

The Cinematography of Artistic Research: Process, Methods, Output

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Abstract

This article discusses artistic-research video documentation and dissemination as an alternative form of cinematography. Drawing from the COVID-19-responsive project “From haptic deprivation to haptic possibilities: researching the embodiment of caring and creative touch while practising physical distancing”, each reader is invited to witness the research process through a video output and its making. Cinematography, as documentation and dissemination of the artistic-research output, is analysed through the project’s somatic methodology, the use of videography and editing as research methods. Thus, the article adds to the understanding of documentation as an inextricable component of each research project.

Keywords: documentation, somatic methodologies, videography, editing.

How to cite: Kapadocha, C. (2022). The Cinematography of Artistic Research: Process, Methods, Output. *Doctoral Horizons* 1(3), pp. 73-84.

Introduction

This article is developed upon my presentation “Videography and editing as methods towards somatic invitations in artistic research” shared at the Advanced Interdisciplinary Art Research online conference in December 2021¹. Going through the invitation to the conference and the suggested themes on cinematographic creation and reception, my ideas began to navigate around the understanding of artistic-research video outputs as an alternative form of cinematography which also aims at evoking audience reception in resonance to the intentions of each project².

Art research or artistic research in Europe has been the subject of a continuously growing number of PhD programmes, publications, working groups and events that aim at advocating the significance and contribution of arts processes and embodied inquiry within the context of formal academic research³. The terms are also commonly used interchangeably or in resonance with practice as research which “might denote a research process that leads to an arts-related output, an arts project as one element of a research process drawing on a range of methods, or a research process entirely framed as artistic practice” (Sjoberg and Hughes, n.d.).

Within the context of artistic research and its potential outputs, significant attention has also been given to the awareness of documentation as “an integral component that must be engaged with from the very inception of the project” (Bucknall as cited in Arlander et al., 2018, p. 71). This documentation aims at facilitating the perception of each research project and is primarily multimodal⁴. My practice as research, focusing on embodied inquiry through somatic methodologies

¹ The event was organized by the Doctoral School of the I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film (UNATC) in Bucharest, Romania.

² On the significance of video outputs in the documentation and dissemination of artistic research, see among others Jennifer Leigh, Nicole Brown, *Embodied Inquiry*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2021, pp. 86-87, 90-92.

³ See among others Michael Biggs, Henrik Karlsson, *The Routledge companion to research in the arts*, Routledge, Oxon, 2011, Baz Kershaw, Helen Nicholson, *Research methods in theatre and performance*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2011, Paulo de Assis, Lucia D’Errico, *Artistic research: charting a field in expansion*, Rowman and Littlefield Int., New York, 2019.

⁴ On multimodality in artistic research and embodied inquiry see among others Robin Nelson, *Practice as research in the arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2013, pp. 66-68 (Google Book), Jennifer Leigh, Nicole Brown, *Embodied Inquiry*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2021, p. 30.

within and beyond theatre contexts, has brought to my attention several insights regarding artistic-research documentation processes, methods and outputs⁵. So even though this article discusses a short film output that can stand on its own, it simultaneously further expands upon its perception adding on contextual information, underlying methodology and process.

For this discussion, I draw from my latest project “From haptic deprivation to haptic possibilities: researching the embodiment of caring and creative touch while practising physical distancing”⁶ and the short film *Off touch-off balance: are we still in touch?* (9:58) which in turn complements the most effective reading of this article⁷. Outlining the project and facilitating the witnessing of the film, I wish to highlight not only the contribution of artistic research but also the shaping of artistic-research video outputs as “an integral component” of the research per se. Approaching artistic-research video documentation as an alternative form of cinematography, I introduce how methods of videography and editing shape the dissemination and reception of the project.

From haptic deprivation to haptic possibilities: outlining the project

What prompted the practice-research project under the umbrella title “From Haptic Deprivation to Haptic Possibilities” was the actual experiencing of the pandemic and the first lockdown in the UK in March 2020. With the necessary transition to online interactions I noticed a “gap” in how we could still embody the benefits of touch either working remotely or while practising physical distancing. The study of the positive impact of touch or haptic sense has been an innate part of my somatic

⁵ For an overview and further details of my practice-as-research projects, see the relevant item on my personal website <https://christina-kapadocha.com/practice-research>.

⁶ For an overview of the project up to now, see the following webpage: <https://christina-kapadocha.com/practice-research/from-haptic-deprivation-to-haptic-possibilities>.

