

2017-02-17

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/9168>

10.15663/dra.v4i1.49

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Developing experiential openness and reciprocity in *Viridian* (2014), a cross-generational community dance experience and practice as research screendance project

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Abstract

This article presents ‘*Viridian*’, a practice as research, cross-generational screendance project. Drawing upon seminal research into the fields of somatic movement arts and community dance practice it will discuss how *Viridian* fostered an inclusive community dance experience, and one which sought to embrace difference and develop understanding of the potential we have to empower each other through experiential openness. It will discuss how Shin Somatic principles and processes were applied in the making of the dance film *Viridian* and, in specific, reference to how the project facilitated empathic listening and an inclusive community dance experience. Comments and reflections from the perspective of the performers will be included to give voice to their experiences and reflections on the creative process. At the heart of this practice as research project lays the proposal that somatic bodywork can resource wellbeing and develop greater awareness of the importance of being in movement and in contact with others as we age.

The film *Viridian*¹ can be accessed at <https://vimeo.com/106195364>
Readers are encouraged to view the film and then proceed with the article.



Figure 1: Screenshot: *Viridian* (2014)

Performers: Nathaniel Turner, Pam Woods, Claire Summers, Zoe Mote, Harley Burrell, Pat Barker, Catarina Lau. Photo: Russell Frampton

Introduction to *Viridian* and its practice as research purpose

Under the guidance of Sondra Fraleigh, the founding director of Eastwest Somatics Institute, I have developed my research into somatic movement arts and I am currently a certified Somatic Movement Educator and registered with ISMETAⁱⁱ. This somatic learning continues to inform and influence my practice as research projects and research informed teaching. Sondra Fraleigh invited both myself and Russell Frampton, Russell Frampton, and myself as the artistic directors of Enclave Productionsⁱⁱⁱ, to create a short dance film in response to her publication *Moving Consciously* (2015) and the themes arising from its collection of essays. As a practical scholar, I sought to creatively engage with the book's philosophical terrain and the core narratives permeating these essays.

Through a process of a continuing creative partnership with Frampton, I have been making experimental screendance work since 2002. Initially, this was a way of exploring the collaborative potential between our different disciplinary perspectives, myself as a dance artist and choreographer informed by my somatic movement research and Frampton as a contemporary visual artist and filmmaker. Our interdisciplinary screendance projects have since critically engaged with issues pertinent to the relationship between the body and its environment. For example, our dance film *Utah Sunshine*^{iv} (2007) and its resultant thematic content was motivated by a personal account of the impact and devastation caused by American nuclear testing in the 1960s. *Blind Torrent*^v (2012) explored how empathic movement responses to the landscape could develop a phenomenological interface between the body and landscape to enhance the proximate senses.

The core narratives in Fraleigh's book *Moving Consciously* (2015) of Being Seen, Respecting Difference, Dancing with Nature, and the understanding that self and other are intricately interwoven through our many different interactions and associations resonate closely with my somatic movement practice and its aim to work inclusively and "build community interactively through playful, artful means" (Fraleigh, 2015, p. xxii). In facilitating somatic learning I foster a spirit of play and where playful exchanges provide opportunities for participants to move into connection with others and develop empathic responses. A recurring theme explored in our screendance projects is concerned with the passing on of cultural knowledge from generation to generation and the significance of this knowledge exchange to enable us to listen to and appreciate the practical wisdom and understanding held by our elders and respective communities. I concur with performance studies scholar Diana Taylor's (2008) belief that "a community's

‘intangible’ practices (or performances) serve vital aesthetic, epistemic, and social functions” (p. 91). Taylor’s understanding that “knowledge albeit created, stored, and communicated through the embodied practice of individuals, nonetheless exceeds the limits of the individual body” (p. 92) develops a close correspondence with the aims of this project and our understanding how this embodied knowledge can be shared and form cultural memory and collective identity. Taylor refers to these acts as the repertoire and how they “can be passed on only through bodies ... they nonetheless have a staying power that belies notions of ephemerality” (p. 92).

I have become increasingly aware of the importance, particularly for our older generation, to be in contact with others and for them to experience being in movement, an experience that sadly is often denied them. Recent research conducted by Age UK has strongly indicated the serious implications for the older generation who are discriminated against and subjected to ageism in a variety of situations. I personally recall a friend relaying to me how she felt increasingly invisible in social situations, saying that people often disregard her and assume she has nothing useful to say or contribute. She also commented that she increasingly experienced her world, the space she inhabits, as slowly diminishing and how very lonely this made her feel. Of course, there is a range of contributing factors which lead to loneliness but not to feel part of a conversation or activity is painfully alienating. This acute feeling of loneliness facing our ageing population is now being recognised by the UK government and as a significant issue impacting seriously on people’s physical health and wellbeing. “According to Age United Kingdom, more than two million people in England over the age of 75 live alone, and more than a million older people say they go for over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member

Subjected to not ‘being seen or heard’ and diminished opportunities to connect with other people, in my opinion, is immensely disempowering and can lead to a total lack of self-esteem and sense of purpose. I propose that this is a form of social exclusion or, using the more favoured term, social injustice. According to a report written by Dylan Kneale (2012), which asks the question if social exclusion is still an important issue to be addressed for older people, Kneale states that governments favour the terms ‘social isolation’ or ‘social justice’ over using social exclusion. However, Kneale makes the point that social exclusion among older people has actually received very little attention, adding that “despite the fact that it is perhaps among this group that the notion of social exclusion is most pertinent, with older people at high risk of social isolation and

loneliness” (p. 14). These concerns, coupled with my proposal that somatic bodywork can resource wellbeing as we age, fuelled my motivation to develop the somatically inspired dance film entitled *Viridian* (2014) with a cross-generational group of performers.

