

# The Elsewhere

*A conversation between Artists, eryn tempest and Stephanie Patsula, centred on the digital body, cyborgs, glitches in the matrix and lens based practices.*

The intersection of technology and the body has implemented an era of augmentation. Simple cybernetic interventions such as medical implants worldwide, our Western tech-tools and devices expand the reach of commerce and workflow, and I can recognize the cyborg-in-me every time I pop in my contact lenses. However, this discussion aims to refocus these body hacks and reposition them in the Arts. Technology has instigated major shifts in viewer-ship of the visual and performing arts, and artists are expressing the possibilities through their work now more than ever.

Presently Mile Zero Dance is host to Artist in Residence, eryn tempest, and their work is no stranger to the augmentation and fragmentation of digital and real-world identity. tempest's latest project; *Parallax*, is a multimedia installation and dance performance that combines digital and analog technologies alongside the movements of a live dancer.

Since it only makes sense to let this discourse happen in the limitless ether elsewhere, this back and forth has been confined to digital and online platforms.

SP:

Hey eryn, Thank you for holding (digital) space with me. I am interested in how your work *Parallax* meets at the intersection of technology and the live body, and want to ask, why were you drawn towards working in this way?

et:

Hi Stephanie! I'm really excited to be *here* with u in the inter-ether. My new work, Parallax is all about exploring bodies and embodiment in terms of discontinuity and fragmentation. I'm really interested in the body's inarticulate nature, all the ways that it is not one discrete form with clear boundaries and surfaces. I've found technology to be an excellent tool to explore and convey this since the image body can be altered and fragmented in ways that the physical body cannot.

What's interesting to me is that our conception of what a body is and where it begins and ends is very sensorial. We see the skin as a container, we can reach out our hands and feel where there is human and where there is something else: empty space, a counter top, but with technology our sensorial experience of bodies is altered and so, in many ways, the bodies themselves are altered. I'm interested in the move to flesh out how these technologically mediated new bodies are and what types of sensorial experiences they elicit.

I think I am attracted to this methodology because I find in new media practices a freedom to make bodies out of a host

of images and textures. As a dancer I have always been more interested in textures

and energetic qualities than I have been in gestural forms. I have long lamented that my body was not a cloud or a bit of light reflected off water. In the digital I am able to make bodies out of light and smoke or the movement of a glitch, and I can add lots of vibrant colours and it just feels like a more true representation of how I envision my body and my dancing.

Specifically with the glitch, there is just SO much movement that can be mined from a relatively still video. It feels like I'm revealing an invisible presence that had been there all the time. This feels like a

strong analog for the invisible forces that surround us away from the keyboard. It reminds me of something u said to me when u loaned me your soma microphone and we listened to the electromagnetic activity already present in the gallery space. Something about how it was interesting to know that I am already dancing in so much sound. I feel like we have a kinship in our use of technology to reveal and explore the invisible. Something also about magic and spiritualism accessed through technology. I wonder if you could speak a bit about how ideas from technospiritualism influence your work?

SP: Technological mediation gives so many entry points to both an artist and a viewer when engaging with the possibilities expressed through the (im)material of a digital body. I find myself struck by your response in terms of the potential within this realm. The ability to reach beyond the parameters we are

bound to in our daily lives is actually achievable and there are few limitations inside of digital space -- a kind of anarchy. For that reason, it could be suggested that a shift in form, gestural or otherwise, is revolutionary.

There is a hopeful and emancipatory feeling I get when I think of the freedoms that digital space makes allowances for, not only materially, the body is free of a chrononormative time-line and place, it can live on

indefinitely

or be in many places at once.

or be in many places at once. The scope of artistic possibilities is endless with a willingness to teach yourself how to be woven into the technological tapestry.

Admittedly, the initial reasoning for mediating my body through technology was born out of necessity. Like most artists and performers, the global pandemic seriously shifted the way that my work could be experienced. I started to consider proximity in a different way, and wanted to experiment with digital performance spaces as a conduit to connect with others. As someone accustomed to using lens based mediums like photo, GIF and video it came naturally to try and integrate a live element into screen-based viewership. This experimentation eventually led me to fragment my performances and installations across real-world and online spaces simultaneously, and was the catalyst to discovering the invisible realm created by the technology adjacent to us.

or be in many places at once.

Often, I find myself using symbology, ritual and objects to express myself in my work, while attempting to approach concepts of relational ethics, cultural ritual and spirituality. The screens of our devices: phones, tablets, computers, are portals that not only reflect the IRL

experience but move beyond the physical plane to connect to others and ourselves in a non-tangible environment. I see this relationship to technology providing a similar outlet and outcome to that expected from a spiritual experience. For me it is exciting to volley between real and simulated spaces to explore relationships and concepts.

The body is a vessel for experience, and our digital bodies can experience so much more in a day than our material bodies can if given a platform (or two or three).

et: Hmmmmm...yes, I would agree that embodying through digital spaces is absolutely a revolutionary act.

