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Being under, with THIS room

Julieanna Preston 

The live art performance *Being Under Symphony* was delivered as a keynote presentation at the 2019 Interior Design Educator's Council's annual conference held in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. The drama of *Being Under Symphony* redirected long-revered conventions of learning *about* an interior as if it were a collection of merely functional materials and systems to being *with* an interior as a mutual assemblage of thriving energetic forces. Such a critical shift in perspective and experience is allied to my commitment to practice the tenets of New Materialism in a direct, immersive, and embodied manner with respect to everyday materials, objects and interior surfaces. As such, this performative lecture attended to the venue's ceiling in an effort to incite its vitality and to point to the merits of practicing in the spirit of *under*.

KEYWORDS: Material bodies; room; page; performance writing; "withness"; "following"; intimacy

This essay iterates the original performance in textual, visual and auditory form in order to share it more broadly, as well

as, to make a further appeal to extend principles and emotions associated with love to other than human material bodies. Pivotal to this persuasive call is my adaptation of scholar Sara Ahmed’s exploration of the intersection of cultural politics and emotion and Professor of English Lauren Berlant’s discussion of love and intimacy. Conceptual and tangible notions of “withness” and “following” identified in contemporary philosophy are put into a spatio-poetic practice of the page in a parallel manner to the spatio-temporal live performance of the room, Symphony 4.

“Being under, with THIS room” shifts attention from room typologies—general classification/categorization/taxonomy—to the specifics of a room’s material agential constitution. Resisting the temptation to objectify a room as a thing, an object or an artefact, this essay is part of an on-going effort to inquire about what an interior, THIS room, can do. As a piece of hybrid writing that joins a scholarly essay with performance writing, this essay entangles medium and method; it performs the writing and re-writes the performance while seeking out reflexive relationships between the language of text and its practical and ideological performative gesture in time and spoken word. The space of the room is that of Symphony 4, on that date, for that event, in that place, in relation to the space of these journal pages, at this time, and in your place of reading; the spaces conjoin but do not map precisely as such is the nature of space to evade representational exactitude (Figure 1).



Figure 1. An image of Symphony 4 prepared for a keynote lecture. <https://www.worldclassweddingvenues.com/venue-display/vid/14472>.

Instructions to the reader

The following pages include four full-page images. Each page is one quarter of a larger document. Print out a copy of each of these pages at 100% on an A4 or 8.5" × 11" piece of paper. Cut off the white margins and then tape the pages together matching AA, BB, CC and DD.

Let's call that document a score.

A score, a term adopted by performance art from music, refers to a series of predetermined physical, verbal or musical actions devised by an artist to be interpreted by actors, or in this case, you, the reader. A score is both directive and open, meaning that it has the agency to guide one through an experience while also leaving opportunity for improvisation along the way.

This score presents you with a map of Symphony 4, movement patterns to each of five locations, directives for changes to the lighting, poetic text to read aloud at each location, and links to sound files to hum or sing along.

You will need a mobile phone and internet connection to perform this score fully.

What follows is an attempt to stir awake a seemingly ubiquitous hotel chain ballroom ceiling with gestures and stories of its own material being. Best to engage in that experience before discussing love to a greater extent ([Figure 2a–d](#)).



Figure 2 (a-d).

