

Moving Makes a Map

Renée Rhodes

It started with a question, a shared curiosity; “what do we look like from outer space?” I feel us always searching for new ways to answer this question. A unique human vulnerability reveals itself through the constant organizing of spaces and interactions into maps that preserve us from every possible sight line. We want to see everything at once; we want to see the patterns that we are transcribing upon the earth—and with all this looking from afar, new and ephemeral patterns are emerging from an ever-changing technological landscape.

Current social relations evolve through constant drifts in virtual time and space, forging a new landscape that operates at its own geological speed. Every physical place and relation has been translated into 2-dimensional maps and formations of data. In order to really see and know the complex patterns of movement between people in flattened landscapes of virtuality, I convert these patterns back into choreographies of connectivity within physical space. Moving makes a map that translates and documents what we look like right now in disorienting and de-centered landscapes.

I am interested in how these ideas also relate to larger discourses surrounding contemporary dance as both a subjective and a documentary based practice. My own choreographic structures for camera are often subjective translations of how data might be imagined as physical movement. Despite the endless technological support used within my own culture, I still see the human body as an intelligent device for measuring and recording space. Muscles have memory drives, neurons are empathetic, and everyone has a relative perception of space and time etched into their own physicality.

Dance and simple pedestrian scores act as a language for collecting knowledge, observing distant relational tendencies between bodies, and inscribing memory. Within my practice, the body (choreographed) shares an archival impetus with the documenting camera. Both are systems of representation, seeking to record and mineralize the experience of a space, a time, or a set of human relations. By capturing human movement in space through the preserving lens of the camera, a subtle set of relationships forms between technological processes, people in motion, and landscapes (both real and imagined).



Practice I

In *Practice I*, I decided to assemble a group of strangers for a choreographic video project. Primarily, I collected participants through posts on Craigslist and other online forms for networking. It was important for me to organize a group of strangers into an oddly evolving collective, and I wondered how a

group like this could practice relating physically while sharing space with one another.

The groups were given a simple choreographic score: begin by moving together in a clump, any participant can leave the group at any random time—at which point the other group members should re-organize in a geometric form around that person. I was interested in merging patterns of movement reminiscent of flocking starlings and warmth-seeking penguins with the rigor of human organization and geometric idealism. In these systems of movement, I saw a play between forms of spatial awareness and social practices employed by different species. The resulting video reveals individual uncertainties that accumulate into a humorously human cooperation, one that brings a distanced and mediated sociality into a realm of physical negotiations.

Practice I is a document of a performance for camera. Through an aerial perspective (the vantage point of mapmaking), *Practice I* observes a fictitious social system. It is an imagined behavior for a group who, after realizing that its main defining feature had become connecting at distances and through screens, began practicing a constructed set of relations together in 3-dimensional space.

As landscapes continue condensing into removed virtualities, I am curious about the histories of other physical spaces. Again, it starts with a question: “What happened to the sand dunes that used to cover San Francisco?” I asked this question on Craigslist, then collected and graphed every response in a book called *A Question Quickly Covered; An Exploration of the Landscapes that Form When People Answer the Same Question From Separate Places*.¹

In this book, memories, communications, and relationships are fictitiously transformed into a physical landscape, similar to the one I set out to remember in the first place. I saw the Craigslist forum as a site of constant accumulation—a formation and burial of instantaneous micro-histories. I wanted to preserve just one of these volumes in order to imagine connections between geologically drifting dunes, time-lapsing drifts of virtual landscapes, and the new social connectivity found there.



Making Maps Together in Landscapes Like These

In an accompanying video, *Making Maps Together in Landscapes Like These*, twelve separate people are given a map to this imagined landscape. It is a map like most others; 3-D space flattened and laid out as if one is positioned above it—even though this is not how we navigate through space on the ground. The resulting video documents each person in their own separated time, inscribing and translating a 2-D path to the 3-D space that surrounds them.

The time separating each delicate running figure is evidenced by subtle shifts in sand patterns and a constantly truncated panoramic. This is a landscape that forms by way of the digital composite. Archives mineralize in the drifting strata of sand dunes, in quickly accumulating social relations through data, and in the memory drive of a body in motion.

As the bodies in these works document and preserve relations through choreographic mapping and embodied memory, the eye of the camera records what the body made physical. In endless drifts of translation from physical to virtual, the camera is one more geological layer. Landscapes, screens, and the bodies inhabiting these spaces are systems in parallel.

Choreographically, to dance is to organize the body and the physical space it inhabits—similar to organizing a landscape via the flattening out of unruly sand dunes. By mapping a set of Craigslisted interactions choreographically,

we can put these complex and invisible webs of connection and relation into the archive of a body: to see and to remember human connectivity with each other despite perceived distances and separations.

Notes

1 For more on *A Question Quickly Covered*, see also <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/2119125>.

Renée Rhodes is a San Francisco-based artist focusing on intersections between dance, technology and human social interactions. Her work has most notably been featured at La Sala SAM in Santiago, Chile, Nexus Art Gallery in Manchester, UK and recently as a part of the Big Screen Project in New York City.