

again, again; Enacting personal pluriverses, digital shadows, and co-ownership in digital space

[Click here to watch *again, again*](#)

again, again is a screen-based response to the themes explored by the *Dancing Otherwise: Exploring Pluriversal Practices Network* in answer to an open call for offshoot funding. The resulting screen-based work, and this report, constitute key outcomes of the accepted proposal developed by artist-researchers Callum Anderson and Louis Green after engaging with the network since its inception.

Callum and Louis first met through the network after being acquainted digitally for some time. They both instantly found a shared interest in how their commonalities (being queer, male-presenting dance researchers) had been spotted in one another, creating an almost unspoken kinship. First a digital space, and subsequently a dance space, served as a safe environment for the pair to connect and acknowledge their shared experiences.

again, again has served as a return to this digital space in which the pair first became acquainted, opening up time for movement-led reflections on the newfound understandings of one another, and of themselves, through brief 'real-world' interactions and subsequent digital encounters.

Overview

This offshoot funding allowed Callum and Louis time to connect for a one-day in-studio practice research period, stemming from an engagement with the network's activities and prompting a joint interest in the topics of queerness, digital space, pluriversality and otherness. This research was guided by a desire to investigate how the notion of 'dancing otherwise' can be employed to represent queerness in screen space.

Digital space has served as a meta-physical meeting ground for the researchers, allowing for open expression and connection, without the presence of additional parties. Dance spaces, particularly those opened up by the *Dancing Otherwise* network, have held a similar significance – though other individuals have been present, these environments have encouraged self-expression and interconnectivity, allowing interactions to develop a sense of depth which may have not been achieved in more public, 'traditional' spaces.

By utilising digital video conferencing technology, the researchers explored the possibilities of connection, choreography and pluriversality through video and projection software, creatively engaging with digitally distanced dancing and aiming to move beyond screen participation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Creating a feedback loop using cameras and projectors to create a delay/echo/shadow of the co-present dancers to visually interpret pluriversal themes was central

to this investigation. The visual effect of this delay/echo holds symbolic meaning for both researchers and their research interests and how shadow has previously been used by queer artists and theorist in a 'construction of queerness' because of their 'disruptive potential' (Halberstam, 2011: 102).

The use of video and projection software necessitated a fixed camera position which troubled the mobility/motility of the camera and performers, whereas the shadow/other bodies caused by a delay of the camera/projector feedback loop (rather than a post-production edit), gave rise to an-other way of moving, dancing and relating to the queer dancing body. The response asserts an inherent link between queerness and dancing/being otherwise by exploring two scores for engaging with the feedback loop:

- 'Dancing now or then' - choose to interact with the live, co-present dancer, or their shadow/digitally delayed counterpart – how might the change in interaction 'queer' screen space?
- 'Project or capture' - move attention between the projected image and your relationship to the camera – how might this impact on the other dancer's experience/space?

The movement language, on the other hand, was developed by identifying words and phrases from key academic texts which underscore this research, presented below, which scaffolded the improvisation:

- Shadow; doubled, not mirrored; queerness as secondary; disruptive potential of shadow worlds (Halberstam, 2011: 87–121)
- Wayfaring; orientation and pace; meshwork; weaving; interwoven trails; gestural re-enactment of journeys made (Ingold, 2016: 74–106)
- Moments of disorientation are vital; unsettling; shatter; reorientation steadied by action; paths not taken; oblique; offline; arrive; borrow; deviation (Ahmed, 2006: 157–179)

At its root, this research considers how queer individuals embody the experience of existing 'otherwise', and this work explores and celebrates the ways in which both digital and dance-centred spaces can offer a safe environment for queer people to find connection and relatedness through the ways in which they are viewed as 'other'.

Creating a liminal space across 163 miles

At the outset of this brief research response, it was hoped that we, as researchers, would find an-other way connecting, dancing and choreographing 'otherwise' in response to the themes that had developed over our engagement with the *Dancing Otherwise Network*, and an innate, embodied understanding of 'otherwise-ness' as queer-identifying artist-researchers. As a first step towards this new way of working

with each other, and some trepidation regarding if the technology would behave in the way the project envisioned (and with no way of testing it before the studio research time), we relied on scores and words to guide an improvised choreography that was then semi-set as we moved towards the final recording that is presented as the screen-based response.

The screen-based response which resulted from this research period, although not exactly as envisioned, facilitated a liminal space that was symbolic of meeting in a comparable or different way that redefined what it meant to be 'alone' in a studio. There were times when we were deep in the flow of the improvisation that we both experienced 'forgetting' that the other person was not physically in the space with us.

Throughout the day it had come up in conversations if we were dancing a duet or two solos, and for the most part it felt like a duet due to the awareness that we were giving to the other dancer through their projected image. To begin the afternoon session, we spent some time individually, but still in the camera/projector feedback loop, exploring the words that scaffolded the movement improvisation. This was primarily as we had spent most of the morning engaging with the scores and the technical aspects of the feedback loop, and felt that we were moving 'generally', without necessarily capturing the essence of the guiding words in our improvisation.

Through these more independent improvisations, we found that, where previously it had felt like a duet, it instead felt disconnected and like two solos, even though we were dancing in the same 'space' provided by the feedback loop. After we felt that we had found a deeper understanding and specificity of the movement, we returned to the scores and recorded a take. Although this was around the fourth time we had 'performed' the piece, we recognised a difference in the attention and sense of the dance. Having spent time dancing solo, we had not managed to capture the duet feeling that had been present previously. Shifting our attention back to each other through the projected images helped to redefine this duet relationship, and the relational space that this research aimed to produce. We assert, then, that finding a queer dancing space, as we have defined it through a pluriversal practice, is wholly reliant on engagement with the other dancer in order to convene in this liminal space.

