FULL FRAMING TEXT as part of online exposition:
*Dorsal Practices [re-turning]* by Katrina Brown & Emma Cocker
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*Re- as in back. To re-turn or change back. Again, anew, once more — again, again. Restoring (to a former state) and at the same time undoing. To turn. A turning back. A coming back. Again, anew, once more — again, again [...]*

This exposition comprises textual fragments (both written and voiced) produced through the act of returning to (in turn *re*-activating, *re*-configuring, even *re*-imagining) conversational transcripts generated within the artistic research project *Dorsal Practices,* a collaboration between choreographer Katrina Brown and writer-artist Emma Cocker. The original transcript material was produced through a practice of conversation undertaken within six interrelated blocks of exploration, taking place over 18 months between October 2022 and February 2024. Within this period of enquiry, we — Brown and Cocker — focused our attention on the act of *returning* within our shared practice, re-imagined as a *dorsal* turn. Through the intermingling of two registers of language-based practice, that is, through the performativity of both the written and spoken texts themselves, within this exposition we attempt to make tangible how the dorsal gesture of the turn and the circling principle of *re-* become operative as a *spinal* thread within our shared enquiry. Deviating from the straightforwardness of a strictly linear text, we invite a form of *dorsal* listening-reading that might engage through loops and returns. Navigating this exposition, the video extracts and written texts can be engaged sequentially. Alternatively, the reader-listener might traverse the materials horizontally, diagonally, as well as vertically, or else generate unforeseen possibilities of sense-making through the (inter)play of overlapping voices. We conceive the research artefacts generated through the practice itself (SEE LEFT) as the central focus within this exposition, however, in what follows we introduce briefly the wider enquiry of *Dorsal Practices,* alongside reflecting on how we conceive the act of turning and of re-turning therein.

*A Dorsal Enquiry*

*Dorsal* — an adjective meaning of or pertaining to the back. A *dorsal turn* — that which involves turning towards the back. Initiated in January 2021, *Dorsal Practices* is an artistic collaboration for exploring how the cultivation of a back-oriented

awareness and attitude might shape and inform our embodied, affective and relational experience of being-in-the-world. We are interested in how a dorsal orientation might support the releasing and de-privileging of the predominant social habits of uprightness and frontality: the head-oriented, sight-oriented, forward-facing, future-leaning tendencies of a culture intent on grasping a sense of the world through naming and control. We ask: How is the embodied experience of a dorsal orientation? Rather than a mode of withdrawal, or of turning one's back on, how might a dorsal orientation support a more open and receptive ethics of relation, unfold possibilities for alternative and affirmatively resistant modes of participation and involvement? What emerges through a shift of attention from frontality, verticality, even visuality, towards increased awareness of dorsality, diagonality and listening? Conceived at the threshold between choreographic-movement practices and language-based artistic research, *Dorsal Practices* explores how the experiences of listening, languaging, even thinking, might be shaped differently through this embodied tilt of awareness and attention towards the back, moreover, through a practice of *coming back*, the act of *(re)turning*.

*Turning Towards the Back*

Rather than being propelled forwards from initiating questions towards some teleological goal or conclusion, our research process proceeds by leaning back, leaning *into* the back, carried by the momentum of turning and re-turning. *Return* — to come back, come or go back to a former position. Turn back, turn round. Returning — doubling back, coming back. Reversing — from *re-* meaning back and *vertere* — to turn. This shift from a forward direction, towards an orientation of returning, of turning back to an original starting place, is not always one of beginning anew but rather for feeling anew, encountering anew, imagining anew. Our own research journey follows an oblique path. Oblique: to give a sloping direction to, to slip sideways, aslant — deviation from or turning from what is straight or direct. Slanting, leaning, leading from the back. We engage with a wider discourse through a reverse glance, a side glance, from the corner of our eyes — not seeking direct correlation or correspondence, rather by coming back, coming back, holding open the possibility of re-imagining a relation. In *Dorsality: Thinking Back Through Technology* (2008), theorist David Wills stresses the importance of the turn "in its sense of a departure that is also a detour, a deviation, a divergence into difference".[1] Reflecting on the origins of human articulation and locomotion, he invites the reader to imagine "the human turning as it walks, deviating from its forward path in order, precisely, to move

forward, advancing necessarily askew". [2] He argues how the act of walking, which gives the human its bipedal orientation, necessarily involves deviation or turning — "a type of turning around or turning back, a turning from the back or from behind, a dorsal turn, a turning to or into dorsality". [3]

