The School of Television & Imaging

Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design

University of Dundee

Postgraduate Diploma Report

Session 2006-2007

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basic movements in hi-tech

ABSTRACT

The over-all work title of my Master Degree is 'Space and Reality'. The present document describes the research of my practical work which aims to improve the examination of motion and our physical relationship to digital movement. The artistic idea behind the concept is of *metakinesis* through making the observer part of the art work and therefore raising their awareness of their own physicality in space. It also looks at the correlation between primitive movements, the history of human movement techniques and the digital age. All this is put to test in an exhibition scenario to develop an interactive, functional and aesthetically pleasing outcome.

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Jeffrey Shaw[1] writes in the introduction of William Forsythe's '*Improvisation Technologies'*:

> 'The history of art exemplifies a complex set of negotiations between body and space – negotiations between the actual domain and the real space he inhabits, and the virtual domain of the represented body and represented space. The contemporary body in space is no longer the classical model.'

The notion of the moving body and digital media has been one of my main themes for the past years; therefore, I decided to intensify my research further during my Master Degree. The aim is to profoundly understand the subject I am dealing with thematically and technically. Then, this knowledge gives me the freedom to creatively and confidently work on my projects.

The aim is to find (new) ways to work with dance and how to present the results to the viewer in an interesting and engaging manner.

Each of the five following projects practice a certain camera, editing and/ or compositing technique and also investigates the theme in depth as well as the spectators' reactions to a real interactive exhibition set up. Thus, to specifically further the development of my final Master Degree Show piece 'ProjectorDancers'.

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[1] Director of the ZKM-Institute for Visual Media In Karlsruhe/ Germany from 1992 to 2002

MAIN REPORT

FROG[2] – evolution in motion:

Watching an albino[3] aquatic[4] frog, there are noticeable resemblances to a swimming baby because the movements of an aquatic frog are simplistic. Frogs' and human anatomies show strong similarities in terms of bone structures[5] and muscles. Therefore, the 'FROG' projects are a tool to establish the knowledge of basic movements and also serve as a study to improve practical techniques on. Comparably to chronophotographers like Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard

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[2] 'FROG' consists of two projects called 'FROG1' and 'FROG2'; both are still works in progress but see the draft STILLNESS1.mpg on CD or online. 'FROG' uses an African Clawed Frog as performer which has not been harmed by the filming.

[3] Refers to the colour

[4] Refers to the type of frog; *aquatic* means that it purely lives underwater compared to the tree frog that lives on land, however, because they are amphibians either of them can survive for a certain period of time on land or in water.

[5] Although, both have a skeleton, the frog has got no ribs nor as many bones as a human being, yet it has got a widened pelvis and elongated hind legs. Personally, I regard this knowledge of the frog's anatomy as well as the humans as a vital part of my understanding of movements

Muybridge who both studied human and animal movements through analog sequential photography. For this project two different camera and editing techniques are trained: one is the camera as performing partner[6] to the frog which is then fully accomplished through an edit with fluid cuts; the other method is a locked off uncut shot. Both systems were inspired by the frog's natural behaviour of whether fast moving around or playing dead.

Although having directed performers, to film an uncontrollable subject has been a challenge that has enriched my adaptability to react with the camera to its unpredictable actions.

David Hinton's '*Birds*' is described as '*a dance film without dancers, yet filled with fascinating movement.*'[7] The way the film is cut *'and choreographer's[8] perception, the unrehearsed, natural movement of birds becomes an exhilarating dance experience.*'[9]

Hinton chose real-life footage of different birds in various natural locations. Hinton finds that working with birds as dancers special because it is an area where 'you can still be creative in'[10]. The sound is a remix of birds' noises and electronic drum-like ones. The film uses documentary footage[11] from three different sources, thus, there is a disjointed look throughout the video.

On contrary, the music video 'Birds'[12] by PLEIX shows different breeds of dogs which were filmed with a high-speed digital camera jumping up in slow motion in

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throughout my projects.

[6] To recreate the feel as if the camera is looking through the eyes of another dancer or frog.