Project aims and feelings as knowings

A core principle applied in the teaching of Shin Somatics®^{vi} is the ‘facilitation of emerging potentials’, and this is helpful in expounding the efficacy underpinning the creative processes in *Viridian*. Aligned to a practice as research methodology, *Viridian* and its somatic movement practice represents the means and material processes for this investigation. In reference to specific somatic movement patterns, such as the ‘sea horse’, and how these directly informed the generation of performance material, my aim is to reveal how this cross-generational screendance project developed experiential openness between participants and a growing awareness of the capacity we have to empower each other. I use the term experiential openness in reference to how somatic movement processes as discussed in this article develop somatic intention. Fraleigh discusses how “*somatic intention is directed intention involving consciousness*” (original emphasis, 2015, p. xxii). Directing this intention to what arises in the present could be described as the ability to be perceptually aware in how one receives sensory information and is able to respond to others and when certain environmental changes occur. I am proposing that this form of experiential openness nurtures reciprocal empathic exchange between participants and acts as a process where we begin to understand more about who we are and our potential to be in a creative and meaningful dialogue with others. This form of reciprocal exchange can be empowering whereby we are open to learning from each other. Within this analysis the reader will encounter a multiplicity of voices for the use of ‘we’ and ‘our’, which more accurately denote the collaborative and inter-subjective nature of the creative movement processes, which were shared and experienced together. Through the process of applying a practice as research methodology, we became attentive to the particularities of the practice and movement responses emerging from the performers. Dance scholar Anna Pakes (2009), in her chapter ‘Knowing through dance-making’, examines Aristotle’s understanding of a mode of practical knowledge called *phronesis* and how this form of knowledge is “associated with the domain of *praxis*, the variable and mutable world of human beings, intersubjective action and encounters” (p. 18). Pakes makes specific reference to how Aristotle

aligned this to a moral domain and our attempts “to live and act in ways beneficial to ourselves and the social group” (p. 18). Pakes’ analysis of this practical wisdom applied to dance making offers valuable insight into our own knowledge generation in this cross-generational project and community dance experience as encountered in the creative processes throughout the making of *Viridian*. Pakes illuminates this further when she writes,

It is a kind of attunement to the particularities of situations and experiences, requiring subjective involvement rather than objective detachment; and it has an irreducible personal dimension in its dependence upon, and the fact it folds back into, subjective and intersubjective experience. (p. 19)

Sondra Fraleigh, in her chapter ‘Why consciousness matters’, refers to Antonio Damasio’s understanding of ‘feelings of knowings’, drawing our attention to his proposal “how felt knowing can produce a sense of ownership and agency” (Antonio Damasio, as cited in Fraleigh, 2015, p. 16). Giving value to ‘feelings as knowings’ was central to the project’s ethos and philosophical positioning. The participants’ voices are therefore pivotal and central to the articulation and dissemination of *Viridian*’s research insights and outcomes. On completion of the filming process a short questionnaire was sent out to all performers inviting them to comment and reflect upon this set of questions:

- Did you feel supported and/or empowered by the project and its somatic learning processes?
- What was helpful to you, and what wasn’t?
- Do you consider your connection developed and deepened with the group?
- Did you feel seen and valued by others? In what ways was this important to you personally?
- Can you offer any specific examples where you felt particularly connected to the creative process, the performance material and its key themes?
- Did it touch upon any of your own embodied stories, and life’s journey?
- What did you take away?

This article embeds the performers’^{vii} comments and insights with the direct intention of giving voice to their experiences of the project and reveal aspects and understanding of what was felt and transferred as a form of bodily knowing from their own personal perspective.

Viridian: Listening for what has heart

Viridian, from the Latin word *Viridis*, refers to an intense bluish green colour or pigment. The colour green is known to symbolise harmony, creativity, health and nature. In Shin Somatics the chakras are aligned to a model of infant development movement stages and Sondra Fraleigh (2009) describes how these stages can be used as a guide for moving through the energy system of the body. The fourth chakra is green and radiates from the heart and is described as being an integrating and unifying chakra. References to the heart chakra being blocked include feelings of loneliness and a lack of confidence. A Shin Somatic principle of 'listening for what has heart' held particular resonance for this project and its aim to open up people's hearts and minds to each other. Aligned to Shin Somatic's curriculum model^{viii} (2011) and core narratives discussed in Fraleigh's book *Moving Consciously*, *Viridian* embarked upon a journey of somatic movement and dance explorations with this cross-generational group of performers. The Shin Somatic processes of Land to Water, Contact Unwinding and Moving as Nature informed this somatic bodywork, practically and philosophically underpinning this creative practice and its film making process.