Reflecting on the 'turn' within our conversations, we observer that —*the turn is … not straightforward […] It is constantly pulling you off the straight, the upright — pulling you a little this way and a little that way, swaying this way and that way, even as you are progressing forwards. Sway and to be swayed […] There is the sense of a diagonal orientation creating space where there appears to be none — this cut of the diagonal, all these diagonal paths […] refusing to be one or the other but being both […] That is why we have to turn — to keep turning and to keep moving the spine to turn — to activate these diagonal relationships, and the criss-crossings and the meanderings […]* We conceive our 'dorsal practices' of turning and re-turning as a form of resistance against the pressures of straightforwardness, perhaps even against the 'violence' of linear thought. [4] For Wills "the dorsal turn operates as a form, or forms, of resistance" against a certain (technological) logic that proceeds "straight and forward", through a "straight-ahead linear advance". [5] He argues how "Any departure, however slight from a pure and strict (and necessarily impossible to define) forward linearity makes reference to what is behind … inflects as it were that strict forward linearity of movement with a decelerating pull from behind and so implies or calls for a thinking of what is behind, a thinking of the back". [6] A back-oriented approach to sense-making requires a different engagement with time, with teleology: it invites a willingness for waiting, residing, abiding. *Dorsal Practices* cultivates a receptive attitude of letting and accepting rather than of grasping and reaching towards destination, *telos* or goal.

*Movement/Conversation/Reading Practices*

*Dorsal Practices* has evolved gradually *in* and *through* practice, a live enquiry involving the interrelation of three fields of experimental, embodied exploration — various movement, conversation and reading practices.

* *Movement Practice*: Taking place through various blocks or 'episodes' of practice, our exploration of the felt experience of a dorsal orientation begins with various body-based, somatic-informed movement scores.[7] Conceived as non-verbal explorations of a dorsal orientation, our physical practices have focused on everyday movement patterns (e.g., lying down; axial rotation; transition from back-ness into movement), alongside nurturing an expanded repertoire of movement patterns and habits (e.g.,

walking backwards, micro-turning) through repeated engagement with various scores and exercises.
* *Conversation Practice:* The movement explorations are accompanied by a process of conversation for reflecting *with* and *through* the experiences of embodied practice.[8] Our conversation practice takes place through a process of timed 'turn-taking' allowing us to each speak without interruption, moreover, for fully focused 'deep listening.' [9] We practise conversation (from *con-* and *versare* — to turn, together) as a way of attempting to come back or somehow return to the live(d) experience of dorsal practising. Often undertaken back-to-back (releasing the eyes from the frontal habits of online meeting), our conversations foster sensitive interaction, heightening attention to the embodied experience of listening and being listened to, allowing for an emergent 'dorsal voicing'. Within this process, linguistic content is not already known in advance, but rather emerges in and through the process of speaking and listening. The process of conversation is recorded, which we then transcribe through an embodied process of 'slow listening' — the manual activity of transcribing is experienced as a durational undertaking based on returning to the conversation over and over in the delicate translation of spoken word to written text.
* *Reading Practice:* The conversation transcripts are then reactivated, re-organised, even re-imagined, through various experimental reading practices — conceived as an experimental, improvisational approach to textual genesis — where a mode of linguistic sense-making emerges live through the interplay of spoken word, the intersubjective interweaving of two voices within the occasionality of dialogic encounter.