[7] Kinodance Website: http://www.kinodance.com/russia/films_program2_2006.html © Kinodance–Russia, 2006

[8] Choreographer for 'Birds': Yolande Snaith

[9] Kinodance Website: http://www.kinodance.com/russia/films_program2_2006.html © Kinodance–Russia, 2006

[10] Introduction to 'Birds' by David Hinton on the DVD 'Take 7' by South East Dance Ltd'. Curator of *Take 7* collection: Linda Jasper.

[11] From BBC Television, Gerald Kooyman and United Wildlife, because of using different sources the quality of the footage varies

[12] For the band *Vitalics* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx0UwY5IQMo. Dir./Prod.: PLEIX, 2:58min, France, 2006

a controlled studio setting. It is about altering a common subject like a dog into something alien. This creative process gives a dancing personality to a non-dancing subject by using digital cameras and editing.

Looking at Hinton's work, I decided to leave the "unrehearsed" wildness to the animal, yet, considering PLEIX, I set up a 'studio' tank for the 'frog' filming to keep the same look throughout.

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Wrestling – Dance – Karate – history of movements

Wrestling-Dance-Karate, short WDK, is a triptych that juxtaposes three evolved kinds of human movement techniques. All three men are standing in part of a white room. The pallid space stands for a higher spiritual sphere; the two fighters show each just one corner of the room while the dancer is placed in the center of the room visually symbolizing the wholeness of dance. After Mary Clarke[13], dance is considered as a fundamental human need of expressing ourselves; while wrestling and karate serve the purpose of self-defense and hence physical survival. Each of the three performers was filmed individually in a locked off shoot and then composed together in the edit.

The controlled structure of Cunningham's 'Coast Zone'[14] video piece has worked as an example of spatial layout of the performers. 'Coast Zone' is an edited piece compared to WDK, yet, the position in space and timing of each dancer is absolutely perfect. Each dancer's appearance is geometrically arranged while the sound appears random with a few 'in sync' key points. Similarily, WDK aims to

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[13] p.7, CLARKE, M. & CRISP, C., 1981, *The History of Dance.* London: Orbis Publishing Ltd.
[14] *'Coast Zone'*, Chor: Merce Cunningham, Dir: Merce Cunningham and Charles Atlas, Music: Larry Austin, 1983

have key moments in movements and noises of the three performers.

With a related theme, Steve McQueen's[15] video installation:

> Bear (1993)…shows a wrestling match between two men...the physical interaction of the spectator with the projected image arouses a feeling of spatial dislocation which is heightened in this case by the fact that the film has no sound and it is the spectators' breathing that completes the showing.

Part of this investigation is to observe human reaction to seeing other humans in action: *Metakinesis*.

Belgian artist Marie-Jo Lafontaine's examines *metakinesis* in *'Les larmes d'aciers'* (Tears of Steel) is a six-channel video installation of monitors mounted onto each other in form of a triangle. All screens simultaneously run the same footage of weight-lifters who hide their pain of workout behind a 'façade of pure stoicism'[16] while Maria Callas sings in the background. The WDK performers appear in a monologue with their own sport however comparable to Lafontaine's I directed them to do it in a certain way to turn them into my work of art.

One of the main differences between dancers and fighters is that a dancer is usually comfortable performing on their own and that dance also allows them to dance without any reason. Theoretically, dance can happen in any place and at any time in forms of rehearsed or unrehearsed solos, duets, formations or improvisations.

Wrestling is possibly one of the oldest types of human competition and is even referenced in *'cave drawings.'*[17]

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[15] http://www.fundaciotapies.org/site/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=514 Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Aragó, Barcelona 15th Jan 2007

[16] Wurm, K. (ed), 1997, *ZKM/ Centre for Art & Media Karlsruhe*, Munich:Prestle Verlag.