An invitation serving as an initial introduction to the project and its aims was sent out to 12 performers who I had previously worked with in some creative capacity, with ages ranging between 19-80 years. The final group of eight performers, who were available for the project, comprised of current and graduate Plymouth University dance and theatre students, and independent community and professional dance artists. A deliberate strategy was to work with performers who would bring different performance skills and experiences across theatre, dance and community dance led film practice. Some had less movement and performance experience whereas others brought an erudite, embodied knowledge of movement and performance processes to the project.

The framework for the rehearsal period undertaken at Plymouth University was discussed with the performers and described as being open and flexible so as to accommodate different needs and important external commitments. This meant that the rehearsal schedule was arranged accordingly in consultation with all performers and with an understanding that material being generated at this stage could remain fluid and be open to change. The workshop and rehearsal period took place over seven consecutive days in May/June 2013 in a dance studio, and this was followed by two evenings to rehearse and film the performance material in a vast underground, 12 lane bowling green situated at the Life Centre Plymouth. This

location was selected for the project due to its expansive spatial dimensions, which enabled us to create a filmic environment with seemingly no edges. This seemingly hermetic space served to accommodate the key thematic elements of the project, specifically the movement of water and perspectives of the ecological body, recognising that our lives in some way echo and respond to a wider cosmology and the physical mechanisms of these complex and subtle planetary orbits and revolutions.

A cross-generational project and finding new capacity

The term ‘cross-generational’ is used to specify the nature of this project, rather than applying the term inter-generational, as I agree with dance artist Ruth Pethybridge’s observation that the general perception of a term such as ‘inter-generational’ falls into the problematic fixed binary classification of those participating as being ‘the young’ and ‘the old’. This fixing of groups, stating ‘you’re old and you’re young’, is philosophically at odds with Shin Somatic principles, which refute Cartesian dualistic thinking^{ix} where the body and mind are positioned separately. Such binary oppositions as self/other, mind/body, right/wrong, natural/cultural, young/old are observed as being a limitation to developing an understanding of “a different sense of self as process, participating in the movement of life” (Reeve, 2011, p. 51). Ruth Pethybridge (2013) writes, “Using cross-generational implies a more fluid definition” (p. 76). This fluidity is an intrinsic value of Shin Somatics where we practise finding out more about ourselves in order to find new capacity, and as Fraleigh (2015) purports “to experience more of my *potent self* (as Feldenkrais called it)” (p. 17).

Introducing the project to the group and framing of its key aims was also underpinned by the core values of community dance practice where difference is valued and supported. Ken Bartlett (2008), in his chapter entitled ‘Love Difference’, identifies a number of these differences, which he deems important to consider within the context of community dance. *Viridian* specifically drew upon differences of aesthetics in ‘different dance situations’, ‘differences between individuals’ and ‘different bodies that can produce different dancing opportunities and solutions’.

The creative process: Developing experiential openness

During the initial briefing session, the group was invited to reflect upon their individual practice and any concerns they might have. Some members of the group expressed concerns as to their technical competence in regard to their movement skills and performance to camera. These feelings were acknowledged and participants were encouraged to suspend judgement and avoid comparing themselves with others. We discussed how everyone's individual and collective responses to the creative tasks would inform the development of these movement scores and the filmic outcome.

Initially, I felt intimidated due to not having any formal dance training but the somatic movement workshops allowed me to feel at ease within the company, giving me a voice within the collaborative process, this countered my original thinking of "I haven't been dance trained so I have nothing to offer" and gave me confidence throughout the creative process, allowing me to express myself more freely without the worry of feeling judged due to my different performance training. (Performer Nathaniel Turner)

We discussed how the camera would be sensitively tuned to the relationships and connections occurring between the performers themselves and with the surrounding filmic environment, rather than applying a fixed and or predetermined set of aesthetic criteria. The presence of the camera and how it could move fluidly and intuitively as a discreet, non-judgemental component of the process allowed the creation of a more intimate relationship with the dancers. Thus, the perception of the camera as being part of the creative process rather than it being objectified and ideologically positioned and separate from the aims of the project was fostered.

From my own embodied understanding when we can embrace the unknown and 'not needing to know', this enables us to be more open and receptive to different ideas and ways of being. From this neutral position and openness, this opens up a pathway for new experiences and exchanges to occur. By adopting this more neutral position, we can let go of fixed attitudes, any defensiveness and judgement of the self and others.

I remember feeling very supported and valued throughout the process.