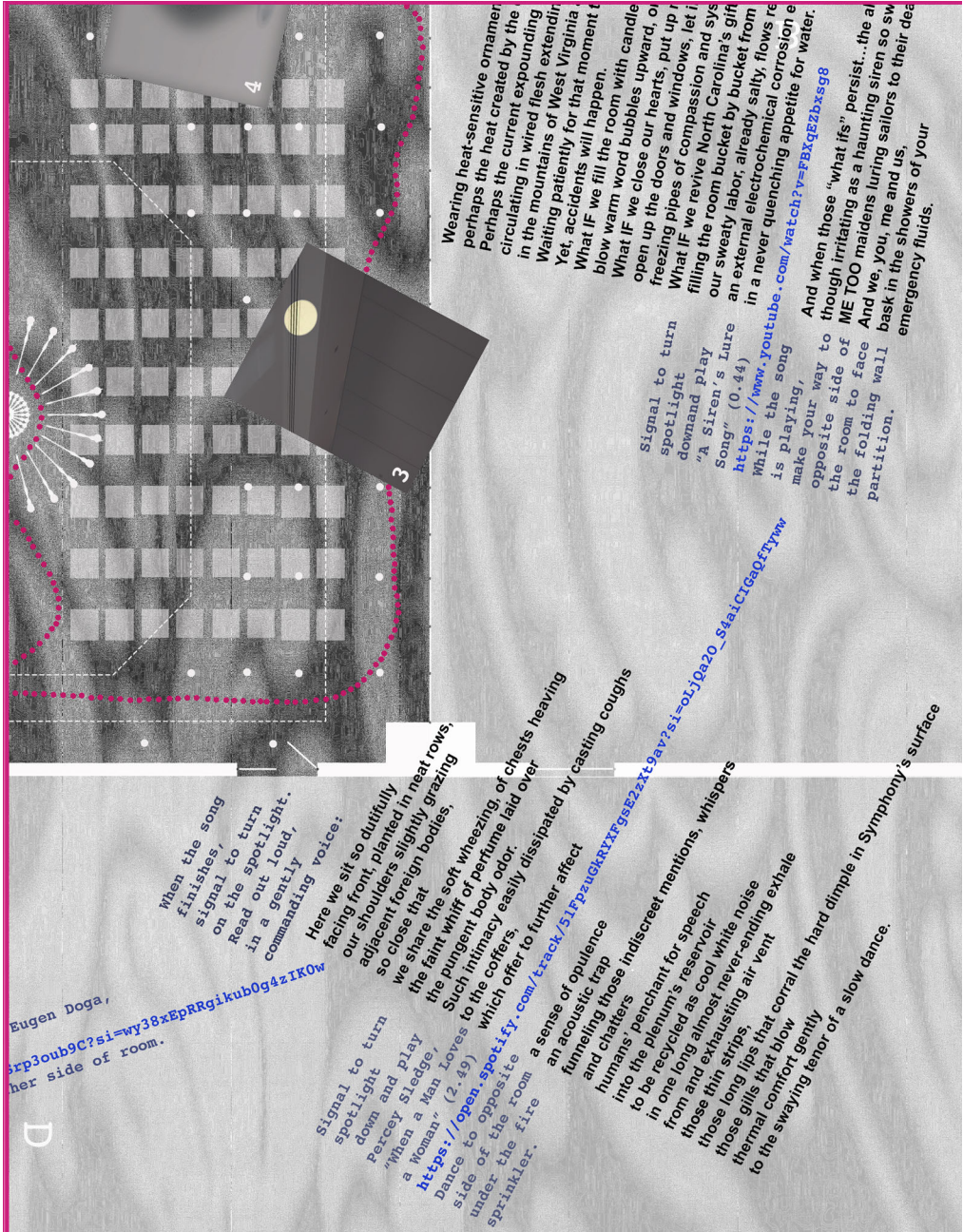


Figure 2 (a-d). Continued.



Figure 2 (a–d).
Continued.

The rooms of THIS page

On the occasion of this encounter, you have probably picked up a print copy of this journal issue or, more likely, clicked open the digital version, browsed the table of contents, and flipped or flicked through its pages. Attracted by the bright colors of this opulent interior image (Figure 1), you linger— to read on, to look into, to hear around, to move with. The pages to follow tell the story of a live art performance masquerading as a keynote lecture at the annual national conference for IDEC, the Interior Design Educator’s Council. Compared to the performance, the story on these pages is embellished, fleshed out, elaborated and refined as a result of audience comments, further research, and critical reflection (MacDonald, 61-62).