[17] http://www.yampavalleywrestling.org/wst_page2.html 2006 Yampa Valley Wrestling Club

Karate can be practiced on its own, called *kata*, or in form of *kumite* which involves a further competitor to fight with. There is also a visual resemblance between dance and martial arts:

> 'The legs slightly bent, the arms contracted: the basic position of all Asiatic martial arts shows a 'decided body' ready to leap and act. This attitude, which could be compared to the 'plie' in classical ballet…of the position of an animal ready to attack or defend itself.[18]'

A different option of dealing with WDK would have been similar to the short video *'The Hunt'*[19] which shows a naked male dancer tensing his muscles like he is pulling an invisible arrow in a cold black studio setting. *'The Hunt'* is shot and edited in a way to create a moment of intense suspense supported by the sound. The greenish reflections of the lighting on the dancer's body enhance the unsettling feel. In the process of making WDK, the dancer and the martial artist were also filmed with a moving camera under extreme lighting conditions and were meant to be cut together in the edit. However, I opted for the static sterile environment and also added the wrestler to give the spectator the opportunity to compare the history of those three forms of human movements.

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of Routt County
[18] p.192, SCHECHNER, R., 2002. *Performance Studies – An Introduction.*London: Routledge. Eugenio BARBA *"Pre-Expressivity"*
[19] Produced by Marlene Millar and Philip Szporer, Sharon Moore as choreographer
http://www.mouvementperpetuel.net/en/bio.html

RiceGirl – fast fading memories

This near three minute long dance video shows a girl in a white skirt and white vest top. She[20] dances, fights and turns in a fast unrealistically cut way. Every so often flashes of white lines and even an animation of champagne being poured appear in the grainy imagery. The graininess is emphasized by the soundtrack which has got a constant deep humming noise and snipes of words.

'RiceGirl' developed my practice with the camera as accompanying performer to the dancer as well as promoting skills in creating a visually engaging work through the edit. The movements were inspired by Janet Smith's 'Zulu'[21] choreography in which the dancers imitate animals they studied in the zoo. I directed the dancer to do certain animalistic moves combined with child-like behaviour. The camerawork was enthused by the workshop with the Space dancers[22] in Dundee while the edit was inspired by Katrina McPherson's piece 'Pace'[23].

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[20] Performer Khardine Powrie
[21] Scottish Dance Theatre at Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh, 3rd Nov 2006
[22] See DarkDuet.mpg on attached CD: created during the workshop together with Gayle Meikle.
[23] MCPHERSON, K., 2006. *Making Video Dance.*
Oxon: Routledge.

'RiceGirl' uses similar to 'Pace' the camera as part of the performance and holds the viewer's attention through the fluid fast cuts. McPherson's piece was created in a dance studio while 'RiceGirl' was shot on chroma then altered with overlaying 35 mm footage. Sound-wise, both videos utilized real audio effects from the live shoot and added additional noises. The editing trained my eyes to focus on single frames and improved the sense of duration in a choreographic way for each sequence of the piece.

'RiceGirl'[24] helped to improve practical skills while the theme is based on fading memories which is reflected by the visuals and the soundtrack. The audio keeps on repeating certain sequences but stays unidentifiable, irregular and distorted. Inspired by John Cage and John King[25]; both of their music is jagged and impulsive rather to an emotion or idea than a continuous harmonic melody.

> '…our pleasure in movement derives from the longing it creates in us, not only to move with it, but to hold it….language, like dance, is overfilled in its time by the immemorial instant.'[26]

In 1994, Forsythe reinvented the teaching of dance with his pioneering and award-winning computer application *«Improvisation Technologies: A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye»* which is used by various disciplines. I aimed to apply his observation techniques for the process of making 'RiceGirl'. It helped to clarify the edit and to give it a geometrical structure although it deals with a fast moving subject.

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[24] About the title, 'RiceGirl' is named after the performer's outfit. The white skirt –that the performer is wearing in this video- belongs to my mother and is about thirty odd years old. It has always been there, an inspiration to play with and somehow it reminds me of the girl in the Uncle Ben's commercial. I cannot really remember the ad but I know that the skirt carries the memory of it.
[25] *'Delta Inserts'*, Stuttgarter Ballett: www.johnkingmusic.com
[26] Lepecki, A., *Of the presence of the body*, Chapter 'Presence and Absence', p.143

'RiceGirl' is on one hand a personal piece and at the same time it is technical study too. It was produce parallel to 'ProjectorDancers' when I was searching for the right approach to my final Master Degree piece.