There was such a wonderful feeling of openness created by Ruth and the other dancers. I felt supported enough to be creative without the fear of being judged. (Performer Claire Summers)

Across a number of different somatic movement approaches, this is referred to as applying a beginner's mind. Body-Mind-Centering practitioner Linda Hartley (1995) describes this as a natural process of taking in and letting go and one which is “like the waxing and waning of the moon, like the expansion and contracting of the breathing of a cell; yet it is often hard for us to allow the dying and cutting of our attachments without feeling some resistance and confusion” (p. xxxvi). There was acknowledgement across the group that letting go of certain movement and postural habits, perhaps feelings of trepidation and self-critique, can be challenging. Practising as a somatic movement educator, a non-hierarchical working environment was nurtured throughout the devising process and construction of *Viridian*. This was central to our working ethos with the aim to support each individual's voice and give value to everyone's distinct learning and creative movement experience. Shin Somatic practice supports a core narrative of ‘being more fully who we are’, and developing self-agency so individual movement explorations and opportunities to contribute to the creative process were integral to this somatic learning and the development of the performance scores for the film.

Shin Somatic process: Land to water yoga and returning to our watery source, our soma

Continuing discussion identified how passionate we were to keep moving with ease as we grow older and counter the notion that the ageing process invariably means losing good mobility and physical vitality. Thomas Hanna (1988) makes an insightful observation on the different meanings of the word ‘ageing’ and how it can mean both growth or degeneration but rather it implies that “the direction of human life is not fixed but open” (p. 88). Sondra Fraleigh's Land to Water Yoga, a contemporary style of yoga grounded in the processes of Shin Somatics, was introduced to the group. This form of yoga is very gentle, and was appropriate to support the diverse needs and abilities in this group. Fraleigh describes the form as circular in nature as it moves between land to water and returns to land. The form comprises of five primary developmental stages: standing and walking, kneeling and crawling, sitting and turning, front lying with radiant belly breathing, floating

on the back and in water. These are also referred to as developmental movement patterns and evoke the early stages of infant and childhood development. Moving through these stages invites us to “retrace our personal development back to its watery soma source” (Fraleigh, 2009, p. xiii). Fraleigh (2015) explains how the etymological root of the word somatics is traced back to ancient Greece and how they used both words, soma and psyche to express a living essence. Fraleigh (2015) writes that Aristotle viewed the soul as the psyche and “not a precious spiritual entity; it is part of aliveness in everything” (p. xx). In Shin Somatics we purposely use the term inclusively whereby soma is understood as embodied conscious awareness. This practice fosters an awareness of self and others, where self-perception is described as an active process. It is a process whereby we are constantly tuning into our relational self, for as Fraleigh explains, “what we call *self* exists in the life-world and the social and cultural world of others” (2015, p. 5).

During the first gathering, sharing kinaesthetic information in a safe and comfortable environment, something changed within me. I exhaled. I became closer to those in the shared space. This confidence regarding movement and collaboration grew as time went on and the more and more we were in the carefully facilitated space, the deeper my connection grew with the other performers. (Performer Catarina Lau)

The group was guided through a somatic movement pattern called the ‘Sea Horse Wave’. The sea horse movement pattern connects the spine, neck and head through the use of a subtle wave pattern, gently lifting and returning the lower spine to the ground. This movement pattern develops a strong connection between the sacrum and the occipital ridge at the base of the skull, effectively integrating the whole body in this experience. A sense of increased length is felt in the spine and also greater fluidity, with more space felt in the neck and breadth across the shoulders. Aligned to a Shin Somatic process of ‘flow repatterning’, several sub-patterns of movement, which focus on ‘bowing’ the whole body, were practised. One example is the ‘Rainbow Bridge’, where the spine benefits from this tensional pattern. In Rainbow Bridge this bowing refers to the spine arching backwards, with the crown of the head passing through the bridge of an arm and directed towards the soles of the feet, with the feet being rooted to the ground. With the intention to fill this arc, the spine extends into this spatial pathway, as if leaving visibly drawn traces of the connections experienced between the spine, neck and head.

Here the significance of being in movement is emphasised rather than any focus on arriving and finishing at an end point or fixed shape.

These integrating movement patterns facilitated a softening in the back of the neck, and release tension in the splenius muscle group. The performers were encouraged to allow their gaze to follow the direction of their movement. This unfixing and subtle shifting of the mover's gaze disrupts the dominance of the vertical and held axis of the body so often entrenched in technical dance training. As the somatic bodywork and movement exploration progressed, the group realised that there was no requirement for them to follow any dance style or codified dance techniques. Rather, this project pursued the creation of performance material through non-stylised movement and improvisational and choreographic scores. Our performance processes allowed for more direct movement responses to create a framework for methods of discovery, and the space to experiment and work with the spirit of play. Helen Poynor's observation below on non-stylised movement practice clarifies how this approach supports participants' creativity and developing their own movement vocabulary.

Over time, each individual generates their own way of moving (or style, if you like), which is continually evolving. As a result, there is a smaller gap between the person and their movement, because it is not mediated through a pre-existing form. The link between the person moving and the movement expression is direct; their movement reveals rather than conceals who they are, making them more rather than less visible (2008, p. 89)



Figure 2: Rehearsal June 2013

Performers: Pat Barker and Pam Woods. Photo: Ruth Way

On being seen

Throughout the creative process, there were opportunities to witness each other's dances in solo or duet form and then reflect back to our partner or group as to how this experience connected us to a feeling or image. This process of 'giving back' is mindful of not interpreting someone else's experience but rather, through identifying what was felt; this process affirms what qualities of movement and emotions are present in their own living essence, their own soma. In this sense we are part of a process of returning what was already there back to our partner, to enable a deeper recognition and ownership of these qualities.