In this case, performing is both subject and method; live art and writing are both bodily endeavors living out materiality in time and space. Dwelling now in the scholarly portion of this essay, I am indulging in writing to you as if I was speaking, luring you into close conversation, conjuring your attentiveness, looking you in the eyes or sitting on a bench side by side. This is but one of the tactics of my performance writing practice—a practice that draws you into the process of the writing, playing with words, their sounds, their rhythms, their precision and ambiguities, “a performance of writing about writing,” as performance writer and scholar John Hall (2007) espouses, “that is as durational, embodied, and located in the present and non-repeatable moment of its enactment as its live counterpart” (35). This is a form of writing that considers the value of the script, the procedure and the score as preparation for performance as well as a live performance gesture in its own right. With emphasis on its materiality, writing “... is a frame through which a range of writing and performance practices are brought into view—the textualities of sonic, visual, graphic and movement performances; the performance of sonic, visual, graphic and movement texts” (Allsopp 1999, 77). Such textualities are easily recognized as key attributes to interiors, and furthermore, notions of interiority. In this way, a page operates as an interior.

While offering you anything but a hard and fast definition of performance writing, I am also seeking to make you complicit with the performativity of the text. I have asked you, the reader to abandon your passive consumption of the text and become an inhabitant of THIS room which recalls THAT room; to rip out or print out the full bleed image pages, tape them together as a score, a scaled plan of the room under consideration, the ballroom, Symphony 4. In an effort to help those unfamiliar with the notion of the page as a performative space, I call on John Hall again. He names three field vectors of the page: as a lineal space characteristic of top to bottom, left to right, parallel lines always progressing in forward motion; as a framing field akin to a picture, a visual constellation; and as a map, which places emphasis on the acts of searching using coordinates for position, movement, orientation, time, where the page doubles as record and notation (Hall 2004, 19).

A mapped page may even be concerned in mapping morphological and syntactic features, breaking and shaping words and grammar to re-reveal their parts, perhaps to transform the part they can play in 'speech'. It will use spatial configuration to map tempo or to complicate time in a trapped angle between the time of concatenation and the space of composition. (Hall 2004, 19).

In contrast to this essay's linearity, the pages that represent the room's plan, take on the third mode of a score such that you, the reader, can make another iteration of the performance via enacting the text indexically. The score is your script, notation and motivation; it is a room of another room guiding you to perform the room of the page. This text attempts to contextualize the score and mitigate a noted problem in performance writing (otherwise known as "prepared pages") by providing a normative text to instruct, forecast and guide you as to what lies ahead (MacDonald, 62). And hence, the visual appearance and structure of this essay will stand in stark contrast to the score, which pries at an assumed clarity and rational logic inherent in lineal text; the score inserts spatial gaps, intrusions and disjunctions to enable you, the reader, to "pass through," effectively to perform the page in an interactive and collaborative manner (Allsopp 1999, 3).

THAT room

On the occasion of that event, if you were there, you likely entered the room, acquired a seat and, with dutiful respect, obeyed the furniture and the ingrained habits of conference keynote lectures as you turned your attention to the fanfare of screens, amplified speech, lighting, a lectern and a speaking body at the front of the room. The seating may have felt especially close as your arms and thighs brushed those of your neighbors, already inciting a slightly unnerving level of intimacy. The first event of the conference, this early morning gathering was fraught with normative expectations about the form, message and medium of a proper lecture. You may have assumed that you were there to listen, absorb, passively, even while taking notes or checking your phone.

Symphony 4 is one of four conference spaces within the Sheraton/Le Meridian Hotel located on the outskirts of downtown Charlotte, North Carolina. Like many big southern cities in the United States, Charlotte has not been immune from the effects of economic instability, social inequity, racially motivated violence and poverty. The histories of the city and the hotel are entangled in the realities of this socio-political landscape, including the numerous attempts to attract tourists and businesses into the region and, hence, the numerous efforts to refresh, upgrade and rebrand the hotel.