JEKYLL&HYDE - the doppelgänger[27] in a static space

"We don't live in a homogenous and empty space but in a space
that is charged with qualities that could include phantasms.
The space of our dreams, the space of our passion."
Michel Foucault[28]

In 'Jekyll&Hyde', I digitally duplicated myself to represent the notion of the AlterEgo and the meaning of having a doppelgänger. I chase, scare and tempt myself which confuses, frightens and annoys my other self. The look and especially the static background are based on film pioneers like Gaston Velle, Max Skladanowsky and Segundo de Chomon, who with simple means like copying footage and colouring details with masks, they managed to achieve fascinating trickery. The allusion to silent movies is emphasized by the static background as well as the noise of a hanging LP resembling repetitive time that can only be changed if we interact and react.

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[27] the literal translation of the German word 'doppelgänger' is the 'duplicated walker'
[28] p.173, *European Media Art Festival 2001*. Osnabrueck: Hermann Noehrig.

After Forsythe, I decided on certain moves and rules before the filming, then applied those and videoed them all in one shoot.

Martina Leeker[29] describes 'the computer as a medium for the electronic digital representation of man' which is connected 'to the history of self-representation…by means of mirror reflections.' During this development, the digital reflection 'becomes detached from the body and achieves independence as a computer-generated moving image.'

The narcissistic theme of 'Jekyll&Hyde' can be summed up with the page excerpt by Carl E. Loeffler:

> '…narcissism as a standing device channelling desire,....It is especially relevant to performance art utilizing video since parallels between the video process and the "mirror phase" can be well drawn[30].'

Within the same frame, this video explores the interactivity of two characters which reappears in my live performance for 'The State of Play' as well as in 'ProjectorDancers'. Again, the static camera method was applied combined with digital keying and compositing techniques to further develop practical skills which are required for the final master piece.

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[29] p.394, DINKLA, S. & LEEKER, M. (eds), 2002, *Dance and Technology: Moving towards Media Productions.* Berlin: Alexander Verlag.
[30] P.457, LOEFFLER, C. E., 1989. *Performance Anthology – Source Book of California Performance Art*, Contemporary Arts Press, San Francisco.

THE STATE OF PLAY - the interactive game within

'develop real research on the status of the body and the gesture, and on the movement and perception'[31]

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[31] p.72, 'Equilibres' (Equilibrium) by Archaos & Sylvie Guillermin, 'Techniques et Architecture' No485 dossier: Scenographie (stage design)

'The State of Play[32]' is a travelling interactive performance exhibition event initiated by Alexandra Ross[33] as curator, Arnar Lindal-Haldorsson, Ridade Al Dagestani and myself as exhibiting artists. It brings together artists from different disciplines to 'play' with each other and the audience in order to find alternatives for artistic creativity. Interactivity is used in the form of installations and live performances with the aim to actively involve the spectators. The curator chose my works 'RiceGirl', Jekyll&Hyde and 'WDK' because of their internal playfulness. Furthermore, the upcoming Dundee exhibition will include the interactive piece 'ProjectorDancers' which could not be in the Berlin exhibition due to financial and security reasons. In order to make the exhibitions a success, applications and press releases require to be written in a professional manner[34].

The motivations behind this exhibition are to gain knowledge through exposure and to test our projects on an audience in a gallery space. The audience is asked to give feedback on layout, structure, clarity and duration; consequently we should to be able to realistically improve the work before the master degree show.

[32] The first opening was in the Internationales Forum in Berlin on 17th April 2007, which will be followed by one in Dundee on the 8th June and then by one in Iceland after the master degree show.
[33] see attached word document *'Performance Art and the wider world'* by Alexandra Ross

I see this exhibition as a 'proto-performance[35]', short 'proto-p', that is essentially a dry-run of an actual event like a performance to tryout variations which can turn into a performance themselves.

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[34] see application on CD: The State of PlaySUMMARY.pdf
[35] p.191, SCHECHNER, R., 2002. *Performance Studies – An Introduction.* London: Routledge.

PROJECTORDANCERS - interactivity between real and digital space and beings

'ProjectorDancers' is planned to be my Master Degree Show piece and will draw all my research together.

