrument (coined 2026) — the camera deployed as a somatic choreographic instrument. Not a recording device but an active choreographic partner — another body in the space, conducting meaning through its own agency — what critic David Eggleton recognised as "a biomechanical dancing machine possessed of an unblinking eye" (Eggleton, 2008) before the term existed.



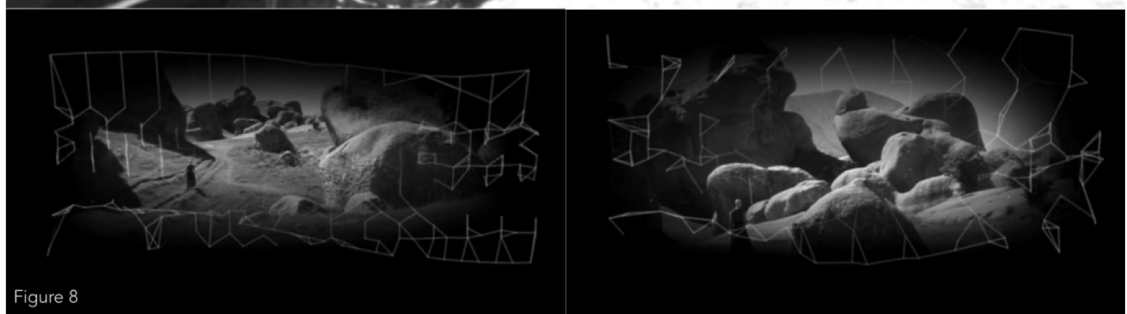
First present in Figure(s) of Speech (2003) and After Dürer (2007), where a large LCD monitor cabled to the camera created a real-time feedback loop between the

⁸ Wordstrument (coined by Daniel Alexander Belton, 2026) — spoken language deployed as choreographic and sonic conducting agent within the Conductor-Receiver Method. Where the Aistrument conducts through material presence and spatial gesture, the Wordstrument conducts through the sonic and cognitive weight of the spoken word — the voice as sculptor, the word as baton. Sound arrives in the body of the receiver before meaning is consciously processed; emotion precedes cognition. The Wordstrument extends the Aistrument family's taxonomy into the register of language itself.

dancing body and the lens — the performer sculpting themselves in what I describe as the digital clay of the Digital Kiln.

Sitestrument (coined by Daniel Alexander Belton, Good Company Arts) — the site itself as choreographic conductor. The historical water treatment plant at Bubeneč carries this quality: its machinery, textures, and sonic residue of water and labour conduct meaning before a single body enters the space. The Sitestrument has functioned across Good Company Arts practice for over two decades before its naming — from the limestone formations of Castle Hill outside Ōtautahi Christchurch in *Time Dance* (2012), whose vast naturally formed stone recalls the sculptor Henry Moore's morphological intuitions and where dancers Donnine Harrison and Emma Martin cast their body shadows across the sun-heated limestone surface, those animated black voidal figures invoking the memory of ancient rock drawings: the dancer's shadow as proto-animation, the limestone as the first screen, the body as the first mark-making instrument; to the bamboo forest of Kyoto in *EMAKI* (2016); to the coastal landscapes of Aotearoa New Zealand that move through *Pōtaka Nautilus*, *Astrolabe — Whakaterenga*, and *After Dürer*.

The Yellow Mountains of TAI AO (POIPOI) (2020) carried their Sitestrument quality before they became Scenostrument — a specific day's mist and fog, unrepeatable, already de-occupying and re-occupying space in ways no fixed theatrical scene could anticipate or plan. The significant white void areas in those stills — recognised later in the studio as spatial potential — became the floating realm into which Xiao Ke was placed through luma keying: gravity defied, depth evoked, the Infinity Studio's white te kore in direct correspondence with the mountain's white void.



Matchbox (2008) also depicts the city of Dunedin itself becomes the containing Sitestruement: the grand 1930s Post Office facade as threshold, the tiled Railway Station interior as stage, the Jukebox door as the passage into productive emptiness, and the Public Library facade as the world reclaimed — dancers returned, jubilant, as if aboard some Bauhausian cruise ship, the Zwischenwelt traversed and everything changed.⁹



Figure 9

Scenostruement (coined 2026) — the constructed scenographic environment — digital, physical, or real world — understood and deployed as an active choreographic instrument: simultaneously conductor and receiver, an active participant in the artwork's narrative alongside the performer figures who dialogue with it. Where the Airstruement names an object held in the dancer's hand, the Scenostruement names the environment itself as agent.¹⁰