Below are comments from the performers when asked if they felt they had been seen and valued as part of this project and what this had meant to them.

I think at first I was trying not to be seen too much but I relaxed into it gradually. The project was designed to be cross-generational so it was important that I was seen and I was quite comfortable with that as it developed. It is important that the general public can see older people dancing. It is natural and even essential in many cultures. (Performer Pat Barker)

I felt an important part of the process. I appreciated having a 'special moment', in that it faced me with my own age on screen, and because of the caring process, was able to feel tender with myself. (Performer Pam Woods)

I would probably argue that I was seen but rather as an equal to other performers instead of standing out, this was important due to the issues surrounding race, ethnicity, gender and ages which arose from our differences as we danced and performed together. (Performer Nathaniel Turner)

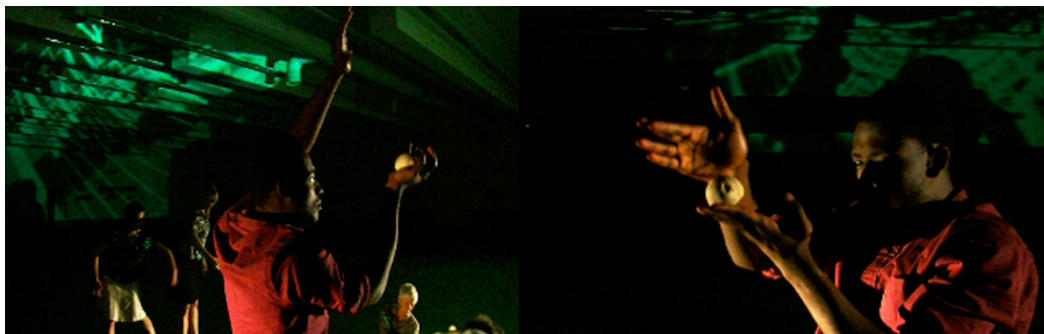


Figure 3: Screenshot: *Viridian* (2014)

Performers: Nathaniel Turner, Catarina Lau, Claire Summers, Zoe Mote, Pam Woods, Harley Burrell, Pat Barker, Saurav Rai. Photo: Russell Frampton

Moving as nature—forging links between somatic movement principles and this creative film practice

Inspired by Theodor Schwenk’s insight that “wherever water occurs it tends to take on a spherical form. It envelops the whole sphere of the earth, enclosing every object in a thin film ... A sphere is a totality, a whole, and water will always attempt to form an organic whole by joining what is divided and uniting it in circulation” (1995, p. 13.), the element of water, emerged as a central theme from the somatic bodywork and embodied poetic imagery. The performers explored the quality of flowing water in their improvised movement scores and it was apparent how the seahorse and rainbow movement patterns had brought greater fluidity throughout the spine and connection between the upper and lower body. These ideas influenced the use of the space available to us at the Life Centre, where we spatially configured many of the performance scores as concentric circles with a common centre and aligned to a cosmological model of a solar system. Alison East’s (2015) observations here align with the underlying principles intrinsic to this somatic practice when she addresses the connection between self, others and the earth from her perspective of the ecological body, stating that “moving as nature implies that we are already part of, and participating with, the elements and energies of the planet—we are one of nature’s living organisms” (p. 167). Moving from the smaller and more intimate dance studio located at the University to this colossal underground space posed a number of challenges over the two-day filming period. For the performers this meant filling this space, but not merely with the performance material but more in the sense of retaining these subtle connections and relationships between them in this space. So initially the immensity of this space was really quite daunting. Performer Pam Woods reflects on how this was navigated:

On site, the expansive space created, for me, a feeling of being just a dot in the cosmos, and yet the movement material carefully kept us connected. I found it moving and powerful when we came together holding hands and performed the simple progression forward.

Contact unwinding: A somatic movement process applied in the creation of the ‘Seaweed Duets’

The somatic learning experiences and somatic sensing of movement began to evoke images of our watery soma and the movement qualities of seaweed flowing in

water. Initial movement explorations brought our attention to releasing tension in the wrist bone, the radio carpal joint and adopting a continuous fluid quality of movement initiated by the wrist bone. This exploration led to the development of material for the ‘seaweed duets’ applying the Shin Somatic process of Contact Unwinding. Contact Unwinding interweaves dance and Shin Somatic principles and nurtures specific qualities of movement and connection between participants. The sensitivity arising from the quality of touch in Contact Unwinding is informed by haptic perception, for touch plays a pivotal role in regard to nonverbal communication in this somatic movement process. Working in pairs one person facilitates their partner’s movement exploration through gently guiding them towards a greater ease and range of movement. Somatic movement educator Karin Rugman (2015) explains how it “enables a correspondence to emerge, as partners connect and communicate with each other through their kinaesthetic sensitivity” (p. 198). It was this connection and sensitivity arising between performers in the seaweed duets that the camera was drawn to, rather than the more expansive and technical movement vocabulary. A choreographed duet arising from this process, performed by Catarina Lau and Zoe Mote, is imbued with this kinaesthetic sensitivity where movement unfolds spontaneously, not forcing an outcome but maintaining a focus on flowing with this connection.