To quote Legacy Russell paraphrasing Anaïs Duplan in Russell's book *Glitch Feminism*,

**“A body is an idea that is cosmic, which is to say, ‘inconceivably vast.’...we have only just begun to scratch the surface of what the body is, what it can do, and what its future looks like.”**

I feel like technological mediation or embodying digitally/online is a way of enacting the cosmic nature of the body. It's a way to grow or transform our ideas of what a body is and then, by extension, what a place is. My other favourite idea in Russell's book is that body is a world-building word. It is important to me that I remember that how I embody in the world/online has real consequences for the spaces I move through. The way that I deem myself contained, what I include, what I exclude, how I describe that containment builds for me the spaces that I arrive inside. I think, culturally we have some deeply ingrained notions of what our bodies are and what they are for and it can be difficult to dream outside these paradigms. Glitch is so effective at disassembling, laying bare, revealing space and movement where

there was only stillness and continuity. It can start us on our journey towards new worlds and new bodies.

I agree that this is absolutely describing spirituality. Something like religion even. It's a way of describing the relation between the one and the multiple where bodies (all bodies), as the multiple, contain and are contained by the one. Sort of a holographic relation: through a particular engagement, the body reveals the universe, reveals all facets at once. There is a way in which digital and new media practices give us sensorial access to this relation. Advents in technology absolutely guide our culture into the future and technologically mediated art practices guide us forward spiritually I think, as well.

SP:

As I read your suggestion of a kind of holographic relation, I was met immediately with a strong visual in my mind, of a sort of shimmering nebulous light, saturated with galactic colours and moving in so many directions at once. A moment of synesthesia that makes me want to circle back to something you said at the beginning of the conversation:

“In the digital I am able to make bodies out of light and smoke or the movement of a glitch, and I can add lots of vibrant colours and it just feels like a more true representation of how I envision my body and my dancing. “

When I speak to spirituality/technology in my own research, I am really thinking about this in a secular way. I think that even this instance of synesthesia is an example of how the body

can reveal the universe to us, and that such a profound and fleeting human experience can be explored, represented or challenged by the flexibility of augmented

realities. Not to get too touchy feely, but it makes me feel in communion with individuals in a way that is dissimilar to ways I have experienced before, especially via embodied explorations.

Despite our attempts to keep this discourse to e-mail between us, I have had the good fortune of many opportunities to speak with you across other online platforms and in-person. I feel thoroughly steeped in this conversation and my own personal thoughts regarding the topics we are addressing -- Yesterday when we spoke on my front porch it prompted me to later think about an E-flux Journal article written by the artist Hito Steyerl, *In Defense of the Poor Image*. Early in their

writing Steyerl lists the ways that a “poor image” has been “..uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited” and goes on to state (it) “.. It

transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction.” I am wondering your thoughts on this and Glitch having the potential to transform a “quality image into an accessible one”.

et: Yeah, we were talking about accessibility and inaccessibility with regards to how well content can be read or parsed. Like, can you read this document?

## Is this legible?

And I was suggesting that, while there may be writing here, and there may be a conversation going on between u and eye, in reality, what u are looking at is a .jpg and actually the glitch reveals that and makes THAT more accessible. Glitch resists that disappearance into the content. It resists the absorption of the viewer into the viewed and instead draws attention to the mechanisms that make it possible. I think this messes with our sense of expectation and the ways we project ourselves forward in time. It brings

us into the present moment, in relation with our bodies in relation with whatever machine we are using. Glitch is a rupture in the experience of flow. It's like waking up from a dream. Oh I am alive. Oh I am dreaming. Oh I can redirect, begin again, w/e. And maybe for me, to make art out of that kind of discontinuity and rupture could be called a kind of meditative practice. I'm not sure. But I like it when I have to work to mine the content, or to make out the message. It makes me feel that I am relating with distance, like I am

receiving messages through long-time. It also makes me feel like I am communing with objects: with .jpgs, .mp4s, which feels like a way of being in the world, looking around, sensing, seeing, smelling, touching, holding. I like to hold these digital containers. Glitching them makes them more legible to me as objects. I am reminded of the animated *bit* in the original Tron movie. Just sort of a precious little friend along for the ride on my adventure through life, love, connection, community, conflict, loss, w/e.

The glitch gives the .jpg or .mp4 a responsiveness, makes it more body-like. I think we/I are looking for guidance from other forms of life and other body-like things these days. This is a kind of universe revealing experience as well. It's revelatory to discover these digital bodies. It allows us to learn things about ourselves, to dream our bodies afresh in relation to an ever-transforming reality.

*This conversation took place over 4 days btw September 14 and 17, 2021. What u c is a reformatted transcript of our email thread. What u don't c are the many texts, IG messages, phone calls, and face2face conversations that took place on porches, in salons, and en plein air over the course of our young friendship.*