WAHAWAWEWAO
Welcome to our field, we are here and we are everywhere at once

We are transcontextual
We are transhuman

We are transhemispherical
Where are you/we/I?
Survey the field
Scan the scene with your whole self
Walk softly around the edge
Move inside and outside the boundary
Take up a position that is unfamiliar
Where are we/you/I?
Welcome to our field

by Carol Brown
Our project begins from a recognition of the heterogeneous, variegated field of contemporary art and digital culture. The transitory, mobile, the elusive bio-virtual of our condition is the undersong of this work. For this is the era of people movement and data flows. We navigate our way here through tangled networks of flesh and data; we pathfind through intuitive somatic know-how; we wayfind through place responsiveness; we assess our positionality through global coordinates; we are tethered to satellite technologies.

*we are here and we are everywhere at once*

We are marked markers, navigating kinesthetic longings through complex webs of identity. We are fusions of human and technology, connected to physical and virtual dimensions. *We are lichens and cyborgs*.  

As artists in the contemporary milieu we are navigating an altered sense of agency, moving, not in a mixed reality, but as a reality remix. Initiated through the research project *Kinesthetic Navigations / Kinesthetic Stories*, our film is a quest and a question. Our collaborative drive to bring a palpable sense of movement’s uncanny relation to places that are physical and virtual led us on sorties into extreme environments. Through a palimpsestic, filmic layering of movement from one place onto another, two sites are bought into contact with each other; two fields interpenetrate: the enclosed space of CoLAB Auckland University of Technology’s Motion Capture studio, and the expansive, rugged, physical landscape of Mt Ida, Kyeburn Diggings, St Bathans, Poolburn Reserve and the Hawkdun Ranges in Central Otago. Our collaboration is a tangled relation configured through messy cartographic-corporeal-technological mappings of these extremely different terrains.

As dance, sonic, digital and film artists we consider how the spaces that
are particular to our movement in the world bodies forth new meanings that capture a complex sense of presence. We play with and through the fractal embodiment we feel in our daily lives. The media-specificity of our project is found in movement’s sensuous, kinesthetic, proprioceptive and haptic properties. It is charged with affective becomings that are transitory and matrixial. Our kinematic gestures inscribe new spatio-temporal ecologies for future memories. In searching for a new cartography of presence, we offer an oblique critique of the mapping tools of the past.

The horizon of the horizontal line returns our eyes to the page whilst our bodies settle around its familiar striated logic. The optics of perspective return the dancer to the stage where she takes up a position whilst you watch. Windows direct our gaze beyond the planes of walls to an outside that we cannot touch. We are framed and framing, scopically defining terrains of perception across a subject/object divide. The rectilinear frame of the screen is our portal to other worlds. But what happens when this portal is a prosthetic device attached to our bodies, when its movement is continuous with our movement? We are escape artists, swerving off the well-worn paths of subject-centred narratives.

How do we find our way without an object? We extrude hand held poles as wayfinding tools for travel in horizontal, sagittal and vertical planes. Using these long sticks, to prod, point and pierce the ground and to trap a child in a game, we generate patterns of multi-directionality through polycentric balances. Like Bauhaus performers gone feral, we extend into the volumes of air around our bodies, listening to our inner ear, our auris interna, orienting ourselves through the vestibular system.

Negotiating thresholds, balancing outside and inside, we build relations through a vibratile tactility. From inside this unstable equilibrium, we approach the shifting ground with corporeal questions:
Dancing, like virtual travel, involves practices of feedback and feedforward that constantly loop. We create strange loops between places. Catalysing reflexive relations that are generative and subject to change, our doubled relation to movement, as deferred and potential action, stumbles.

A stumble, trips up perception, it disrupts advance, progress, forward motion. In stumbling we fall, into shadow-sites, we open gaps, and fissures, we are shunted into unexpected accidental discoveries. But after stumbling we concentrate on landing back within ourselves. Back into our bodies. We have to re-centre, re-balance, in order to carry on. Imagination requires such attentive acts of recalibration.