*Dorsal Practices* involves a looping, circular process, folding in and out between physical-somatic and linguistic practices. It is a process that unfolds through a series of *returns.* In one sense, we conceive the movement practices as a way of coming back or returning to a felt quality of embodiment, experienced as a porous, receptive and participatory form of sense-making *with* and *of* the world, that might have easily become lost, forgotten or estranged through the pressures and conditioning of those forward-facing, future-oriented (inherently individualising and thereby isolating) ideologies pervasive within our own experience of contemporary life.[10] In turn, through the shared act of conversation (foregrounding the sense of listening and being listened to, of witnessing and being witnessed), we attempt to return to and prolong the embodied experience of a back-oriented being-in-the-world, or perhaps better, we attempt to create conditions wherein the felt experience of a dorsal turning might return. Through a process of recollection, we attempt to reconnect with the direct experience itself, allowing an experience (in the past) to somehow become felt again in

the *now, i*n turn, intermingling with the felt texture of the present. This act of re-imagining is not only one of re-connecting with a 'mental image' conjured from the past, but an experience that is also *felt* in the body, a time-based practice of *re*-feeling, *re*-understanding, *re*-connecting capable of generating new sensations of relation and understanding of self and world.

Rather than trying to *find* the words for describing these dorsal experiences, we attempt to lean back, allowing the experience to somehow find its own way into language. It is often only in the act of returning to the recordings that we realise what has been said (*realise* — to bring into existence, make or cause to become real, comprehend the reality of), for in the process of conversation itself the words can have a quality of air or water, disappearing, dissolving even as they appear. The act of transcription is a patient practice, returning to the recordings over and over. Rather than necessarily crystallising our textual materials into a conclusive or definitive written form, we are interested in how an experimental practice of reading and re-reading might keep the texts alive, endlessly capable of being reconfigured. Reading as a live process of sense-making where content is each time apprehended afresh. In parallel, we return to the transcript material again, deep diving into specific words that were recurring or resonant during a particular research phase through a live practice of etymological exploration. These phases of research activity have a sequential dimension, but are also inherently interwoven, cyclical, looping, where the findings generated within one phase of practice are re-visited, re-activated, re-organised and re-enlivened within the next.

*Returning: A Folding Back*

During the first period of our research enquiry (January 2021 – May 2022), our blocks of exploration proceeded through the arc of practice described above.[11] However, in October 2022, rather than *continuing* as such, we became interested in what might emerge through *returning* back to the practice: by reactivating existing scores and exercises; by returning to and reflecting upon occasions where we had shared our enquiry with others; by coming back to the archive of transcripts; by listening and re-listening to our accumulation of dorsal readings, listening as a form of returning. We undertook six blocks of exploration (titled *Returning I – VI)* between October 2022 and February 2024 within which we focused specifically on these various acts of returning. Within this exposition we return to and re-activate the conversation transcripts generated during this specific phase of enquiry, re-meeting and re-imagining this

material anew through the intermingling of two linguistic approaches each generating its own form of sense-making (SEE LEFT). The two language-based approaches are:
* *Condensation:* We returned to the conversation transcripts generated within our the six 'blocks' of practice called *Returning I – VI.* Re-reading these transcripts again and again, over time and through several iterations, we have been able to gradually condense, even densify, the original texts towards a series of thought fragments, which in turn speak of and to our process of dorsal practising, and the act of turning and re-turning therein.[12] These 'condensations' or 'densifications' are presented as six sections of written fragments (numbered I – VI) within the exposition.
* *Dorsal Reading:* On 27 May 2024, we returned to the original conversational transcripts once again but through a different approach, coming together online for a live improvisatory reading practice, alongside re-reading extracts of our etymological dives into specific words: *reverse, straightforward, intermingle, release, reflect, reveal.* Within this exposition, we present six video extracts from the recording of this reading practice.[13]