The hotel's most recent renovation occurred in 2013. The decorative aesthetics applied to Symphony 4 are relatively indistinguishable from many other hotels nationwide that cater to large conference events. Large accordion acoustically clad partition doors enable

Symphony 4 to join with adjacent rooms to cater for four times the number of attendees. A single carpet flows from each room to the next by way of an arabesque red, gold and cream pattern. The same carpet fails to command order of the many rows of upright chairs facing the stage in allegiance; it is more likely that as a ballroom, it prompted bodies to dance waltzes, swing or boleros. Nothing touches the walls with respect to fire egress guidelines. Looming above in superficial opulence, the chandeliers drip from coffers amongst a suspended tiled ceiling grid that is punctuated by recessed lighting, fire alarms, security sensors, and air vents. Here, one finds the ordering principle of the room embedded in the omnipresent surface hovering over and in service to an event. The room's décor, an aesthetic recognizable in many major hotels in the southern states of the USA, feels as if common industrial materials and finishes have been extended as far as possible with modest funds, which only confirms the forgettable franchised nature of its design. For all its effort to be spectacular, Symphony 4's material constitution is seemingly unmemorable. It is as if the material constitution of the room has no bearings on the meetings, conferences, political parties, balls, weddings or graduations that take place within it, or for that matter, under it.

With THIS room

Two interrelated concepts underpin this essay, the performance preceding it and, hopefully, your performance during it: "witness" and "following." Both concepts help to bridge between the emotions of love and empathy as understood from a human/anthropocentric perspective to those extended to other-than-human material bodies. This transfer is motivated by New Materialist philosophy, a relatively complex and burgeoning field of discourse that has found its way into art, design, political theory, social science, humanities, ecological studies— the list goes on. The scholarly contributions to this field of discourse are huge in number and often dovetailing into other distinctive areas such as Post-Human, Anthropocene, Object-Oriented-Ontology, to name just a few.

In the book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, a pivotal text in New Materialism discourse, political theorist Jane Bennett asks us to abandon human-centric binary worldviews that separate the world into inanimate matter (things) and animated life (humans) (2010). Bennett promotes more responsible, ethical human engagement with our world as a means of ensuring a self-sustaining world. This view depends on understanding the world as a complex 'vibrant' assemblage in which material bodies, human and otherwise, are in a continuous state of indeterminant relational flux. It also is reliant on regarding materials and material things not as inert, mute matter but, instead, forces with unique agentic potentialities, interactions, capacities, and trajectories.

In Bennett's vibrant world, material interactions are relational, ecological, and contingent assemblage-forming and assemblage-disrupting. Unlike chance in a mechanical perspective of the world, material things have an inherent vibrancy she calls thing-power, the agency of material objects to act and impact other materials, thereby producing effects in the world. "Thing-power," says Bennett, "is the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett, 2010, 6). However vibrant, a thing never acts alone; other-than-human things exist and act only in relationship with other bodies and forces, some of which are human. Vital materialism sees humans and nonhumans not as antagonists or mutually exclusive categories, but instead as fundamentally collaborative, cooperative or co-constitutive, to such a degree that their differences become blurred, collapse or reform together. Often escaping human perception and understanding, Bennett recommends experiencing it with "a certain anticipatory readiness" (2010, 5).

Being Under Symphony, and this subsequent performance writing essay, developed under the influence of "withness" and "following." My aim is for these concepts to linger with you after enacting the score. I would like you to consider them as complementary elixirs towards living the text and the room spatially.

"Withness," a word and concept in my vocabulary for numerous years, finds its provenance with numerous others such as psychoanalytic researcher Bruce Reis whose cross-disciplinary scholarship on "being-with" bridges the philosophic with the practical.

At its most elemental level, the idea of being-with has to do with our embodiment, with a basic constitutional element of our humanity, and with issues philosophers refer to as having to do with being. Although most analytic conceptions, supported by different philosophic groundings, have reified a notion of the solitary individual to greater or lesser degrees, the idea of being-with is, in itself, reflective of a condition of relationality ... (Reis 2018, 130).