The surplus potential in our movements, never present in their entirety, de-frame the spatial and temporal operations of technologies. Our rhythmic soma-technics unsettle the map that determines the projection of our gestures. We are interested in bodies which feel where the spectacle of representation fails. The site of this affective encounter involves near-collisions with the camera.

How do we find balance in the world?

How do we calibrate between physical & virtual conditions?

How do we activate embodied longings for a sense of place?

What happens when we transpose movement memories from the laboratory into the landscape, and from the landscape back into the laboratory?
score and no storyboard. We are making it up as we go along, together. The material and immaterial ground we cover creates a choreographic itinerary for listening to a remote performance. We riff on kinesthetic navigations as virtual travel experiments.

Working with the commercial film industries means for capturing movement, we resist hyper-visualisation, through an oblique strategy. We explore the possibilities for moving through undersides, places of meeting between corporeality and environment that remain unmarked. In these conditions our somatically intelligent bodies think on their own terms. The traces of their movements write kinesthetic stories. Rewilding we make a new tribe. We create an ironic myth, a nomadic becoming of kinfolk in a theatre country.

We are shifting perspectives, bending time, making malleable stories, becoming allies of stones. Our task is to develop a process that embodies not just somewhere else but something else. Our affective investments in technological tools brings about an altered sense of terrain. An expanded field for body-mind shaping a different way of belonging.

What name is it that calls a hawk from the sky?

Hand-held and spherical mirrors are communication tools, telepathic signalling devices for heterotopic desires and shattered frequencies of touch. They project beyond that which we can physically touch, they touch virtually. A fractal sense of embodiment emerges as we play at the edges, blurring the real and the artificial in costumes cut for our segmentation as data.

Movement initiated across digital and analog spaces alters our inherited understanding of the kinesphere and modernist conceptions of space. Challenging the idea of human movement taking place within a 3D sphere, we discover new kinds of rapport, transfiguring movement as a site of
multitudinous becomings. Space as volume and depth rather than surface brings attention to its primordial dimensions, as felt and tangible material. For when depth is tied to place it becomes topological. Linking body and place through a carving of volume, our corporeal figurations become topological, they manifest a spatial milieu through a depth of places. Our forays do not follow linear pathways, they are contoured and layered, multidimensional, restless wayfarings. This de-territorialized travel maps a multidimensional atlas.

In the mountains, suited up, skin is sealed from surrounding air. Enclosed in synthetic bespoke Mocap suits, we are patterned in a palette of geometrical cut blocks of grey camouflaged against the grey schist rocks. Figuring the landscape, a panoramic gaze meets the technological gaze. Airborne, we are prodigious, ecstatic figurations, tracing pathways, holding multiple memories, overlapping places, feeling the contradictions and disjunctions in the spaces between. Attending to the way one space talks to another, we listen to lost wave lengths. On this wonder-voyage, a moving panorama, an elsewhere.

Playing Strange with Movement
by Jenny Roche
It started with blank beginnings with discussions of reorienting and surveying the land in Central Otago. Carol Brown’s father had been a land surveyor in that area when she was a child. We gauged the intervals from rock to rock in movement. Our new tribe emerged through distributed cognition. Fresh narratives connected the dots as this place became written into our stories.

I arrived with my fellow dancer, Grant McLay, in Dunedin on the South Island of New Zealand in January 2017 with only a brief overview of the context for the creative exploration we were taking on. We became involved when the research project was in its second stage of development and was moving from the Motion Capture studio to filming in the external environment.

Omakau, Ranfurly, Ophir, Poolburn, Hawkdun… place names from the Ida Valley, Central Otago. These names sounded strange initially but are familiar to me now that I have moved through the landscapes they define; from vast dramatic vistas, to small intervals between specific rocks. The territories they describe looked familiar from the start. They resonate with my lived memories of Ireland, where I lived most of my life before moving to Australia five years ago; and imagined memories, in the way they recall the fantasy world of Tolkien’s Middle Earth. These places represent for multitudes the Kingdom of Rohan in Peter Jackson’s film of Lord of the Rings. The overlaying of these filmic images, as false memories, is so potent that the territory no longer solely represents itself, it is a celebrity landscape you feel you have encountered before.