These two different language-based approaches to coming back to (indeed to re-imagining) the transcript material activate a form of reading-as-returning albeit in different ways. Through a slow process of condensation or densification, we return again and again to the original text, gently highlighting and in turn redacting words and lines, until we are left with a poetic form of languaging, a dorsal vocabulary that was perhaps already there within the original transcripts, but which is now allowed to somehow shine through. Alternatively, the live reading practice proceeds through a score-based approach. Within an agreed time frame, we each scan the transcripts selecting fragments of the transcript to read aloud as a live improvisation — the very moment of voicing creating a 'new' and contingent unfolding of dorsal sense-making.[14] *Reading score: Have the transcript to hand, allowing one's gaze to be soft, to glide or roam the pages. As the practice begins, when the time feels right, read out loud single words, phrases or a cluster of sentences as they come to your attention. Attend to the emerging sense-making between the lines of two voices intermingling — letting one's attention to shift between listening and speaking.* This reading practice offers a way of bringing into touch fragments of thought that may not have existed in chronological relation or proximity within the original transcripts. Through the practice of reading, the chronology of linear sense-making is eschewed in favour of a palimpsest formed by circling and returns.

In *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution* (2017), Michelle Boulous Walker outlines the importance of the slow and patient act of returning as a necessary

precondition for engaging with the complexity of the world. She explores what it might mean to "reread, and return to what one reads"[15] as an ethical practice for engaging with, staying with, dwelling with, for being-with the other. She states that by "Reading slowly and rereading, returning time and time again to read anew, we return, similarly to the things in the world anew".[16] Significantly, Boulous Walker's insistence on a form of slow reading does not "simply mean always reading slowly, but would, rather, involve a preparedness to return time and time again to what we read".[17] With reference to the work of various philosophical thinkers including Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Simone Weil, she emphasises the importance of patiently returning, re-assessing, reconsidering and re-engaging with texts as a mode of attentiveness, moreover of incompleteness, a form of reading unconcerned with grasping at sense (as the desire to know), rather more open to the potential of transformation, of being transformed. For Boulous Walker, "By allowing things to emerge and becoming part of them, we open ourselves to the world".[18] Whilst Boulous Walker addresses the potential of transformation enabled through the slow reading of philosophy, *Dorsal Practices* explores the act of reading and re-reading as an aesthetic practice. Over and over, our own previously uttered words become transformed as they are re-spoken; through the act of reading and re-reading, different potentialities of sense-making becoming manifest, where each time the transcript is encountered afresh. In turn, we approach the practice of dorsal reading as a kind of training, transforming the desire to know, to find or fix meaning, into a capacity for being with openness, receptive to what comes.

Boulous Walker advocates for a form of reading that is "willing to slow down and to wait for meaning to emerge"[19]: "to suspend reading, to slow it down in order that we avoid hasty, definitive and closed readings".[20] She argues that "in the present act of speaking, meaning has not yet congealed into a meaning, and thus dialogue is still a possibility [....] The listening opens each to a meaning different from its own, and in this difference the rudiments of an effective intersubjectivity is born".[21] Our looping act of returning, of reading and re-reading leans back, holds back or attempts to suspend a definitive form of the written text (as noun) in favour of a live languaging, reading as writing (as verb). This form of sense-making offers a more suggestive, affective, fragmentary way of reading-listening that might work with the (sensorial) imagination, moreover, is capable of infinitely permutational possibilities. Rather than grasping at sense or meaning, listening is approached as a practice of attention enabling the soft letting of language, in turn, the potential of emergent wor(l)ds. For Boulous Walker, "One takes shelter in this refuge of letting-be, and the space this provides allows us to work towards creating a dwelling with the other. Such a dwelling

relies on the development of a new speech, new words and a new and radical listening".[22] Within *Dorsal Practices,* we conceive listening as an act of turning and returning; listening as affective attunement during the 'turning together' of conversation; listening as an act of returning, repeating and re-engaging through the slow process of transcription; listening as the basis of dialogic and kairotic sense-making within improvisational spoken-word.