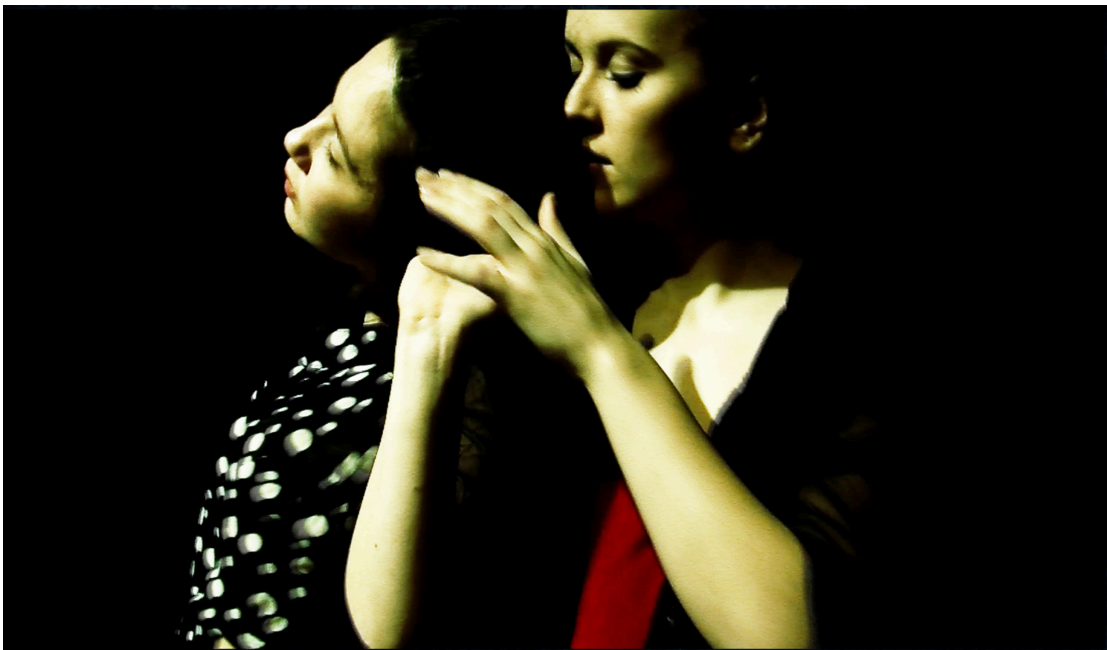


Figure 4: Screenshot, *Viridian* (2014)

Performers: Catarina Lau and Zoe Mote. Photo: Russell Frampton

When working on a partnered movement sequence I felt as though we began to move as one. Our connection to the movement became synchronistic and we developed a shared language. The notion of bringing the outside space, inside through my body as a vessel, helped me to communicate with my partner during the development process. (Performer Catarina Lau)

Continuing our exploration of the theme of ‘moving as nature’, a range of different sized and shaped river stones was resourced for the performers to experiment and dance with. Bringing these natural objects into the rehearsal space created a new sense of place that could be inhabited quite differently. The understanding that landscapes are enfolded informed *Viridian’s* scenographic development, where the layering and mixing of natural and cultural elements in the film began to realise an ecological and ritualistic environment. Each of the worn and eroded river stones was distinctive, as if they had their own personalities. Their inherent tactility seemed to sharpen our haptic experience of holding them, translating this connection into an almost reverential movement relationship. Symbolically, perhaps, there was some form of association with weathering, water processes and the eternal nature of the cycle of creation and destruction.

The performers started to develop an intimate felt connection with their pebble by attuning to its weight, form, surface texture and engage in a playful correspondence when the stone quivered, rolled or was caught to break its fall. Experiencing the weight of the pebble and finding places for it to rest or balance on the body, gave rise to a heightened sensitivity to the pebble and its properties. Performers embarked upon a process of mimesis, becoming one with the stone, merging into its form and being. This process arose out of the mimetic capacity of the body to develop both an imaginative and physical connection with these pebbles through their own skeletal and sensory systems. Practitioner Sandra Reeve (2011), in her discussion of the ecological body, draws our attention to how this body is “situated in flux, participation and change” (p. 51) and here references the politics of the body as through movement it both resists and challenges “any deterministic notion of self and stimulates a different sense of self as process, participating in the process of life” (p. 51).

I have always collected stones and keep stones in my home that I collected from places such as India, Mongolia and a tsunami affected beach in

Thailand. Dancing with the stones was therefore very meaningful to me.
(Performer Pat Barker)



Figure 5: Screenshot, *Viridian* (2014)

Performer: Pat Barker. Photo: Russell Frampton

I really remember feeling a connection to the stones. It's strange because even though we worked indoors both in the studio and while filming when I reflect back on the project I actually think about being outdoors and feeling very connected to the earth. I think this could be about the creative process and the journey Ruth took us on when devising the material. (Performer Claire Summers)

Alison East (2015) writes that “when she considers her own human dancing body as a particular and living arrangement of the same matter that makes up the planet, then my relationships between my body and the earth take on different and broader meanings” (p. 167) and these ideas resonate closely with *Viridian*'s conceptual framework and the evolution of its scenography.