Another critique of the work was noticed as we rewatched the recordings of the improvisation. At the project's outset, it was imagined that there would be no edit to the screen response and would instead be reliant on the audience members to find the links and shadows, echos and relationships that we found as we were embedded in the improvisation. What was immediately noticed on reviewing the footage was a lack of depth to the work, and an absence of the choreographic choices which guided much of the semi-set improvisation. Revisiting the footage and developing an editing rationale to ensure the response provided something of the experience of dancing it became important to the research output. We knew that a heavy edit was not the way that we wanted to go, and presetting the screens side-by-side was a key

visual of the work, so instead we wanted the edit to encourage the audience members into the work, direct the eye and guide them towards moments that felt important when dancing them.

With this understanding of what we wanted the editing rationale to achieve, we landed on a simple fade in and out of the separate screens at key moments. Not only did this allow us to achieve the directing and guiding that we were aiming for, but it also allowed us to bring more 'movement' to the immobile cameras in their fixed positions. The editing rationale also allowed us to look at the work in another way in terms of its presentation possibilities. Whereas it was first imagined that it would be seen on a flat screen, and primarily this is how it will be seen, we are also looking towards other opportunities to present it more as an installation work, projecting it into or around corners – intersections of spaces which, like the work, may be considered as queering.

Queer connection in the Digital Space

In addition to allowing for the creation of a screen-based response, the day also offered a fruitful phenomenological enquiry into the meeting of queer bodies in digital space, both retrospectively and in the present moment.

Whilst the practical, artistic outcome of *again, again* holds its own life and significance, in many ways it was also a vessel through which deeper understandings of digital encounters were developed. Many of our previous discussions had identified the commonalities we see in our life experiences, and by accompanying these with a common space and task, we seemed to be able to connect and communicate with great depth - almost as if the researchers' commonalities cancelled one another out. Within this digital meeting space, it felt as though the layers of common identity, experience, interest and history were stripped back, leaving only our individualities on show. This experience held a strong contrast to our day-to-day lives, in which these attributes of queerness often seem to be interpreted by others as the forefront of personalities. This led to one of our greatest discoveries from this process, that perhaps there are parts of those who have been 'othered' that can only be identified and understood by other 'others'. In other words, our own familiarity with queerness might allow us to see directly past the queerness in one another and understand the parts of each other that lay beneath.

It could be argued that this conclusion would hold truth in physical meeting spaces, rather than just digital, however this might not be the case. It is common for queer individuals to 'tone down' their queerness when in the presence of non-queer people in an attempt to be more palatable, less 'othered', and in extreme cases, as a method of self-preservation or survival (Le Vay, 2019). Whilst western dance spaces are often supportive, or at least tolerant, of queerness, there are still occasions in which it is safer to confine to heteronormative and cisnormative expectations. In a secure 1-to-1 digital environment however, two queer individuals are able to connect

without the presence of external parties, and therefore, with fewer expectations of subjugating queerness.

Digital conferencing technology also allows individuals to connect from any spaces, no matter the distance between them. Within this project, meeting digitally allowed both of us to choose spaces in which they felt comfortable and able to openly discuss and display themes of queerness. If this research process were to have occurred in-person, it is likely that one of us would have had to travel to an unfamiliar space, potentially negatively influencing the affected party's ability to remain vulnerable and open. By creating a 'new' digital space, composed of two physical spaces that felt familiar to us, we were able to connect with great comfort, and therefore with more depth, generosity and authenticity.

Conclusion

This screen-based response and accompanying report has been informed by the thematic and practical questions around the possibilities of dancing otherwise, and the new understandings and positionalities that might be possible through engagement with these ideas, specifically from the personal/social perspective of queer identities. Further to this, it takes inspiration from the spatial/geographic, actively interrogating how it might be possible to connect across geographic areas and define new spatial possibilities through a choreographic practice.

In addition, this project has explored the unique offerings of digital space for queer individuals. We found that digital spaces provided an ability to openly exist 'otherwise' whilst connecting with others, facilitating conversations and discoveries that may not have been possible in more traditional, physical spaces.

Reference list

- Ahmed, Sara. (2006). *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, Judith. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure*. London: Duke University Press.
- Ingold, T. (2016). *Lines; A Brief History*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Le Vay, Lulu. (2019). 'Becoming Ordinary: Making Homosexuality More Palatable' in *Surrogacy and the Reproduction of Normative Family on TV*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp103–146.

Credits

Research & Development: Callum Anderson & Louis Green

Concept: Callum Anderson

Sound: Louis Green

Funded by the AHRC Dancing Otherwise: Exploring Pluriversal Practices Network

Biographies

Callum Anderson (he/him) is a PhD candidate at Bath Spa University and a dance artist-researcher whose work is influenced by site and screen-based dance practices, choreopolitics, and the queering of space and place through choreographic interventions. Working across live and digital performance he has made work for large scale screens, portable devices, and installations. His research has been published in the *International Journal of Screendance*, and his chapter 'Dancing in the Street: Pride, Parades and Protest' was published in *Encountering Environments Through the Arts: Interdisciplinary Embodiments, Politics, and Imaginaries* (Hunter and Chubb, eds., 2025).

Louis Green (He/They) is a postgraduate dance and embodiment researcher based in Bath, UK. His work is centred around the psychology and phenomenology of embodied movement practices, with additional interests in queerness, neurodivergence, spirituality, pedagogy and the visual arts. Louis' project, 'Somatic Practices for Transgender Individuals: Potential, Facilitation and Accessibility', was presented at the University of Wolverhampton's *Dance Medicine and Science Research Symposium* in 2024. He aims to begin doctoral study within the next year.