At intervals within our enquiry, we have taken time to listen again (over and over) to our own readings – listening, moving, writing, notetaking. This entanglement of practices informs each other, opens up to the complexity of what is happening, opens up to the poly, the multi, the around-ness. Our returning act of listening seeks to affect a shift of preposition: from listening to, towards listening with or listening alongside. Not listening to get something, but listening to experience: a different motivation, a different relationship to the body, to the space, to time. In this exposition, as within our own live practising, we explore the shifts between reading and listening, inviting an engagement with different textual registers that attempts to blur the lines between these two modalities. Boulous Walker raises the question of "what it means to think of reading as a kind of listening",[23] where "The present of reading would then be something like a reading capable of a radical listening, a reading attentive to the presence, proximity and nearness of the other; a transformative openness that offers the world anew".[24] *Dorsal Practices* explores how listening might create both an intimacy with oneself and with the world. Intimacy – a closeness to the things, a way of practising that moves between things, with different degrees of in-touchness or proximity. In *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, Gemma Corradi Fiumara addresses the neglected role of listening within the logos of Western philosophy which has tended to foreground the value of speaking, of saying, of enunciation. Challenging the dominance of a form of thinking "revolving around grasping, mastering, using"[25], she advocates for a listening perspective, "characterized by the requirement that we dwell with, abide by, whatever we try to know; that we aim at coexistence-with, rather than knowledge-of".[26]. For Corradi Fiumara, the recovery of a 'listening perspective' "may be facilitated by a retrieval of a more 'circular' way of thinking, as it were, entailing repeated confrontations which may eventually result in the rule of dwelling and coexistence".[27] We recognise a form of circular thinking within *Dorsal Practices*, a process of thinking that proceeds through loops and returns, resisting the straightforwardness of linear thinking and its desire to know, by holding back, holding a space open. We approach *Dorsal Practices* as a means of re-orientation, of re-organisation — as a research practice *and* as a practice of living, of life. We continue to imagine and re-imagine our

acts of turning (towards the back) and of re-turning as quiet tactics for resisting the forward-facing and future-oriented demands of a (academic) culture underpinned by neoliberal values of progress and (economic) growth, as a turn away from what comes *next, next, next.* Or else, in the affirmative sense, we conceive the dorsal turn as way of holding a space-time open for attending, for dwelling with, for listening. We conceive our own enquiry as part of a wider turn, perhaps even *revolution*, turning away from the teleology and linearity of goal-oriented, progress-driven, acquisitional approaches to thinking, to knowing and to knowledge, in favour of an alternative praxes and poetics based on a willingness and receptivity towards *co-existing,* for listening *with* and *alongside. Revolution:* to revolve — to travel or orbit around a central point, again and again, to return, repeat or come back. *To re-turn or change back. Again, anew, once more — again, again. Restoring (to a former state) and at the same time undoing. To turn. A turning back. A coming back. Again, anew, once more — again, again […]*

Endnotes

1. David Wills, *Dorsality: Thinking Back Through Technology and Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 4.

2. Wills, 2008, p. 4.

3. Wills, 2008, p. 5.

4. During our performance reading at the Society of Artistic Research conference, *Too Early/Too Late,* in Trondheim, Norway, 9–21 April 2023, a member of the audience invoked the writing of academic and artist Denise Ferreira da Silva to reflect on the circularity of the thinking witnessed within our practice in contrast to 'the violence of linear thought'. For Denise Ferreira da Silva, we need to activate a 'shift in thinking' that begins with decolonialization. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQTroNAHE3w (Accessed 30 May 2024)

5. Wills, 2008, p. 6. We further elaborate on Wills' notion of the dorsal turn in Katrina Brown and Emma Cocker, 'Dorsal Practices — Towards a Back-Oriented Being-in-the-World', published in Tara Page (ed.) *With–In Bodies: Research Assemblages of the Sensory and the Embodied,* Special Issue of *Humanities* 2024, 13, 63. https://doi.org/10.3390/h13020063. In this article, we also draw on the work of feminist writer and scholar Sara Ahmed who in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others (*2006) confronts the shaping and 'straightening' directionality of heteronormativity, to then explore possibilities for a queer phenomenology that "faces the back, which looks 'behind'". Ahmed, 2006, p. 29.