Though Reis' research focus is on an infant's early and non-verbal relationship to its mother, his supposition is easily applicable to how to do things with others at large in situations when knowing develops on a procedural, interactive, and affective level. For him, experience is not one singular nor autonomous individual to another; it is a co-experience where knowledge emerges within the context of relating (Reis, 131). Borrowing from Reis, who borrowed from American philosopher and psychologist William James: "Knowledge of sensible realities thus comes to life inside the tissue of experience. It is made; and made by relations that unroll themselves in time" (James, 1912, p. 57, original emphasis). "Being-with" is postured as an unfolding and emergent relationship.

Reis acknowledges how the notion of "being-with" has been taken up as an inescapable "we-centric" sharing of the condition of

being, which conceives the human condition to be based on community rather than individuals (Reis, 132). He expands using continental philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's radical philosophy:

... sharing is not something that preconstituted individual entities do to achieve an intersubjective relation, it is rather a nonmediated and nondialectical relation of encounter, in which what is always affirmed is a singular exposure to our mutually shared separation and exteriority, just as much as our connection and proximity. Nancy uses the French verb *partager*, meaning both sharing and dividing, to illustrate how our mutual connection lies in our mutual separation, and that what most holds us in common is this separating-connecting (Reis 132).

In this instance, being is, at its core, plural, a confluence of “we,” “you,” and “I” that creates a mutual affective attunement and affirms our mutual tissue of experience with regard to states and emotions of separation, connection, proximity, distance and exteriority (Reis, 133). I encourage you to consider this notion as an upgrade of “being-in-the-world” to “being-with-world,” a collaborative model that, for some readers, might resonant with familiar tones of the principles and practices of relational ecologies associated with New Materialism. I propose that it is here that you and I can fathom “beingworld” as a prelude to how the abstraction of philosophy collaborates with the practical and sentient experience of embodied practices. All being, all world. No prepositions. No binaries to keep us apart.

“Following” is a concept elaborated by Professor, Art History, Musicology and Media Studies Katve-Kaisa Kontturi in her book *Ways of Following: Art, Materiality, Collaboration*, which aims to “overcome the kind of analysis that detaches art from its processes of production,” and to write *with* art in a way that gives credence to the materiality of practice as equal to the practices of materiality (2018, 11, emphasis in original). While “withness” infers an ethical practice that takes note of the subtle relational complexities at play in making a work of art (Meskimmon 2003, 4–6), Kontturi situates “following” as “a different position, one that grasps the singularity of matter and is attentive to its connections and movement ... Its nature is itinerant ... confluent with the present always on the verge of opening into the future ... To follow is to become with” (2018, 12–13). Quite distinct from applying theory to an artwork prior to or after its making, “following” opens the possibility for new modes of knowing. Like all variants of New Materialist philosophy, Kontturi’s notion of “following” is not the same as shadowing, being subservient or not-leading—patriarchal traits associated with human-centricity. “Following” is also not to be assumed as flowing smoothly, amicably or without disruption; for even the state of ‘stuckness’ in the artistic material practice exerts a manifold of virtual possibilities, many unrealized in what you and I might call the object of art, the finished

work or the final design (Kontturi, 15–17). So, while “witness” may imbue conditions of collaboration, “following” adds cooperation to the mutual agreement, a subsidence of authoritative mastery over materials, where materials are not merely compliant; they have the capacity to exceed an artist’s or a designer’s expectations or intentions (Khazam 2018, 115).