Being held: A spiritual dimension

In addition to the solo and duet performance material, an ensemble, ritualistic walking sequence was choreographed, which could be repeated several times. Repetition allowed the performers more time to excavate these movements, thereby noticing the subtle shifts of weight taking place with each step. Phillip

Zarrilli's (2002) observation on repetition in performer training draws our attention to how the "practitioner must constantly (re) discover the 'self' in and through the training and with each repetition" (p. 189). With each repetition this re-discovering of self was encountered as a somatic process for the performers to navigate certain challenges and find new connections. The ritualistic walk was performed in a line and incorporated upper body gestures and executed as a processional journey, moving forwards together holding hands.



Figure 6: Screenshot, *Viridian* (2014)

Performers: Pam Woods, Claire Summers, Zoe Mote, Harley Burrell, Catarina Lau.
Photo: Russell Frampton

A relationship between dance and ritual has featured significantly in our previous screendance projects. Dance anthropologist Cynthia Novak has observed that dance ritual is often used as a gateway to access the spiritual world and that these rituals can evoke "power, evocative strength, resistance and changeability" (1998, p. 356). In the film we view the community of women walking towards a digitally constructed precipice, a sheer drop, but their walk remains calm, sure-footed, earthed and assured. This sequence required more rehearsal so the performers could work sensitively with their differences, making subtle shifts and adaptations in timing and their steps. The walk appears to embody their understanding that we will all, at some time during our lifetime, experience some difficulty and be emotionally challenged. Daphne Lowell draws our attention to how the body holds knowledge and can access life wisdom, "which can be used as a source of insight, healing and spiritual guidance" (2007, p. 297). The qualities of empathy, personal resolve and solidarity emanate from this community of women

‘standing together’ as they move through this difficulty and face the unknown and some uncertainty.

In conclusion—The stones as a spiritual core representing heart’s purpose

As we reviewed the film footage, it was evident that the movement explorations with the stones and the passing of these between performers was a visually and metaphorically significant gesture, one that expressed most articulately the core somatic principles informing our creative process. The sensitive handling and passing of stones between performers communicated the care and attentiveness given to each of these exchanges. The stones became the material manifestation of this embodied knowledge of how to respect difference and develop empathic exchange. The stones were also representative of a physical and spiritual core expressed by this community of performers, who grew closer together and demonstrated heart’s purpose.

Working in close proximity to others with the stones, I felt tenderness towards both people and stones. (Performer Pam Woods)

The moment of concluding the actual filming process was announced and duly marked so we could take this ‘moment’ to acknowledge what we had experienced together. This moment also imbued a heightened awareness of a sense of closure, of a time now passed, an embodied knowing of how these experiences were already part of our somatic memory and embodied history. I personally witnessed the warmth, generosity and kindness flowing between these performers and how their connected selves effortlessly filled the space. Despite this stage of the project coming to a close, I realised very quickly that these connections between us would continue to resonate as they possessed a ‘staying power’ not unlike Diana Taylor’s observation mentioned earlier which stated how this defies ephemerality, and can be described as lasting.

Every time I finished a session, I felt happy, more alive and aware of not only my space, but also everyone else’s. I developed a heightened sense of my surroundings and how kinetic communication has an important impact in not only dance and movement, but also in life. Tactility can be a measure of human relationship; it is a variable concerned with the level of trust between two humans. Through kinetic communication, I felt we grew together as a

group and we developed a tangible bond. We shared laughter and stories and it felt like a true community. (Performer Catarina Lau)

These somatic movement processes experienced and shared by the performers built a strong sense of community and where each individual, regardless of their age, movement range or skills, felt valued and part of the creative process leading to the filmic outcome. I agree with somatic movement educator Catherine Shaeffer when she states that “art does not merely imitate life, or life art. Art is created from attention to what is felt and lived from within” (2015, p. 76). The film *Viridian* as a two dimensional document though could never in effect capture the fullness and nature of the experience and the transformative aspects it gave rise to. Rather it would always be somewhat secondary, able to reflect several aspects of the creative process but not the totality of the experience itself. The experience of *Viridian* continues to live with us and move with us as we take these experiences forward into our lives. I consider it has opened up the potential for other creative and inclusive experiences to happen again, proffering hopefulness, and hope acting as a shield against loneliness.

Considering the extent of ageism still present in our society today with many older people feeling socially excluded and disempowered, it was moving to witness the reciprocal respect and empathy which had grown between these performers during this project. It was palpable how much the group valued the practical wisdom and charisma that Pat Barker and Pam Woods brought to this creative project and how all performers were nourished and inspired by experiencing others’ creative imagination and vitality in movement.