⁷ The short film, which from now on will be referred through the abbreviated title *Off touch-off balance*, can be accessed through the following YouTube link: <https://youtu.be/gi6QHDPmqyE>. I would prompt you to combine the reading of this article with the witnessing of the video for a more comprehensive understanding of the discussion.

research⁸ and has recently attracted a growing research interest⁹. Embodiment studies, from phenomenology and psychology to sociocultural discourses, highlight the significance of physical engagement with our social environments towards various forms of balance such as effective interactions, expression, mental health and wellbeing¹⁰. Touch also became the subject of a number of artistic projects particularly in response to the physical distancing guidelines implemented by the Covid-19 pandemic¹¹.

The main research question I set up within the context of my research is: what happens to individuals and communities, particularly theatre communities, when physical proximity and physical contact is restricted due to a pandemic such as COVID-19? I first started investigating this question as a movement educator for actors at East 15 Acting School in London: how would it be possible to examine new tactile possibilities around alternative use of physical contact while working online or maintaining physical distance in the studio?¹². Broadening the scope of the research beyond the context of actor training, I also started examining the development of remote haptic methods for practitioners, artists, educators and researchers. To do so, I set up a series of five one-on-one online sessions between January and March 2021, devising alternative tactile practices in response to each

⁸ See Christina Kapadocha, "Somatic logos in physio-vocal actor training and beyond", in Christina Kapadocha, *Somatic voices in performance research and beyond*, Routledge, Oxon, 2021, pp. 155-168.

⁹ See among others Sarah Cox, "Survey to explore attitudes to touch: bodies, minds, society, psychology", published on 21.01.2020, <https://www.gold.ac.uk/news/the-touch-test/>, accessed on 20.12.2021.

¹⁰ See among others Tiffany Field, *Touch (second edition)*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2014 (in psychology), Matthew Fulkerson, *The first sense: a philosophical study of human touch*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2014 (in philosophy), Malaika Sarco-Thomas, *Thinking through touch in partnering and contact improvisation*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2020 (in performing arts).

¹¹ Some UK-initiated projects include *Skin Hunger* by Dante or Die, the dance duet *Mud of Sorrow: Touch* by Akram Khan and *8 Tender Solitudes* by Fevered Sleep. Interestingly all of the aforementioned projects focus on or include film as medium of dissemination.

¹² On online actor training see Christina Kapadocha, "Haptic possibilities: practising physical contact as part of online actor training", *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Blog*, published on 12.04.2021, <http://theatredanceperformancetraining.org/2021/04/haptic-possibilities-practising-physical-contact-as-part-of-online-actor-training/>, accessed on 20.12.2021. On physically-distanced actor training see Christina Kapadocha, "Haptic possibilities: practising physical contact as part of physically-distanced actor training", *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Blog*, published on 24.11.2020, <http://theatredanceperformancetraining.org/2020/11/haptic-possibilities-practising-physical-contact-as-part-of-physically-distanced-actor-training/>, accessed on 20.12.2021.

participant's process and enquiries.

My investigations draw from the study of touch through the awareness of the diverse skin organ in somatic methods¹³ and are theoretically underpinned by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of human bodies as *exemplar sensibles*; the bodies that are at the same time sensible and sensate¹⁴. I am using plural to add the element of embodied multiplicity to Merleau-Ponty's discourse. I also expand upon the intersubjective and diverse potentialities that reside within the study of the skin organ as both embodied practice and conceptual framework integrating other discourses such as feminist ideas by Sara Ahmed on the skin of the community: "it is through moving towards and away from others or objects that individual bodies become aligned with some others and against other others, a form of alignment that temporarily 'surfaces' as the skin of the community"¹⁵. Ahmed's quote opens the film *Off touch-off balance* the structure and content of which I discuss in the following part of this article.

Facilitating the witnessing of artistic research

The artistic-research film *Off touch-off balance* was created to feature on the TaPRA (Theatre and Performance Research Association) PaR (Practice as Research) Gallery 2021. The theme for the 2021 Gallery was "off balance": "Something happens when a body (systemic, organic, biological, elemental) is set off balance: an unsettling, a slipping (in/out), a loss of trajectory even as the action continues on"¹⁶. Reading this through the nature of my project, I located in the deprivation of physical proximity and physical contact a condition that can set our diverse bodies off balance or off alignment, using Ahmed's word. So, if the circumstances require distancing, are there any possibilities for us to re-align and somehow stay in touch?

¹³ See Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the body moving: an Introduction to body-mind centering*, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, California, 1995 and Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, *Sensing, feeling, and action: the experiential anatomy of body-mind centering*, Contact Editions, Northampton, Massachusetts, 2012.

¹⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1968, p. 135.

¹⁵ Sara Ahmed, "The skin of the community: affect and boundary formation", in Tina Chanter, Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, *Revolt, affect, collectivity: the unstable boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*, State University of New York Press, Albany, p. 104.

¹⁶ Annalaura Alifuoco, "TaPRA PaR Gallery CfP: Off Balance", published on 09.04.2021, <http://tapra.org/call-participation/tapra-2021-6-10-sept-online-co-hosted-by-liverpool-hope-university-tapra-par-gallery-cfp-off-balance/>, accessed on 20.12.2021.