A following

Kontturi’s thesis on “following” has been an influence on my own scholarly and artistic practice with its focus on the way of doing over method in more-than-human encounters. In both cases, what is “we,” “you,” “us,” and “I” includes all material bodies/all bodies of materials ripe with vitality, agency, duration and contingency, an encounter that holds brute force and technical power in abeyance. Ten years ago, I proposed that interiors are not just the physical material enclosure, the stuff of the built world, but instead, an affective spatial relationship between material bodies (Preston 2013). The radical aspect of my proposition is three-fold: First, that an interior is not defined exclusively as a thing, a room, a place and enclosure; an interior is something temporal, something impermanent, unrepeatable, maybe even virtual, and when material stuff is involved, a relational encounter, something waiting to happen, or better, something always happening, just changing as it happens.

Secondly, in this new paradigm of interiors, it takes at least two material bodies to ignite this encounter. In all of my research both scholarly and artistic, never has it been only two; environments and ecologies do not work in this kind of isolation. So, let’s say that it takes at least two highly charged material bodies within a complex situation. More importantly, the term “material bodies” opens up the possibility that the bodies might not be human. I struggle with naming them non-human if even for the way the term “non” denies or negates having a name or identity all its own. Like many New Materialist and feminist writers and artists, I hope my efforts will aid to abandon anthropocentric binaries and taxonomies such that every material thing will be recognized as a body with its own agency and rights.

In simple terms, my creative and scholarly research is an inquiry on and with the liveness of materials. It started with interior spaces and explored how an interior might be political. How does it resist, protest, defer proactively? How is an interior complicit, even a comrade or companion, in disturbing, in voicing, in seeking parity, equality, and liberty? Somewhere along the way, an interior became uncoupled from assumptions that it was dead, only hard stuff, only instrumental at the hands or whims of human desire.

While searching for signs of a material’s liveness, I learned that materials do not move or talk like humans do. (And nor should they be expected to.) Their time is not the same as mine; theirs is geological time, movement is subtle and often at the level of nuanced

thermal or chemical molecular changes and sounding usually occurs outside the range of human audibility. In response, my performances invest duration—sometimes as long as seven days—to notice transformation, leaving space for the material and I to establish a rapport, and for me to put aside any preconceptions about what would happen. Thus far I have practiced with andesite boulders, gypsum board, timbre studs, a log holding up a wharf, carpet, ice, eggs, air conditioning fans, asphalt, metal fencing, concrete, a stone wall, a chalk cliff, dirt, a river—the list goes on. This creative practice gravitates towards every day, even banal material bodies, often materials that are taken for granted and overlooked for the impact they have on the lived world.

In each of these creative works, the material is the material; it is itself, individuated, unique - not generic, standard, generalized, universal or homogenous. It is bound up with place and as such, it is situated. I approach the materials as a stranger, and with respect for our differences. Here I apply principles of empathy, cultural protocols and gesture to communicate, often non-verbally. My works are often more listening, waiting and attending than full-fledged action. I find that hesitating before acting resembles meeting a person from a far-away land with a language different than my own: meeting of the gaze, nodding, perhaps a handshake, a walk, an embrace, sharing a meal and so on. Many of these interior encounters have become protests hinged to ethical, political, cultural and social issues around neutrality so much so that I now find it difficult to paint a room white. For example, a 2019 article entitled “You are imbued with tolerance...” presents a poem performed as a lament to link the tolerance of building construction to that of tolerance associated with open-mindedness (Preston 2019). The poem speaks to the impending sacrificial carnage of the wall’s constitution, an apology or reparation at best.

So, for me, interiors are not necessarily the nice, passive, safe and comfortable places of well-being we might assume them to be. The layout of a house interior, the acoustics and sight lines in an open office, and the signage on public toilets are as confronting as new neighbors who graze and BBQ a goat on the suburban front lawn, the symposium speaker delivering her talk in sign language and the large person taking up more than one seat on the long-haul flight. Interiors and their encounters are far from pretty or benign. They are politically charged and far from neutral, a point I explored in “Neutral, not so” (Preston, 2013, 117–128).