Emergent conversations in movement
We were working together as a group for the first time which required some shared reference points to begin with. Our initial discussions revealed a common connection to the minimalistic approach of British choreographer Rosemary Butcher’s work. Carol and Ruth had looked to some of Butcher’s early choreography as a point of discussion for the project, in particular, Touch the Earth (1987) and Flying Lines (1985). Together we watched short extracts of each piece and were taken by the visual references to Native
American indigenous tribespeople in the 1700s that Butcher had absorbed into *Touch the Earth* (1987), in particular. The images of figures holding long poles in the landscape led us to develop a particular motif which we reconstituted through our improvisations. These poles created a visual framing of our bodies, an alignment with and a sense of extension into the vast spaces we encountered.

Our first day of work involved an exploration into the land around the house Hawkrock where most of the group was staying. We outlined the parameters of how we would work together, Ruth suggested that once we had made a decision to move out into the landscape, we would not discuss our actions further. This allowed us to become immersed in the spaces we were moving through and to listen to each other in making spontaneous movement and interactional choices as a particular scene unfolded. More than just listening to each other, this allowed us to respond to the ‘signs’ from the landscape. I had been reading the work of British cultural theorist Wendy Wheeler (2006) on biosemiotics, she explains that every environment is abundant with signs, *An environmental niche is always also a semiotic niche. Every environment is, at the time, and necessarily, rich in ‘information’: sounds, odours, movements, colours, electric fields, waves of any kind, chemical signals, touch, etc. On this view, life is primally semiotic.*

While we acknowledge a certain order in human culture, we assume that nature is somewhat chaotic. However, Wheeler describes the coupling between organism and environment as a kind of evolving conversation, explaining that this semiosis takes place from the level of simple life forms to the complexity of human cultural life.

Environmental signs impact on our processes of meaning making and develop cultural potency. I was fascinated to experience how this emergence might take place from our encounter with the environment. How the landscape might shape us and our interactions together and what new narratives would emerge. I describe my first encounter with the land in the following lines:
I can hear everything; I reach to the edges of this vastness. The rock catches me, draws me into its circular contours. Its shape directs my feet to tramp circuitously, my toes following these coordinates. I’m completely in the round as my body follows my feet. These directions from the land are surprisingly complex, they send me in multiple pathways when I listen.

An engaged performative presence and attentiveness allowed us to encounter the landscape and each other. I describe a meeting in this space as, ‘when I sit with Ruth, I sink into deep presence, landing and dispersing at the same time’. This performative presence pervaded each moment on camera, giving weight through attentiveness to each other and the environment. Immersing ourselves in movement exchanges with little discussion allowed us to establish a working practice quickly without having to define it through the limitations of a conceptual frame. In this way we superceeded what Wheeler describes as the constriction caused by the western metaphysical separation of mind/body and culture/nature, through the potential to actively engage in a real environment or Umwelt, which for biosemiotics describes the species’ world as they perceive it.

The prior research undertaken by the group before Grant and I entered the project, supported the possibility of encountering each other and the sites in a performative moment without much preamble. Costumes (technical clothing for Mocap), objects (poles, pegs, ribbon and mirrors) and locations had all been identified and gathered in advance, so that we could form the context quickly. The costumes, bespoke Motion Capture suits designed for the film, gave us a strange legibility in the landscape through the angular patterns of their grey, black and white geometries. We were simultaneously marking presence and absence as these suits are usually overlaid by other characters in the post production phase of a film; we were avatars traversing a real domain.