It will be a dual screen projection piece showing the same dancer on each. The dancers appear to be frozen in a standing position, yet, if approached by a spectator triggering sensors the dancers will start to move. Currently, I imagine the piece mute[36] because the projected dancer's movements can live of the natural noises the approaching person does which will create a personal relationship with the viewer's motions.

The viewer will be able to scratch[37] the projected performer's movements through their own movements. It becomes *'a way of feeling and sensing spaces…, and so it's about inscription.'* [38]

Correspondingly to Rudolf Laban, Forsythe bases his theories on geometric

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[36] Similar to Steve McQueen's mute 'Bear' video
[37] The viewer will be able to direct and control the dancers' movements through triggering different sensors in space.
[38] William Forsythe's CD-ROM on 'Improvisation Technologies

forms[39] in relation to the body itself and the body in space. Laban outlines the kinesphere through defining spaces[40] around us, inspired by this I examined my physical capabilities in a box[41] which references to the confining frame space of 'ProjectorDancers'.

Examples of applied interactivity are documented by the workshop 'Dance and New Media'[42] undertaken by media artists, dancers and choreographers who explored the possibilities of projections, telemedia spaces and animation. The aim is to alter perception and to gain insight into it then to use it as tool to find new ways to use the body in space, thus deepen human's physical understanding. The aim of 'ProjectorDancers' is to '*develop the physical sense of relationships between motions as well as - actually discover one's own … passed on through visual exchange and imitation*'[43].

During the same workshop, Maya Deren's video work *Ritual in Transfigured Time[44]* is shown in which Deren walks up a staircase that appears distorted through the camera and edit. The partakers 'felt physical twitches when'(p.178) viewing the video:

> This visceral feeling is a movement identification or *Metakinesis*, a term coined by John Martin, is the identification or empathy of movement from the moving subject to an observer.

Last year the Kinetica Gallery[45] presented a simple but sophisticated piece made

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[39] Like circle, lines, planes and points
[40] E.g. in forms of crystals
[41] Please view attached mpeg 'Box.mpg'.
[42] 2001, Choreographisches Zentrum NRW Zollverein under the artistic direction of Soelke Dinkla
[43] quotation of William Forsythe on *'Improvisation Technologies'* CD
[44] p.176/8, DINKLA, S. & LEEKER, M. (eds), 2002, *Dance and Technology: Moving towards Media Productions.* Berlin: Alexander Verlag.
[45] LIFEFORMS, 6th Oct – 14th Nov 2006, Kinetica Gallery/London

out of lights[46] which were reacting to the visitors in form of changing colours. I noted into my sketchbook:

Movement reacting to movement; movement as human interaction/reaction/dialogue.

The new media artist Simon Briggs[47] described the mechanism behind his work 'Halo' as a projection tilted over the viewers' heads showing floating people forming a corona around the audience. However, it is not only the relationship between viewer and the art work but also the connections to the other people who influence the piece.

Sean Cubitt, Professor and Director of the Program in Media & Communications at the University of Melbourne[48], describes one of Michael Heim[49]'s six technical definitions of virtuality and new media as the 'interaction with electronic representation'[50]. He continues to discuss about the relationship between the machinery, filmmaker and the audience:

> …we are subject only of ourselves, mediated through machineries downgraded to mere feedback loops…part of ourselves that most longs for dialogue[51].

The theme 'Reality and Space' is reflected with 'ProjectorDancers', in a way that it appeals to the viewers to have a dialogue between their own bodies in a real room and the dancers set in a digital space on screen. The audience shall find an interactive relationship which controls and reacts with the 2D presentation.

