



#3

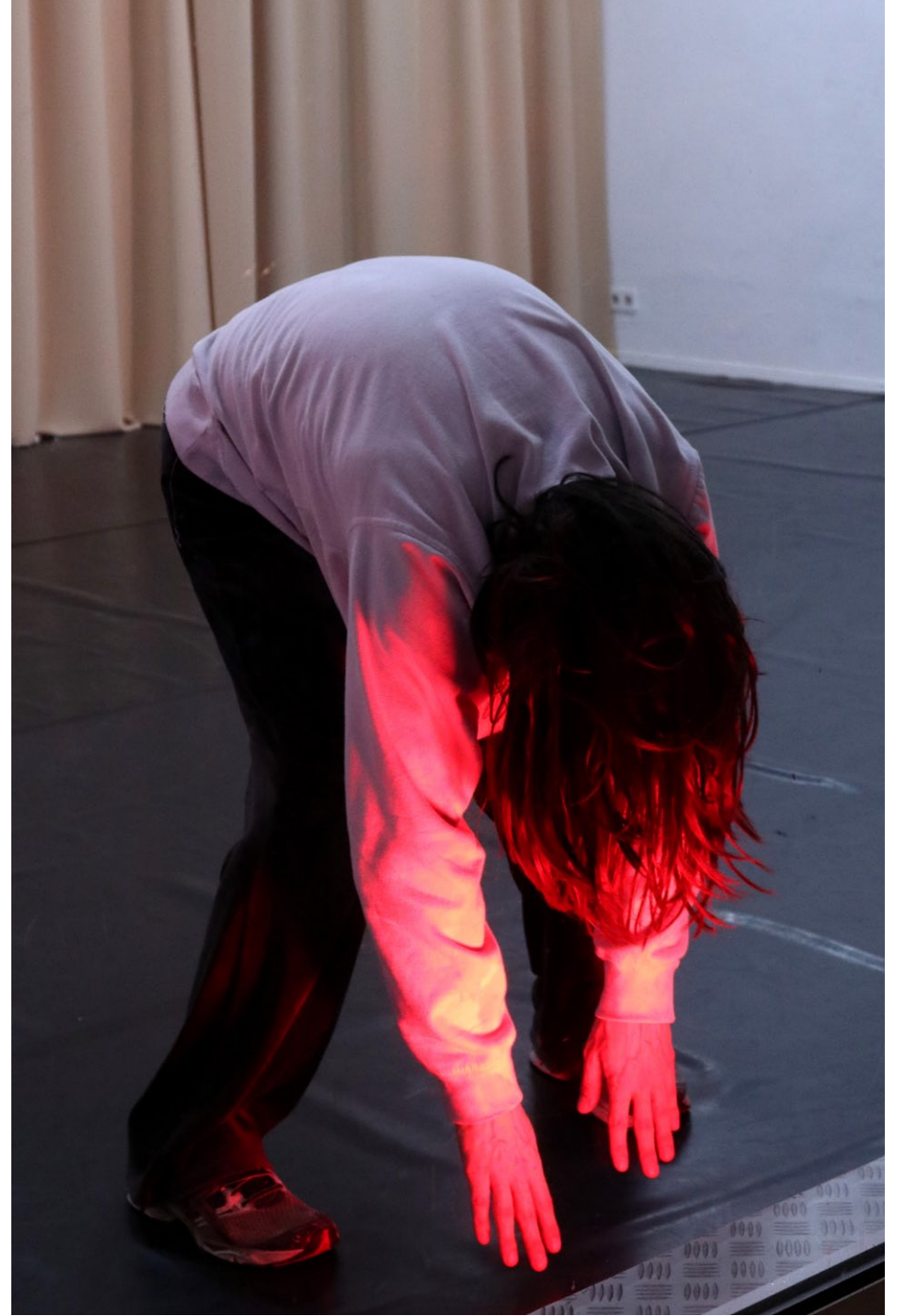




Alistair N. Watts
M Dance





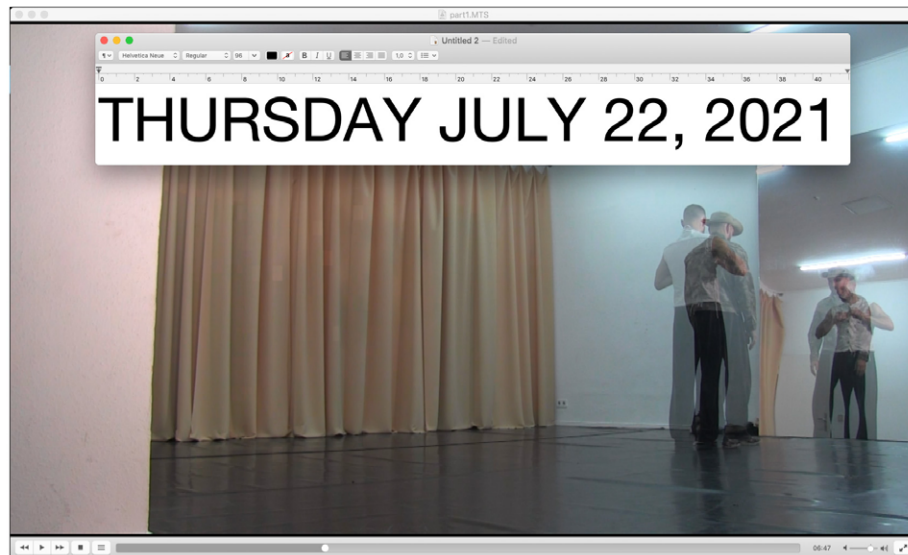




The performances mentioned here have almost entirely been seen through video documentation. Whatever experiences and reflections they might have provoked in me are mere fantasies and after-the-fact constructions that been slurped up from the muck of compressed and decompressed image.

So here is it: the documentation and the performance. The body and its image. The storefront window and the retina display of my computer screen. At present, I'm tempted to say that it makes little sense to invest in such comparisons. It feels like this is a dance that has been well-rehearsed but that is now shrivelled and dried up, holding out for just a drop of something that feels intensely real. What might be tried here instead, however, is finding a form for my lo-fi experiences of the work to occur, almost like an event, in writing. Or... perhaps I should just focus on the knives which have create such divisions: doors and locks, windows and mirrors, cameras and screens.

*And yet before all that, the storefront vitrine of New Fears is scaled down to a VLC window on my screen. **PULL TEXT FILE OVER THE PLAYER. PLAY.** The video continues and I begin with typing out the only thing that I did see in Wedding... the second half of Alistair Watts' performance M Dance and my pathway to get there.*



I close my eyes and listen to the audio. A memory: Ass on the concrete. A late arrival.



By the time I got there, the performance was already underway. I had straggled over with my friend F after an evening of fanfiction readings nearby. Wandering through the streets, we were talking about life, love, and the German countryside. After turning the final corner and passing under some foliage, our conversation was suddenly amplified. Before actually being able to see anything, it was a strange silence that engulfed us and hurried our belated arrival.

As New Fears began to prioritise more and more of our attention, we shifted our language towards a hushed, no-stakes chat about expressivity and scenography in German Tanztheater. A topic at least a little more suited to the given context. Piercing the public, I shed a weak and apologetic smile to those standing around because our bodies were newly initiated and were now temporarily blocking their view. We took a seat on the sidewalk at the very front.