The content of the film is developed upon my online work with 16 research participants from Europe and North America. More specifically, its creation followed reflections upon the first session with each participant on introducing the activation of the individual skin organ in relation to the self, one's own environment and sense of touch. Practising the available reflexive attributes of the individual skin organ and directing our attention to our exemplar sensibility, my objective was to heighten in each participant's attention the palpable possibilities that the individual can access even without direct tactile interaction with another lived body. In other words, we practised a form of intra- subjectivity¹⁷ that aims towards a fuller relation to one's own tactile self or what in recent neuroscience has been identified as *somatosensation*¹⁸. To this end, as mentioned during the film, the facilitating methods I studied included verbal input, physical echoing and responding as well as a form of intended-distant contact. This distant contact speaks with precision through the physical qualities of an intended tactile input prompted by each participant's physicality; a physical contact that I would have offered if I were in proximity with each participant.

The film opens with Ahmed's quote on the "skin of the community" while in the background I include the picture of the "skin" of a fabric taken through a digital microscope. This was inspired by the fact that during the sessions I started integrating the experience of the actual environment, different textiles and textures as diverse "breathing skins". After a few seconds I start narrating the introduction to the project while captions are also available for further facilitation if needed. The visual input then includes extracts from the online sessions that aim at offering awareness on the setup of the online activities. For ethical purposes I have covered the names of the participants and have chosen frames that do not include faces. The practice extracts interchange with other microscopic material, from the fabric in the opening frame, to my own skin and hair. In a similar way my voice interweaves with text as I aim at inviting each viewer-witness's attention to a sensory overlap.

¹⁷ See Colin Hay, "The Interdependence of Intra- and Inter-Subjectivity in Constructivist Institutionalism", *Critical Review*, Vol. 29, Nr. 2, 2017.

¹⁸ Jocelyn Duffy, "International Research Effort Gives Neuroscientists Better Feeling About Sense of Touch", published on 05.01.2015, <https://www.cmu.edu/news/stories/archives/2015/january/touch-and-neuroscience.html>, accessed on 20.12.2021.

At around 1:24 I include an actual extract from a session for further input on the content of the activities and how they landed in the physicality of the specific participant. I should clarify that the responses varied in relation to different individuals and, adding to the ethical element mentioned above, I chose extracts that are sensitive to the participants' identities and personal spaces. I connect the session extract with the outline of the employed facilitating methods while visually I shift to a key practice moment (2:16-2:31) when in one of the first sessions the participant's response offered me the opportunity to test out the devised method of intended or distant contact. The video shows the moment I lift my hand following the impulse to support the participant's back. And even though in the film I do not include my verbal input, I also talked the participant through palpable qualities of this intended touch such as the exact position of my hand, the intended pressure and movement engagement.

The above becomes a bridge to the next part of the film, the documentation of a solo artistic-research performance that actively emerged from the intersubjective and contingent dynamics of the first round of the online sessions. Reflecting on the video recordings, I realised that through the somatic narratives of the activities an innately interactive dramaturgy started taking shape. By using the term somatic narratives I do not mean only the physical interactions between myself as facilitator and each participant but also the development of my responsive and intersubjective language which also reflects theoretical ideas on sensory overlap and experiential reversibility. To identify these intersubjective dynamics between self and other, non-verbal and verbal, the theoretical and the embodied in the dramatic text within my overall somatic methodology and methods I introduce the term somatic logos¹⁹. The somatic logos in the documentation of the performance section is outlined in the following part through the methods of videography and editing.

Videography and editing in the cinematography of artistic research

Connecting the above introduction with the cinematography behind the performance within the film (2:32-9:58), I discern videography and editing as prevalent methods towards the dissemination of the artistic-research video. I

¹⁹ Christina Kapadocha, "Somatic logos in physio-vocal actor training and beyond", in Christina Kapadocha, *Somatic voices in performance research and beyond*, Routledge, Oxon, 2021, pp. 157-159.

approach videography as *the process of making* the artistic-research film and editing as *the process of creating its audio-visual narrative* “as integral component” of the nature and the intentions of each specific inquiry²⁰. Thus, within the introductory part of the film discussed in the previous section, videography took a multimodal identity (i.e. the integration between verbal narrative, theoretical and informative text) while the editing aimed at following the chronological development of the activities prior to the shaping and documentation of the performance.