The dancernaut's filmed motion etches into surrounding constructed topographies — co-generating the virtual world.¹¹ Proto-Scenostruements appear across the practice before the word arrived: the Jukebox of Matchbox (2008) — a

⁹ Sitestruement (coined by Daniel Alexander Belton, Good Company Arts) — the site understood and deployed as an active choreographic conductor: a space whose history, materiality, acoustic properties, and spatial intelligence shape and direct the bodies, objects, and events that move through it. The Sitestruement holds the whole Airstruement family within its architectural embrace — the conductor that conditions all other conductors. The historical water treatment plant at Bubeneč, Prague is a Sitestruement in full activation — its industrial whakapapa conducting before a single performer arrives.

¹⁰ Scenostruement (coined by Daniel Alexander Belton, Good Company Arts) — the constructed scenographic environment — digital, physical, or real world — understood and deployed as an active choreographic instrument: simultaneously conductor and receiver, an active participant in the artwork's narrative alongside the performer figures who dialogue with it. Where the Airstruement names an object held in the dancer's hand as choreographic conductor and bridge to the scenographic, the Scenostruement names the environment itself as agent. Performers move through and activate these worlded spaces — entering into exchange with them through Airstruements, through pure movement presence, and through energetic engagement. The space responds: atmospherics pulse and shift, digital weather moves through the frame, and the scenographic field appears alive and attentive.

¹¹ Each work in the practice carries a bespoke portal frame — a screen-within-screen design culturally sourced for each project, creating a threshold between the viewer's world and the film world: the interspace made visible as design. Examples include the lobed oval gold bowl form of TAI AO (POIPOI) (2020), derived from an ancient Chinese lobed oval gold bowl, c. 830s CE, Tang Dynasty, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore; and distinct bespoke frames for Pōtaka Nautilus, PEPE, Ad Parnassum — Purapurawhetū, EMAKI, NGURU, and the Asia-Pacific Trilogy. In each case the frame is not ornamentation, but conceptual — a Scenostruement in miniature, conducting the viewer's entry into the work's world.

scenographic machine projecting sound and moving image simultaneously — and the Stairstruments of Line Dances (2010) — two large staircases functioning as plinth and platform stages within the stage, physical bridges to the digital scenography of animated lines drawn from Paul Klee's lithographs, drawings, and paintings, featured in Saint A in B and Harlequin on the Bridge (<https://vimeo.com/dbel/saint>).



As the programme note for Saint A in B recorded: 'Line, dance and music converge in the screen space to create as Klee said, a "between world" (Zwischenwelt)' (Belton, 2014). The philosophy preceded its naming by over a decade.

Scale malleability runs through the practice across four decades — from Jim Murphy's compact kinetic models, at times scaled to architectural dimensions through the Digital Kiln in AXIS (2017) — rotating orrery-like forms inhabited by the dancernauts — to Jac Grenfell's digital model of the throw stick becoming a ship in Astrolabe — Whakaterenga, to Grenfell's virtual sculptural interpretations of Oteiza's Par Móvil in ENCOUNTER. Small, made large, physical transformed to virtual. Mechanical precision recalibrated as atmospheric poetry. And connecting them all — the geometric whakapapa from Dürer's Polyhedron animated by Grenfell in After Dürer (2007) to the Par Móvil virtual forms of ENCOUNTER (2024): seventeen years of geometric thinking as a path through the void.

The most complete activation of this transfiguration principle in the practice remains Equilibrist (2016) — where performer, objects, costume and Scenographic Body achieved full overlap, the human form transfigured into the linear character of Klee's Seiltänzer, physical and digital as one living expression. Dixon traces a century-long impulse toward total integration of space, body, light, and technology — from Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk through the Bauhaus artists' radical reconceptions of theatrical space — arguing that this lineage finds its contemporary expressions in digital performance practice. Choreographing Media inhabits and extends this tradition (Dixon, 2007, pp. 43–45).

SCENOSTRUMENT: FROM PHILOSOPHY TO PEDAGOGY _

The Scenoststrument concept — the environment as active choreographic agent — finds its most direct pedagogical articulation in a workshop methodology developed from the C-R Method and currently proposed to the Prague Quadrennial 2027 Studio programme: SCENOSTRUMENT: Building Story Through Body, Object, Sound and Digital Light.

The workshop's premise draws directly from the philosophical constellation traced above. All storytelling requires a discipline of silences and eliminations — enabling

new forms of emptiness that invite participation and collaboration. De-occupation functions as an act of breathing: space itself becoming a choreographic partner rather than a passive container.