The room I was looking in on glowed like an LED X-Ray view box. **PAUSE. SHIFT + COMMAND + 5.** **CAPTURE.** I check my memory against the video. Yes... the floor is lined with black dance floor and, if my head holds, neon lights line the ceiling overhead. On the lefthand wall (my left) is a door. Along the righthand wall (my right) is a large mirror. Against the back wall, indeed, a beige curtain. My mind wanders ...*hmmm if we route all self-expression through the X-RAY, and if one's inside feelings are reduced to one's innards, will everything be okay? No. The famous skeleton that post-modern dance haunts us with and asks us to visualise is now in Wedding, dressed up as a vitrine to show us some flattened anatomy theater and dance bones.*



Behind the glass, Alister was wearing velour track pants and a white denim vest. It was possible to hear a slightly muffled soundtrack from the sidewalk. The movement material was rather viscous and ever-transforming, as if an external force was ushering, contorting, and winding the body into different tonalities and shapes. I could sense through the glass that this body was open and receptive. But then, suddenly a facial expression would be pulled, a kind of furrowed brow, and it closed off the body from the flowing in of information and demonstrated afresh that this figure had a virtuosic sense of control over the images that were being produced. **FAST FORWARD 45 MIN. PRESS PLAY...** Alister finishes the performance and unlocks the door. *WHAT?*



I suddenly realise that I am missing some critical information... was the door locked this entire time? Was this a choreographic decision? Was it a standard protocol of the space? Why is this latent information only being surfaced now? In one sense, I think it could be read as a sort of defence strategy. When you are in the heat of performing, the last thing you can possibly think about is getting ready to defend yourself against trespassers. The locked door is therefore a permission to achieve a passivity ordinarily unachievable in a more exposed setting. It allows the dance to hold the body and drag it into unguarded qualities and surrendered states. I still feel incredibly disturbed by and attached to this particular door incident.

I asked Alister after the performance whether or not it was possible to see all of us sitting in the street. Apparently, it was not. I interrogate the video to see if Alister's semi-blindness to the outside world was visible.

Eating falafels side by side, we swap bodies. I rewind 30 minutes and fill the dancing body with my own. Indeed, I can only vaguely see my own slouched contours sitting on the sidewalk.



I think back to a night when I was lying naked in my bed. I was coming back from a party but was not ready to fall asleep yet. It was two in the morning and all the lights in the apartment were on. Suddenly, I heard a sound on my roof. When I looked through the skylight window, I could see the vague outline of a crouched figure looking in through the window. From within the fully lit apartment, I could not see out into the night, but the creep could look in. I ran to my bathroom, still naked, in order to quickly shut the window. Same mistake... I turned on the light. Again I was in full view. I turned it off and then saw a face, **CLOSE THE WINDOW**, and locked the door.

OPEN IMG_3987.MOV.

PRESS PLAY.

U were always from the scratch. It is the same room, but everything is different. Two performers are using their bodies to manipulate the space, produce sounds, and dance. A mirror is suspended diagonally by a red massage table that sits against the back wall. A glittering light announces itself from an LED screen which reads 'NO HARD FEELINGS'. **TURN UP VOLUME.** Ominous sounds. A cut grapefruit is dispersed and there is a pair of high heels. The dance floor is folded this time and coming out of the mirror.



A reminder in the reflection... as I start watching the second performance, one which I will only have a screen-based experience of, I am granted another chance to fully relinquish the romanticism of liveness. Put the roses on the cutting board. A shared communal witnessing and being witnessed will not be my crutch. The cold sidewalk will not be my crutch. Writing and my own body and breath will be my crutch. Whether it's the glass of *New Fears*, a large mirror, or a retina display screen feels only like a matter of intensity...

I am able to direct my eyes more consciously now. On screen I see *U were always from the scratch* next to a draft of almost everything else that has been written above. My eyes start by locating the familiar objects within the image. I notice the changes and begin hypothesising which elements are native to the room and which others have been brought in specifically for the performance. The mirror is surely from the former category. In fact, it has undergone a stunning transformation in this video and its new use responds almost instinctively to my needs. Through the mirror, not only the performance, but an image of the performance appears. I can now see inside and outside the room. Even though the insides of the body are never shown, I can nonetheless see arms and legs casually double and get sewn together at the seam where body meets mirror. Eventually the camera turns and at 00:36:56 I can see a sign on the door.