It was joyful to be able to move from our own capabilities and potential within a respectful supportive group situation. It was also wonderful that there was such an age spread within the group, and I found it satisfying and empowering to be moving among youthful bodies. I left with a sense that I’d been part of a special creative process, and grateful for the opportunity to make my own contribution to it. (Performer Pam Woods)

Pam was very supportive when we worked as partners never letting me feel I was letting her down. There was a feeling of warmth as we met on successive days, it was, and here we all are again, what are we going to do together, to create together? This has really given me confidence. (Performer Pat Barker)

Through practising experiential openness, this brought awareness to self and others, enabling us as a group to engage more deeply with our shared humanity

and form a vibrant and motivated community. I propose that somatic movement education, with its focus on developing empathic exchange between participants and giving recognition and value to each individual's personal qualities and attributes, could play a much more significant role in tackling leading social issues of social exclusion, ageism and loneliness. Crucially not only to raise awareness of these issues, but to apply somatic movement approaches to facilitate changes of attitude and to make empowered choices and decisions to resource wellbeing for everyone in our respective communities.

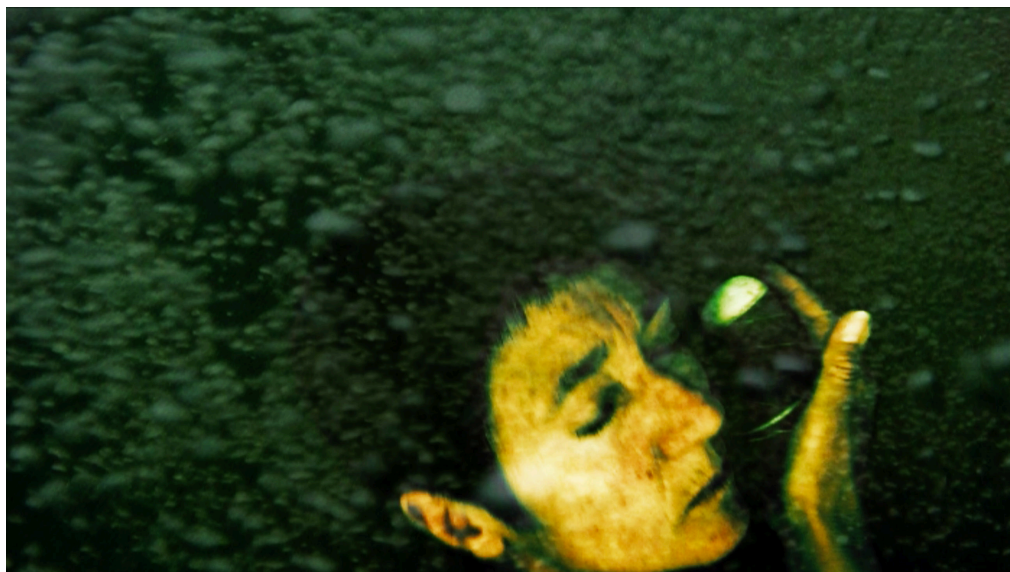


Figure 7: Screenshot, *Viridian* (2014)

Performer: Pam Woods. Photo: Russell Frampton

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the respondents and for giving their written permission to include their comments: Pat Barker, Nathaniel Turner, Catarina Lau, Claire Summers, Pam Woods. Special thanks go to Russell Frampton of Enclave Productions for his creative insight and perceptivity throughout this project.

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Notes

ⁱ *Viridian* (2014). A cross-generational screendance project directed by Russell Frampton and Ruth Way. Performers Pat Barker, Pam Woods, Harley Burrell, Claire Summers, Saurav Rai, Zoe Mote, Nathaniel Turner, Catarina Lau. Shot at Plymouth University and the Life Centre, Plymouth, England.

ⁱⁱ ISMETA, International Somatic Movement Education & Therapy Association.

ⁱⁱⁱ Enclave Productions: <http://rframpton.wix.com/enclave>;

^{iv} *Utah Sunshine*, 2007. A collaborative visual arts/dance film produced and directed by Russell Frampton and Ruth Way. Performers Ruth Way, Kristin McGuire, Sondra Fraleigh. Music : Ben Davis and Max de Wardener. Shot in Devon, England, France and Utah, USA.

^v *Blind Torrent* (2012). Dir. Russell Frampton and Ruth Way. Performers Ruth Way and Catarina Lau. Shot in Devon, England.

^{vi} Shin Somatics® refers to somatic movement methods and approaches identified by Eastwest Somatics Institute for Yoga, Dance & Movement Studies (<http://www.eastwestsomatics.com/workshop-london.php>).

^{vii} Performers who contributed to the creative process and this cross-generational screendance project : Pat Barker, Pam Woods, Harley Burrell, Claire Summers, Saurav Rai, Zoe Mote, Nathaniel Turner, Catarina Lau.

^{viii} Shin Somatics Curriculum Model (2011) authored by Karen Smith and Sondra Fraleigh.

^{ix} Cartesian dualism, a philosophical position which claims separations of mind and body whereas Shin Somatics considers a circular relationship between mind and body, one which Sondra Fraleigh (2015) refers to “oneness”, (p. 12).