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<http://ausdanceqld.org.au/in-form-issue-2/>

COLLABORATING IN A RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENT



COURTNEY SCHEU - choreographer
TESSA RIXON - scenographer

Our collaborations explore the human brain - its function and its failures - through the research of improvisational scores and interactive technical systems. We focused on developing a shared language and process, to have a deeper understanding of the other's form and practice.

**Why scenography and dance?
What was the initial inspiration behind the collaboration?**

TR: Our inspiration was to explore the relationship between improvisational choreographic methods and interactive, real-time technologies. The two forms have similar approaches to notions of time, space, openness, reactivity and agency. I believe there is a beautiful symbiosis between Courtney's work and my own. We also wanted to work in a way that privileged both design and body equally, rather than making one at the service of the other.

What is scenography?

TR: There are many different understandings of scenography - performance design, mise-en-scène - I prefer to think of it as the shaping or creation of the performance environment through physical and audible elements including light, sound, set, new media, costume and more.

How was dance involved?

CS: We created improvisational scores. We are referring to a 'score' as a set of rules, instructions or guiding principles to dictate decision making. We used scores to develop movement and scores to govern the responsive programs, including *Isadora* and *Microsoft Kinects*. Scores also determined how movement and [technology would interact](#).

What were some approaches you used to facilitate collaboration?

CS: We started by making a manifesto: YES to being friendly to our thoughts/ NO to being anxious/NO to expecting greatness /NO to performance/NO to roles/YES to play/YES to saying yes and supporting ideas or suggestions/YES to solo time and reflection. We also played Arts Tag, to find a point of focus (for us it was neuroscience). One person shared something, an article, short creation, sketch or sound clip for example and the other responded within 24 hours - an approach we came across through Zaimon and Lizzie Vilmanis. The content and information gathered was the preliminary research for our experimentations in the studio.

TR: Show-and-Tell was a crucial part of our collaboration. In the beginning, we would work separately, devising and testing scores, configuring different interactive systems or testing effects in

Isadora. We then shared our individual discoveries and discussed in detail the technology or techniques used to create them. Through this we built a shared vocabulary, which strengthened our ability to combine dance and technology, which resulted in over 20 dance-technology combinations during the developments.

What do you find helpful in a collaboration?

TR: I strongly believe designers and technologists need to spend more time on the floor. We need to experience embodied practice, so when it comes to integrating scenography into the process, there is a better understanding and a shared language. Also, be willing to play. As Scott Palmer and Sita Popat wrote in 2005, we need spaces to play together as equals, without fixed outcomes in mind. Only then can we find common ground.

CS: Time in skill sharing is as important as time creating. Share links, articles and books so you can build an understanding of the scope of possibilities and shared references. Communicate clearly and always feel free to ask questions!



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