MAX 4 VISITORS
AT THE TIME

<3 <3 <3 <3

As seen unfolds into new seen, vocal cords and bubbly drink foam in the mouth and the separation between inside and outside, image and not, performance and street confound. Singing is ringed out of the stomach and drink is drank in. There are visitors in the room and I find myself on the bizarre and tangential mission of figuring out whether or not the camera operator is counted as a visitor or not. With fingers on the hot keyboard, I fantasise about the camera and its operator melding into a single optical machine entity.



The moment that I first became aware of the sign and the unlocked door, was the moment when the threshold between New Fears and the street was crossed. Andrius and Bosa shared the thickness of the orifice between inside and outside. Because this happened... because eventually their two bodies straggled onto the street... a vision of the end overlapped the video and came to me like an apparition. From that moment on, no matter how many times the dance split or crossed this threshold, I knew the performance would end on the street. **Fast Forward.** Indeed.

I slide the cursor around in order to arrive back to the scene I wanted finish with ever since I saw it:

01:00:48

PLAY



Everything is everything and Andrius is topless on the street. Detached from its mirror image, the dance is on its knees with its back sensually arched. One of the onlookers nearby, a trench coat, is smoking a cigarette. As the coat approaches the kneeling figure, it bends over and begins blowing smoke along the dance's neck and into its face. This moment on screen is strangely perfection. The rushed burn of a cigarette while nicotine offers its time, the breath of a trench coat lined with decay and then there, right on the street, in full view, public fumes are blown upon the living dance. With tobacco thickening the detached breath, it is almost possible to see and hear the weight of it hitting the face. I close my eyes, inhale the smoke and **CLOSE IMG_3987.MOV.**



It could not have been only our breathing that so greatly altered this place.
- Gins & Arakawa, *Architectural Body*

Because this text desires to fashion an entrance, an access, or an experience of the performances which took into account the different layers of mediation that were involved in my own mode of viewership, I find myself with a problem of holes and gaps. Not memory holes, because I can verify all of that. Not because of flatness, because I feel beyond that. But another kind of lack. One that emerged because the thinking and formatting is more irreversible than I ever would have expected. I cannot change anything now (besides a word here and there) without changing the whole. Perhaps that can also be an experience of wholeness and holes.

But now, reading myself back, I feel that so much has been left latent in my thinking. In the face of this new problem, I must proceed differently.... I hold the two performances in my mind simultaneously and in the abstract. I confirm to myself that I still do not feel any desire to build a bridge of shared content or questions between the two. What I do see however in this introspective impression is slightly more hollow or formal. I see how materials are shared, inherited, and carried over in time and I see iterations of how New Fears as an architectural volume and interface can be practiced.



1. *M Dance* - A locked laboratory of permissions for a malleable, shifting body. The possibility to observe an inside together, perversely, non-reciprocally in public.
2. *U were always from the scratch* - Public in the street watching the 4-person public inside watching the performance and sometimes watching the others through the mirror. The door as a funnel, as a thickness between the inside and the outside. New Fears is simply a room to abandon for the street.

This mental imagery is then replaced by a screen. It is layered with more or less useful open windows, tabs, read and unread content, auto-formatting, and minimised programs. The mechanics of verifying my experience against the documentation returns, using the screen as my experience returns, as I hear the sound of a car motoring through the image. A voice is projected from inside the car window to ask what is going on. "Tanz" is the reply. The car voice is disturbed, "This is not dance. This is some kind of strange yoga."

Andrius Mulokas with Bosa Mina
U were always from the scratch











NEW FEARS is a gallery for dance and performance, representing Berlin-based and international artists. For each episode NEW FEARS invites 2 artists for a residency in Berlin, which leads to a public event. The process is accompanied by a writer whose output together with a documentation manifests in a publication, launched at the upcoming event.

NEW FEARS #3 presented works by Alistar N. Watts and Andrius Mulokas in collaboration with Bosa Mina, texts by Bryana Fritz, photographs by Julian Weber.

<https://www.newfears.net/>

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