6. Wills, 2008, p. 5.

7. The movement component of *Dorsal Practices* evolves from Brown's ongoing choreographic research in relation to the reorganisation of the senses away from visuality and uprightness. See Katrina Brown,

'circling, tumbling, dancing around: Back pieces' in *Choreographic Practices* 13/2 2022, pp. 145–63, and https://katrinabrown.net/project/tilt-rhythm-back-dances-drawings (Accessed on 30 May 2024).

8. The *Practice of Conversation* evolved within *Dorsal Practices* builds on a practice called *Conversation as Material* developed by Cocker over the last decade within a series of artistic collaborations. See Emma Cocker, 'Conversation as Material', in the Special Issue 'Practices of Phenomenology and Artistic Research' of P*henomenology & Practice, V*olume 17 (2022), No.1, pp.201 - 231.

9. The 'turn taking' without interruption is based on Nancy Kline's 'time to think' model. See Nancy Kline, *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind,* (Ward Lock, London, 1999). Whilst influenced by the 'deep listening' practices of sound composer Pauline Oliveros (See Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Composers' Sound Practice,* (New York, Lincoln: Deep Listening Publications, 2005), the practice of 'deep listening' within *Dorsal Practices* is also informed by a method called *Awareness Centred Deep Listening Training* (ACDLT®), a programme founded in 2003 by Rosamund Oliver to develop meaningful and beneficial communication between people and in communities. Cocker is trained in *Awareness Centred Deep Listening.*

10. Of course, not all experiences of contemporary life have a forward-facing, future-orientation. Whilst not the focus of this specific exposition, a further development of our enquiry might consider contexts where a dorsal orientation has been affirmed within a specific culture, or alternatively where a back-leaning orientation might not have the affirmative connotations that we propose within *Dorsal Practices.*

11. Periodically, we have returned to the transcript material once more, coming back to re-read, to re-imagine the content through public reading practices. For example, we presented our enquiry through a performance reading and a workshop within the frame of the symposium, *Sentient Performativities: Thinking Alongside the Human,* (Dartington, June 2022) and as a performance reading at the Society of Artistic Research conference, *Too Early/Too Late,* in Trondheim, Norway, 9–21 April 2023.

12. Writing about the 'vocative' dimension of language, phenomenologist Max van Manen describes how the density and intensity of the language, with its strongly embedded or incarnated meaning (van Manen, 2014, p. 45), might have the capacity to slow down the process of reading for the reader. See Max van Manen, *Phenomenology of practice: meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing,* (Routledge, 2014).

13. The video extracts presented in this exposition relate to transcripts from the 'blocks' of Returning as follows: (Video Extract 1) Improvisatory reading/returning to conversation transcripts from *Returning I* (10.10.2022) and *Returning II* (27.11.2022); (Video Extract 2) Re-reading extracts of our etymological dives (Straightforward / Reverse); (Video Extract 3) Improvisatory reading/returning to conversation transcripts from *Returning III* (16.01.23) and *Returning IV* (22.05.23); (Video Extract 4) Re-reading extracts of our etymological dives (Release / Intermingle); (Video Extract 5) Improvisatory reading/returning to conversation transcripts from *Returning V* (15.12.2023) and *Returning VI* (01.02.2024); (Video Extract 6) Re-reading extracts of our etymological dives (Reflect / Reveal).

14. The 'reading scores' evolved within *Dorsal Practices* extend Cocker's ongoing artistic research interest in reading as an aesthetic practice and the 'poetics of attention' therein. See for example, Emma Cocker, Cordula Daus, Lena Séraphin, *Reading on Reading: Ecologies of Reading, published in Ruukku, Issue 14, 'Ecologies of Practice. Available at* https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/618624/618625

15. Michelle Boulous Walker, *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. xiii.

16. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. xv.

17. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. xv.

18. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 21.

19. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 116.

20. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 115.

21. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 113.

22. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 118.

23. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 104.

24. Boulous Walker, 2017, p. 119.

25. Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening,* (Routledge, 1990) p. 15.

26. Corradi Fiumara, 1990, p. 15.

27. Corradi Fiumara, 1990, p. 16.