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[46] Artist: Dante Leonelli Work: 'Neondomes' see images:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/transphormetic/288453798/in/set-72157594360075534/
Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oLD3RezQQg
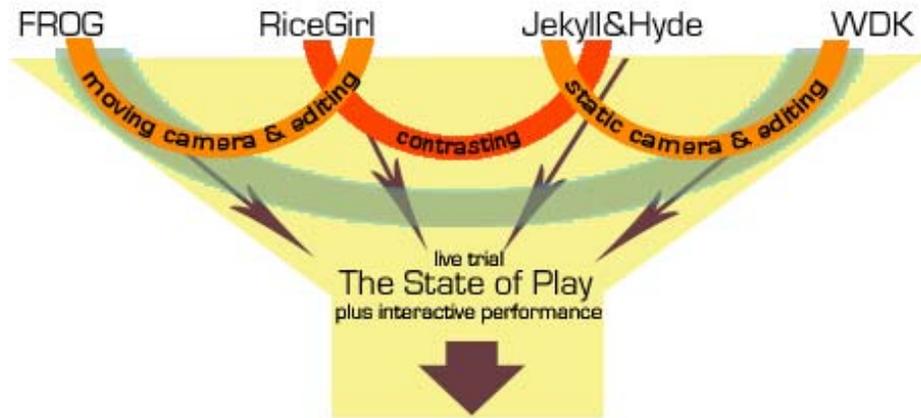[47] Simon Briggs gave a talk in the DCA in September 2006.
[48] He is also Honorary Professor at Duncan of Jordanstone/ University of Dundee
[49] p.32, CUBITT, S., 1998, *Digital Aesthetics*, Sage Publications Ltd, London.
[50] ibid p.35
[51] ibid p.36

Returning to Jeffery Shaw's quote on *'the complex negotiations between body and space',* he is right with saying that *'the classical model'* of *'the contemporary body in space' 'no longer'* exists. Through daily television and computer use, contemporary mankind is in constant dialogue with their own and other one's digital imagery. Therefore, it has also become more and more a theme reflected in art as well as dance.

'FROG' with using an animal as an alternative to a human performer shows movement reactions purely to its needs. Those actions are turned into a form of dance on screen through the editing process. 'WDK' also shows physiological value through movement patterns deriving from human's fundamental requirements to express emotions and as purpose of survival. Thus, 'FROG' and 'WDK' focus on movements affected by the outside; parallel to them are 'RiceGirl' and 'Jekyll&Hyde' which concentrate on an inner stimulant. 'RiceGirl' echoes in its visual presentation fading thoughts and memories while the characters in 'Jekyll&Hyde' struggle with the notion of the doppelgänger. 'The State of Play' event becomes the live trial where the pieces created in a passive studio setting become actively engaged in a gallery space. Finally, this all concludes in 'ProjectorDancers' which combines the dialogue of the digital

figures on screen which also correspond with the visitor in real space. The spectator's body shall feel consciously and subconsciously interacting with the moving images. A bodily conversation shall be started between the viewer and the piece 'ProjectorDancers' to naturally awaken memories in the spectator as well as creating new movement patterns within the projection. The aim is to find a new understanding of how our bodies perceive themselves in dialogue with the screen and how visceral empathy influences our perception of space and reality.

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'Das Boot' Director: Wolfgang Petersen

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Bruce Lee, Channel Four Documentary, 1989

"Dreams That Money Can Buy", Director: Hans Richter

Portishead "Only You" music video), Director: Chris Cunningham

Fatboy Slim "Weapon of Choice" Director: Spike Jonze

Merce Cunningham "Coast Zone"

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Live

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(Silent Screen
Choreography: Paul Lightfoot & Sol Leon

Music: Philip Glass
Film realization: Metropolis Film and Dicky Schuttel)

Hofesh Shechter Dance Company
"deGeneration" at Theatre Traverse

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Attached files on CD

The State of PlaySUMMARY.pdf (copyright The Playgroup)

Box.mpg (copyright Sabine Klaus)

TheStateofPlay.mpg (copyright Sabine Klaus)

ProjectorDancersLiveSketch.mpg (copyright Sabine Klaus)

Jekyll&Hyde.mpg (copyright Sabine Klaus)

FROG: Stillness1.mpg & FROGjazzdraft.mpg (copyright Sabine Klaus)

WDKfin1.mpg (copyright Sabine Klaus)

RiceGirl.mpg (copyright Sabine Klaus)

DarkDuet.mpg (in collaboration with Gayle Meikle and the dancers from the Space)

Programmes of Study

<u>List of Illustrations</u>