The third proposition of this practice centers on love and a full spectrum of gestures, actions, and forms of expression associated with it, often fraught with overcoming the tendency to romanticize a material, to only see it in a nostalgic sense. My research has found me wading in polluted river mouths, living under the threat of chalk cliffs falling, repairing punctured wallboard, bobbing with a water-logged timber pile, hanging on for dear life to a boulder in the swell of a king tide, whispering sweet nothings to a corner, treading six flights of stairs as a

geological memorial to coal, ingesting black sand, and singing a lullaby to an ancient stone wall. Amongst these efforts, my emotions have run the full gamut from fear, anxiety, exhilaration, calm, security, to joy and pleasure. These emotions bear out the emerging relationship I am forming with a material and, in turn, take shape in written works such as poems, sonnets, scripts, letters, soundings, fictional stories, and performance writing such as this essay. Infused with subjectivity in the pursuit of intimacy, this search for love is what initiated this journey: the possibility that if we, if we humans, could learn to find love for something so different from ourselves—love not based on ownership, power, possession or greed—to practice respect for something foreign, strange and unlike us in any way, then there might just be a chance for peace, liberty, imagination, and the future.

Being Under Symphony extends my research on what an interior can do; what it is capable of doing as an assemblage of interrelated other-than-human material bodies imbued with the agential forces of geological, economic, racial, industrial and political histories. Practicing what an interior can do relies primarily on trusting the potential for materials to have agency; it is also contingent on suspending the need for constant and full-fledged objectivity, reasoning and truth that may have good purpose some of the time but may not provide the antidote to our own human centeredness and all that comes with it. This is a basic premise of my New Materialist practice: to seek ways of relating to other-than-human material bodies, to get close to them, to listen, to care and perhaps even extend love. This practice is based on the hope that if humans can cross this almost unimaginable threshold, they might be able to overcome the matters of difference that keep them from reaching their full potential. My creative works, including *Being Under Symphony*, take that philosophy to heart and experiment with how it might be practiced, affective and agential in itself.

This essay and the associated performance posture love and intimacy as primary constituents in the cultural politics of emotions. Here I am relying on feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed's research *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* in which she explores "... how emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies. Bodies take the shape of the very contact they have with objects and others" (2014, 1). She embraces the notion of a sociality of emotions that points to a relational encounter where emotions are conjured, not possessed by a person, nor caused by a person or object, nor limited to personal lives and private spaces; emotions occur at the interface. Ahmed names emotions as impressions: "It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace. So not only do I have an impression of others, but they also leave me with an impression; they impress me, and impress upon me" (2014, 7).

Ahmed investigates the 'doing' of emotions, which works through signs and on bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds" (Ahmed 2014, 191). She calls this a 'sticky'

relation, a saturated affect. And like her, I confess, how such sticky signs belie the power of language to seduce, persuade, to draw one into closer proximity where “emotions align some bodies with others, as well as stick different figures together, by the way that they move us” (195). Like her, I am curious at how words for feeling, and objects of feeling, circulate and generate effects: how they move, stick, and slide, and how we move, stick and slide with them, often in reciprocity (14). Here in *Being under, with THIS Room*, I wish to pull you into the (sticky/slippery) ecology of the lives of many different bodies, to conjure empathy, to enhance your embodied knowing of their possible subjectivities or at least recognize your own subjectivity in relation to them.

Mine is a love-yearning practice also indebted to several feminist philosophers, Luce Irigaray especially, and her essay “I love to you,” an essay in which love is exorcised from stereotype, obligation or possessive protocol (1995). Irigaray rejects a call for equality and outlines the possibility of a new liberating language that shapes an alternative relationship between the sexes, which transitions from a critique of patriarchy to the potential of intersubjectivity between women and men. While Irigaray asks in 1996 how can we move to a new era of sexual difference in which women and men establish lasting relations with one another without reducing the other to the status of object, my practice expands the power of inserting the preposition ‘to’, I love TO you, towards other things, other bodies, other different bodies. I came upon an article by another spatial performance artist, Judith Hamera, who confesses, like me, to being somewhat romantically inclined, and offers this insight on Irigaray’s insertion of the word ‘to.’ She writes,