During the videography of the performance, my main objective was the documentation of somatic relations with the self and the space towards inviting the active engagement of each future viewer-witness. At this point I wish to point out that, inspired by the Authentic Movement practice, somatic witnessing in my research “suggests embodied and equally active engagement between multiple individuals or groups”²¹. In dialogue with Jessica Benjamin’s theoretical notion of intersubjective thirdness²² it signifies “a transformational space that embraces the integration of embodied engagement and diverse individualities in theatre contexts through the experience of *witnessed thirdness*” (original emphasis)²³. In resonance, as an actress-researcher during the documentation of the performance material I aimed at a subtle inclusion of the potential viewer-witness while sustaining my own somatic *attention* and *intention*²⁴. Furthermore, this somatic witnessing navigated my collaboration with the videographer supporting the emergence of a witnessed thirdness in our collaboration.

A main challenge that can arise during the documentation of artistic research is that the lens of the researcher can be different from the lens of the camera operator or videographer. Thus, it is imperative for the researcher to

²⁰ Examples of artistic-research videography can be found at several online sources such as the *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Blog*, the *Journal of Embodied Research* and the *Journal for Artistic Research*.

²¹ Christina Kapadocha, “Community as soma: reflections on a community-conscious gathering”, *Journal of Arts and Communities*, Vol. 12, Nr. 1, 2021, p. 8.

²² Jessica Benjamin, *Beyond doer and done to: recognition theory, intersubjectivity and the third*, Routledge, London, 2018, p.18.

²³ Christina Kapadocha, “Community as soma: reflections on a community-conscious gathering”, *Journal of Arts and Communities*, Vol. 12, Nr. 1, 2021, pp. 8-9.

²⁴ Christina Kapadocha, “Somatic logos in physiovoical actor training and beyond”, in Christina Kapadocha, *Somatic voices in performance research and beyond*, Routledge, Oxon, 2021, pp. 160-162.

navigate the videographer around the clear intentions of the project while allowing them to become an active witness. In that way *third* collaborative and interdisciplinary opportunities can come up. In the case of the discussed documentation, I invited the contribution of a *scenographer as videographer* working with the scenographer and architect Andreas Skourtis. On top of trusting our ongoing collaboration, Skourtis as a practitioner brought in his own experience and experimentation on the dynamics between bodies and spaces. Within the context of the discussed project, we focused on the following videographic elements: a. the diverse use of the space (i.e. the inside-outside spatial dynamics through the windows and also the black background for a “quieter” reception), b. the still and moving camera in relation to the moving body and c. the macrography (wide shot) and micrography (close-ups) of physicality. As a result, we came up with three videos of the same performance while exploring various approaches to these videographic elements.

I then moved on with the editing process as an additional step of the same research project. My editing of the performance as witnessed in the film does not follow a montage method in the sense that it does not intervene to the duration and sequencing of the dramaturgical narrative. During the editing, I had a dual objective: a. to heighten the element of innate intersubjectivity in the tactile experience and b. to bring forth the polyphony of embodied experience creating a sound composition between the different takes. For instance, the intersubjective through the intra-subjective as identified earlier can be discerned at moments I blend two takes, simultaneously becoming the actor and the witness (i.e. the section 7:16-8:32). This co-exists with an ongoing verbal and vocal polyphonic composition suggesting the dynamics from which the performance sprang. Thus, the film organically closes with the verbal input of the participant with whom I tested the intended-distant contact during the first session.

Bringing together the methods of videography and editing in the cinematography of the performance as part of the artistic-research film *Off touch-off balance*, I aim at inviting the somatic engagement of each potential viewer-witness. In comparison to other short films exploring the subject of physical distancing and loss of touch during the pandemic such as *8 Tender Solitudes* by Fevered Sleep, my intention is not to simulate tactile interaction. Instead, I wish to focus on reception possibilities that can emerge through subtle witnessing,

“echoing” the intersubjective qualities that came up while working with the research participants.

Post-witnessing closing thoughts

A viewer-witness of the film wrote to me: “I was summoned to experience (rather than ‘just watch’ the film) ... Until the moment I was invited ... I had not felt the interrelation between me touching an organ so familiar - yet so powerful, and me being touched constantly by it”²⁵. I should like to consider this sharing as an indication of the continuation of the research intentions through the film output. It adds to the awareness that the documentation and dissemination of artistic research is never only a simple or random representation, even if the output is a performance piece. Instead, as Joanna Bucknall suggests, documentation should be integral to the research project²⁶. I would add that any form of artistic-research documentation should take into consideration the following three questions: 1. *who* is documenting? 2. *what* is documented? and 3. *how* is it documented?. In this article I shed light on these questions through an example of artistic-research somatic cinematography.

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²⁵ Viewer, email to the author, 08.09.2021.

²⁶ Joanna Bucknall, “The daisy chain model: An approach to epistemic mapping and dissemination in performance-based research”, in Annette Arlander, Bruce Barton, Melanie Dreyer-Lude, Ben Spatz, *Performance as research: knowledge, methods, impact*, Routledge, Oxon, 2018, p. 71.

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