The workshop unfolds across five phases, each building on the C-R Method's foundational principles:

Phase One — Touch Conducting: Pairs work body to body, sculpting and receiving, building remembered sequences of movement and stillness. The foundational literacy: learning to listen and speak through touch.

Phase Two — Non-Touch Gesture: The same principle freed from contact. Proximity and distance become choreographic variables. The space between bodies becomes active material — the *Zwischenwelt* is made physical.

Phase Three -The Aistrument: A found or geometric object enters the space between the pair. It may be provided- cylinder, cube, sphere, rod -or found from the site itself. The found object is especially welcomed: it arrives already storied, already carrying the absences and histories of its previous life. The workshop does not invent stories. It releases the stories already held in the materials.

Phase Four -Model Making: The choreographic logic of the object triad migrates into three dimensions. Participants build table-top scenographic worlds from recycled materials, using the same geometric vocabulary as their Aistrument. Narrative arrives through the building process- discovered in the spatial exchange between materials. As Christopher Alexander observed: no pattern exists in isolation -each pattern exists only through its interconnection with others.

Phase Five -Digital Projection and the Timegraft: Filmed body duets are edited and projected back into the constructed models. Each participant's personal sonic archive -collected from the site throughout the workshop- becomes the sound design for their own film. The digital body enters the miniature world: a timegraft¹² bonding what was recorded to what has been built, living time pressed onto a medium that knows no duration. Reflected light has a delicacy and elusiveness- it is our minds that write the narrative of what we are seeing. Light does not have time -from the photon's perspective there is no elapsed time between leaving the projector and touching the model's surface. Yet the film is constructed around duration- the unfolding of movement through time. The Scenostrument holds both simultaneously. As Judge observed: "The best dance films don't only record movement, but alter your experience of time and space in the process" (Judge, 2011).

The workshop's proposed site -the historical water treatment plant at Bubeneč, Prague- deepens the resonance of every phase. Le Corbusier wrote that "a house is a machine for living." This building was a machine for sustaining life. In

¹² Timegraft (coined by Daniel Alexander Belton, 2026) — an original term carrying a deliberate botanical register: grafting as the merging of living growth, the branching outward of one living thing into another. Unlike the film editor's splice, a timegraft bonds temporal states as living tissue — past motion, present gesture, and future trajectory simultaneously present in one image. Not a surgical intervention but an organic becoming. The paradox at its heart: I work with film, which is light, and photons exist outside time. The timegraft is therefore an act of grafting living time onto a medium that does not experience time — the dancer's body, temporal and mortal, grafted onto light that knows no duration.

SCENOSTRUMENT, it becomes a machine for making: for generating story through body, object, space, sound, and digital light.

The workshop culminates in a collective scenographic installation open to PQ audiences. Theatre of light. We move toward it. And in that movement, in that productive emptiness, new scenographic futures crystallise.

CONCLUDING NOTE: PRODUCTIVE EMPTINESS AS TRANSFERABLE PRACTICE _

De-occupation is not a philosophical position held at a distance from practice. It is a bodily intelligence — cultivated through the C-R Method's years of development, extended through the Aistrument family's expanding taxonomy, enacted in the Scenostrument workshop's five-phase pedagogy, and made visible in the digital environments of Choreographing Media.

The Zwischenwelt, Ma, te kore — three traditions naming the same truth: the space between is not nothing. It is where everything lives. Where cinema and dance meet as family. Where the Rückenfigur holds the doorway, always looking through. Where the Aistrument extends the body's sensibility outward into whatever environment the next work will call forth — and threads inward simultaneously.

This is what the somatic digital makes possible: not the replacement of the body by technology, but the technology receiving the body's sensibility — the dancer entering the digital realm as inhabitant of a world co-created through the living bond between somatic knowing and digital possibility.

"Matter is the child of spirit." — Daniel Alexander Belton

I see this work as encrypting dance within digital media — the woven figure, woven into the binary language of ones and zeros, becoming something authentic in and of itself. The somatic sensibility of the dancer encoded into the photonic medium, carried in light, decoded by the audience's own biophotonic reception. Our brains are antennae — receiving and transmitting simultaneously, already in the language of light. As physicist Daniele Faccio reflects: "Light is the language of the universe — it holds all the information about everything from all times within it." The dancer moving in the biophotonic field is already in that language. And the Aistrument held in the dancer's hand — that bridge between the physical and the digital — is a tuning fork, vibrating at the frequency where the human and the cosmic recognise one another.