The first day of exploration laid down the parameters for how we would perform our way through the landscape for the rest of the creative process. While the parameters seemed only lightly sketched, we would draw from
these first encounters in subsequent scenes when making intuitive and unspoken decisions in action. Rather than forcing outcomes, the ability to follow these decisions required attentiveness to what was happening, what the material limitations might be, and how they might determine the development of the work. While we all worked across a range of roles, certain traits took precedence for each individual within the group at various times. Choreographically, this was supported by Carol’s ability to let the movement language unfold and then to highlight moments that could be emphasized and or repeated. Ruth, kept an overview of all elements, drawing us back to earlier discussions so that we did not lose track of the dramaturgical intention. Bruno improvised alongside the group in capturing the filmic material seamlessly. Russell, collected sounds and molded them into soundscapes from the various sites we inhabited. Grant and I, in our dancer roles mediated the ideas, exploring how they might be realized. The group adopted a kind of guerilla approach of driving to find a location with our costumes beneath our clothes and jumping out of the car (sometimes in icy, blustery weather – sometimes in blaring sunshine) to film an idea before the light shifted or was lost.

An example of this kind of response was evident during one of our scenes. In escalating winds, we struggled to demarcate a space using surveyor’s pegs, our poles and brightly colored tape. The tape was fragile and so it broke loose in the high wind, our plan unravelling and our actions
becoming comedic as we tried to patch the scene together. The camera kept rolling. Suddenly, Grant broke out, hooking the tape around the pole he was carrying and started walking through the landscape trailing the strands behind until he reached a large flat cleft of rock across the other side of a creek. He had the wind behind him, facing the streams of tape they flapped ferociously. He started winding up the ribbon on the pole through a figure-of-eight movement. This became a kind of beckoning to the rest of us. We all followed to join him except Ruth, who walked off in another direction as if ostracized from the group. This non-verbal decision-making, improvising with the moment at hand, had momentous weight to it as we watched her disappear into the distance. An unrehearsed narrative, it could be a life and death decision for her character, that we witnessed coming into being. Without speaking, we gathered ourselves and began walking in the opposite direction to her as a newly defined group.

Overlays of virtual, physical and real

Mid way through the shoot we engaged in a series of improvisational movement scores in a demarcated space on flat ground at the foot of the Hawkdun Mountains. Marking out the territory of the volume of a motion capture studio, again with surveyor’s paraphernalia we moved inside the volume as if immersed in a virtual reality landscape. Led by the eyes, though imagining we were wearing Oculus Rift VR headsets, we moved as if the real world was virtual; using our vision as the apparatus to transport us into other spaces. This task grew out of earlier movement improvisations by Ruth and Carol at Te Henga (Bethells Beach) near Auckland.

Adapting their method of translation between physical and virtual dimensions, I transferred the movement qualities from an earlier movement score amongst large rocks in which I had to catch myself with hands and feet to navigate an uneven surface. This was challenging to transpose onto the flat surface we were now encountering but it gave an imperative to the movement, pushing my balance into precarious stumbles as if moving from ledge to ledge. Hesitant, I could not quite touch or feel what was real. The overlaying of a different visual stimulus to promote
movement on the existing landscape, produced a kind of defamiliarization of the real which for me led to a finer tuning of my visual perception. I was looking at the real world through strange eyes and it shifted me somatically; playing strange with my movement.

Cultural references from the MoCap studio remixed with the place we were in, provided a transcontextual siting for this improvisation in the volume. Transcontextuality (Bateson 2016) recognizes the interdependency that characterizes living systems. Through a transcontextual lens we discover the mutual imbrication of seemingly distant places and spaces, opening entirely new dimensions in our experience and resisting the flattening of things to a single plane or context. Like a kaleidoscope, many perspectives are integrating.

Dressed as figures for technological capture, for me, made sense of the abstract movement explorations we were undertaking. If dance movement is encoded with cultural significance, then we were enacting the enculturated movements of MoCap avatars. We were not moving to be something else, to be overlaid with a different character but actually performing these roles, while projecting stimuli from other spaces. We were strange characters, almost comical, but somewhat noble.