‘To’ is important to me because, to paraphrase visual artist Barbara Kruger, ‘to’ always hits or caresses some body; it is deployed by, or reverberates between, dancing, observing, and writing bodies ... Here I see Irigaray working toward a view of love as carnal and relational labour and, as someone who loves and studies bodies in history ... this labour is as real to me as it is debilitating and capacitating. While her conscious deployment of essentialism, and her heterosexist ur-presumptions, are frankly, anathema to me, her terms ... allow me a kind of precision in my description of ‘... exchange{s} in which the world is born and remains between two bodies, maintaining themselves by respecting their differences and spiritualizing them without removing them from their flesh (Irigaray, 1995, 125), (Hamera 2001).

How apropos in times like ours when sexual orientation is not one, gender not two but many, when it is more common for one’s heritage to be more than one nation and culture, when a single spoken language is not the norm. And, in this context I don’t mean love as a pseudonym for a sex act; I use the word love as a process of intimating, becoming intimate, extending from becoming acquainted

to becoming enrapt, becoming undone, finding the impulse to follow and be with. In fact, over the years my practice has shifted from emphasis of the 'to' (as if gifting or handing something over) to 'of' (being like, emulation, stepping into the place of) and, more recently, to 'withness' and "following" which put aside ego, domination, and instrumentality towards another person/thing/body. Kontturi writes: "This way of following is not about shadowing a few steps behind, but about opening oneself up to a movement that exceeds the position one holds, the experiences one has had, or the knowledge one possesses" (2018, 9). "Withness" and "following" suggest, for me, a less submissive relation, one where multiple material bodies can co-exist in mutual independence and be open to the possibility that most anything will happen. I believe it to be a practice of deep respectful tolerance, an act of yielding, being vulnerable and trusting simultaneously. To let someone else or something else do the leading, sometimes.

It is important to me to make sure that this essay follows suit with the performative lecture to conclude with a kind of openness, such that you might see yourself implicated in the project. "The move in contemporary practice to re-discover the 'difficult country', to reject closure in favor of openness and fluidity, to replace the conditional realm of the 'as if' with the contingency of the temporary and indeterminate; the difficulties of negotiation and site, of difference, is identified in these examples which provide a tension or unstable relation between the idea of 'difficult country' and the 'receptor surface' that allows in the material of the world" (Allsopp 2004, 5). To do so, to keep things open, I call on theorist and English professor Lauren Berlant's scholarship. A single sentence in her 2012 book *Desire/Love* incited me to approach *Being Under Symphony* as a performance using some tried and true theatrical tropes, such as dramatic lighting, exaggerated enunciation and dancing to, in turn, make the liveness of the ceiling plausible: "Without fantasy, there would be no love" (69). This simply stated, yet complex declaration offered me a ploy to attract you to consider the ceiling worthy and capable of conjuring love or any level of intimacy close to it—a kind of imagination practice we know so well in films, theatre and fiction. I am not offering you any proof that the ceiling in *Symphony 4* is anything other than inert materials assembled by human labor; I am asking you to suspend disbelief, and to consider the possibilities of extending love to supposed inanimate things. I am hoping this leaves room for you to further interpret Berlant's plea:

to understand the pedagogies that encourage people to identify having a life with having an intimate life ... How can we think about the ways attachments make people public, producing transpersonal identities and subjectivities, when those attachments come from within spaces as varied as those of domestic intimacy, state policy, and mass-mediated experiences of intensely disruptive crises? And what have these formative encounters to do with the

effects of other, less institutionalized events, which might take place on the street, on the phone, in fantasy, at work, but rarely register as anything but residue? Intimacy names the enigma of this range of attachments, and more; and it poses a question of scale that links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective (1998, 282).

Please join me in a raucous round of applause for what *Being Under Symphony* did, does and might do.

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Biography

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