The pieces are catalysts for imagination. With each new work, I am journeying too. Dance is pattern, pattern is purpose. The Aistruments extend their living signal outward, the Scenostrument responds. And in the productive emptiness between them — the interspace, the Zwischenwelt, the between-world that is not absence but everything — new scenographic forms arrive.

"Parallel to creation; sometimes it is a sample, just as this earth is a sample of the cosmos." — Goethe, as cited in Moore (1968)

Daniel Alexander Belton / June 15th 2026



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INTERSPACES / SCENOSTRUMENT: De-occupying Space as Choreographic Strategy and Scenographic Practice

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RESUMEN _ El cine y la danza son familia – una familia de luz. A su intersección, donde la filosofía coreográfica encuentra la práctica escenográfica, este artículo traza una línea de vacío productivo a metodología transferible. Basándose en mi presentación invitada INTERSPACES: De-occupying Space as Choreographic Strategy en el Prague Quadrennial Symposium: Performing Exhibitions, Curating Scenographies (Abril 2026), y de la metodología del taller SCENOSTRUMENT que recientemente se propuso al Prague Quadrennial 2027 Studio programme, este escrito articula des-ocupación como una posición teórica y un sistema escenográfico práctico. El método, Conductor-Receiver (C-R) Method, desarrollado a través de 30 años de coreografía práctica e investigación de arte digital, proporciona la fundamentación somática desde donde emerge la familia Aistrument de agentes conductores: Aistrument, Wordstrument, Scenostument, Lenstrument, Sitestument. En conjunto, estos constituyen una taxonomía original de instrumentos somático-digital, extendiéndose desde el cuerpo sosteniendo un objeto en el espacio al sitio mismo como conductor coreográfico. Este artículo argumenta que el vacío productivo (el Zwischenwelt, Ma, te kore, Oteiza's desocupación) no es una abstracción filosófica, pero sí es una práctica escenográfica enseñable, transferible y somática.

PALABRAS CLAVE _ des-ocupación, escenografía, digital somático, Conductor-Receiver Method, Aistrument, Scenostument, Choreographing Media, interespacio, mise-en-scène.

ABSTRACT _ Cinema and dance are family — family of light. At their intersection, where choreographic philosophy meets scenographic practice, this paper traces a line from productive emptiness to transferable methodology. Drawing from my invited presentation INTERSPACES: De-occupying Space as Choreographic Strategy at the Prague Quadrennial Symposium: Performing Exhibitions, Curating Scenographies (April 2026), and from the SCENOSTRUMENT workshop methodology currently proposed to the Prague Quadrennial 2027 Studio programme, the paper articulates de-occupation as both a theoretical position and a practical scenographic system. The Conductor-Receiver (C-R) Method — developed across thirty years of choreographic practice and digital arts research — provides the somatic bedrock from which the Aistrument family of conducting agents emerges: Aistrument, Wordstrument, Scenostument, Lenstrument, Sitestument. Together these constitute an original taxonomy of somatic-digital instruments extending from the body holding an object in space to the site itself as

choreographic conductor. The paper argues that productive emptiness — the *Zwischenwelt*, *Ma*, *te kore*, Oteiza's *desocupación* — is not a philosophical abstraction but a teachable, transferable, and somatic scenographic practice.

KEYWORDS _ de-occupation, scenography, somatic digital, Conductor-Receiver Method, Aistrument, Scenostrument, Choreographing Media, interspace, *mise-en-scène*.

AUTHOR NOTE _ This paper draws from my doctoral research — *The Somatic Digital: Interspaces in Choreographing Media* (Massey University Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa, 2026) — a practice-led thesis developing *Choreographing Media* as a methodology through which digital materials become active choreographic partners, orchestrating dance, music, film, objects, and scenography as a unified creative system. This paper weaves *te reo Māori*, Japanese, and German terms as they arise in the practice and research, explained at first appearance. *Te reo Māori* is the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand; the author identifies as *Tangata Tiriti* — born to this land and shaped through decades of reciprocal creative relationship with *te ao Māori*, a living exchange in which knowledge, cultural practice, and artistic tradition have always flowed in both directions. Key *te reo Māori* concepts used here: *whakapapa* — genealogy, layered foundation, the relational tracing of origins; *wiri* — trembling, oscillating motion, a quality of vibration present in traditional Māori performance and found throughout the natural world. Japanese and German terms are drawn from aesthetic and philosophical traditions central to the research: *Ma* 間 (Japanese) — negative space, the generative interval; *Zwischenwelt* (German) — the between-world, a term from Paul Klee's notebooks.