Affective resonances emerged through incorporating paraphernalia and movement codes from the MoCap studio. Ruth constructed an image at twilight through attaching many fluorescent markers on my suit. Assisted by Carol, they lit me up like an icon, a Madonna, an Angel of Southern Lands. Another sequence drew together Grant with Carol’s son Cassidy, the fifth member of our group, in a dance of poles. Grant steadily stabbed the ground in different spots while Cassidy rolled underneath to avoid each thrust. The elder teaching the youngest member of our tribe this movement ritual. The ROMs, or Range of Movement sequences that the suited MoCap actor usually performs to calibrate the system, became a movement language through which we communicated our belongings and shared understandings of this ‘here’ as an ‘everywhere at once’.
Ground Truth at Lauder

Wheeler describes the natural world as the ‘ground-state of our being’. On our last day, we travelled to the climate research centre, the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research at Lauder in the Ida Valley, where we encountered the notion of ‘ground truth’. Specialising in measuring CFCs, Ozone, UV light levels and greenhouse gases, NIWA’s atmospheric research station is well known throughout the international atmospheric research community. Lauder’s clear skies and geographical isolation makes it perfect for observing atmospheric chemistry and radiation. Here, research scientists collect the data of climate change through various metrics in the atmosphere confirmed through the ground truth measurements from the earth. Like a film within a film, at NIWA, we saw scientific tools and instruments of measurement that could be sophisticated versions of our markers, pegs, mirrors and ribbons. These instruments were also capturing a volume; perpetually monitoring the atmosphere, taking the temperature of the ground, shooting lasers into the sky. Just as our gestures of placing, scaling, navigating and sensing were grasping ground truth through the expanded perception enabled through our augmented reality. With patient insistence these scientists asserted the incontrovertible evidence that the earth is getting warmer. This brought home the fragility of the landscapes we were walking through and moving with; simultaneously seeing the effect of earlier plunders of the earth and knowing the current tipping point we are heading towards
ecologically. One of our scenes took place in the pale sluicings that remain from the gold-mining around the township of St Bathans. At the base of the eastern side of the southern spur of the St Bathans Range, this hauntingly beautiful, otherworldly site was cleaved out of the landscape by the early 20th century hunt for gold. It was as if we had landed in a post-apocalyptic future when in reality, these scars had been formed a hundred years ago. The local poet Brian Turner narrator it beautifully.

He says,

There’s a rich
vein of family histories going back
to days when gold was what you took
and then moved on, leaving land to wrack
but not quite ruin.

While current rhetoric insists that we can continue to treat the planet as an inexhaustible resource, the ‘ground truth’ indicates otherwise. We felt the richness but fragility of the landscapes we were walking through. In our film, it is lonely; there are no animals or other people in shot. We are wandering endlessly through vast spaces. The camera rolls and the walk begins again. Even small chunks of movement sequences through the landscape, interrupted by multiple takes seem to constitute a sense of the whole, as if these fragments refer backwards and forwards to each other. We were not always ‘in’ it and the references to the contemporary world were always present. However, when the camera started rolling, we seemed to pick up the narrative again and it propelled us forward. It felt as if we would continue to walk that land long after we dispersed back to our separate countries. For that time, we seemed emblematic of the environment, as reciprocally it shaped us. This foregrounded the symbiotic relationship, that is, the conversation between self and environment at the heart of the evolutionary process, a relationship that we humans continually betray.

2 ibid
3 ibid
5 ibid (p.91)
Dancelines for a New Atlas

by Ruth Gibson
My first adventure takes place wearing a VR headset in a studio in London and discovering the Ida Valley in Google Earth. I fly above the mountains, I traverse the land as a drone, as a hawk. I change my scale. I switch my distant horizon to a vertical plane in seconds, I navigate over and under the place names.

I have a sense of my body in this world through my proprioceptive capacity – I am an expert in movement I am practised, I have a kinetic sense, but I’m Falling Upwards in mediated exploration. There is an idea that the story exists in the experience of place itself not necessarily in a narrative about the place. Spatial illusions and velocity perceptions. Places that exist in reality, may only be found in the imagination. I am at the interface of real and virtual worlds, spatial encounters, and virtual architectures.

VR is an experiential medium — we can be anywhere and do anything — immersive theatres, a desire for intercommunication in physical space - against ideas of the distancing effect of social media and online existence.

VR enables us to relocate ourselves as ‘embodied beings’ (Popat 2016) allowing us to ask questions about humanity, a corporeal space arising from proprioceptive sensation.

How can we maintain grounding in the physical world? Aspects of sensation with no direct contact — reaching out to touch, attempting to touch, a call to touch.

My body is adapting to the terrain, the landscape quickly starts to speak to me. My costumes are my clothes now. Streams rush down the mountains and wash the inside of my skull. I feel the earth's breath on my fingertips. History tells me I’m at Glimmerburn & the Blood Red Plains, Land of the extinct Moa. Old Man Range, Old Woman Range & Leaning Rock stand before me. Remnants of the gold mines all things extracted, dredged from this land. I am home a long way from home. We are a necklace of bodies across the contours
of the land like a skirting chain. Hissing hot wind, this land is unforgiving and we cannot hide here.

Hemmed in falling geometries, a sublimated pageantry coats my arms. I venture forth with my new community. We are a future family of the past in the headspace of the present in this world yet of that time, the world moves with us, no, we move in the world.

Time is a local event advancing, expanding, accelerating. How to describe the passage of time physically where past, present and future have the same status. Why must we experience the present moment? Virtual and physically real, matter secondary, more a thing of space time.

As the falcon’s wing span views the delta tree, we are dancing in a deep sea with no anchoring lines. The kinaesthetic spills onto the page with a space pen that is sketching dancelines for a new atlas. My ‘Kinosphir’ of phantom hands and valley spaces turns out the volume exposing our embodied flaws, onto our restless floor, we roll vertically and scroll, wind walking the Paper Road.

Enter through the mask, through the eyes of others. Not a psychology of character but a behaviour in vision. ‘We go where we are looking, not look where we are going’ perception and action, gestures as simulated action - Perçaption (Berthoz 2000). I’m touching with my eyes, yet feeling rather than seeing, drawing from my motor activity reservoir continually updating my position and balance. We write with totemic tape, quartering. Our partner, pet drone joins the corral. Our porous borders glisten. Constellations reaching the fabric of space and collapsing the world.

Camera world, Camera helmet, Fixed Face tethered as a kite with our bodies not missing but flapping like the sails of a boat or as a ragdoll body swirling and dangling. Disembodied Heads, Portraits — optical special effects — Latency
Blue screen Blue / motion capture studio
Telepresent presence
Anthropocene cinematic trope and tribe
Movie set of moves.

in-betweenness -

‘It is only by being in between that the knowledge of both subject and object, of both here and there, of self and other, of myself and that which is not myself can be integrated.’ Nicholas Salazar Sutil

2 Gibson, Ruth (2013) Kinosphir - she’s lost control, As Yet Impossible Symposium University of Salford, UK

Credits:

WeAreHereAndWeAreEverywhereAtOnce was created through an international collaboration between digital and visual artists Ruth Gibson & Bruno Martelli (UK), sound designer Russell Scoones (NZ) and choreographer Carol Brown (NZ).

The work is performed by Cassidy Scoones, Jenny Roche, Grant McLay, Ruth Gibson and Carol Brown.

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WAHAWAEWAO

CAROL BROWN  RUTH GIBSON  BRUNO MARTELLI  RUSSELL SCOONES

WITH

GRANT MCLAY  JENNY ROCHE

&

CASSIDY SCOONES

MOVING IMAGE INSTALLATION WITH SOUND
PAH HOMESTEAD WINTER 2017