Michelle Man MA, FHEA, Lecturer in Dance, Edge Hill University PhD candidate in Dance, GSA University of Surrey Principal supervisor: Dr Rachel Hann Second supervisor: Dr Adam Alston

## Introduction:

Attenuating Light and the Choreographic is a strand of my practice research PhD that explores the choreographic potential in the perceptual disturbances that are available in the intensification and attenuation of different lightingscape environments.

The artistic and affective relationships of light and the performing body have gained recent scholarly attention in the fields of scenography (Abufalia, Moran, Palmer) and digital technologies (Salter, Sutil). Similarly, significant critical analysis through both feminist (Albright) and Modernist lenses (Garelick) has been given to the revolutionary light dance performances of Loïe Fuller (1862-1928). Distinctly, my interdisciplinary research examines from the perspective of performer and dancer, the choreographic opportunities in the embodied experiences of coalescing available energies of light and the dancing body.

The conceptual developments underpinning my work recognize that we live in a world of ever-increasing luminescence, argued by philosopher Paul Virilio as "an artificial condition of paradoxical wakefulness" (2009:51), which alters the ways in which we think about and respond to light. Within this context, my research investigates the qualitative differences found in Tungsten and Light Emitting Diode (LEDs) materials, and how choreographies created through sensitized approaches to lighting allow for a reattunement of our relationship with light.



Screenshot taken from lighting designer Kelli Zelzulka's operating desk, surrounded by images from the corresponding practice research session with mixed assemblage of lighting, August 2017.

# 

uminance emitted from sources considered as an electromagnetic field of light, heat, sound and dazzling energy

embodying conceptualizations of light: seeping, smudging, breathing, burning, chasing, touching... based on light being treated as a palpable substance

> proximity of lighting materials affecting choreographic decision



Method:

- Practice research sits within recognised paradigms for choreographic research within Academia, where contributions to knowledge can be made through experiential exploration and performance making that operate within clear frameworks. Embodied praxis with light lies at the heart of my research as a form of inquiry that aims to unpick research questions that arise prior to, during and after the practice.
- In this project I adopt a mixed methodology that uses a phenomenologically orientated practice of improvisation in both the embodied explorations and the devising of lighting environments, which I call lighting-scap. In logging physicalized tendencies within the practice research environments of dazzling and attenuating lights, pre-choreographic materials are generated which resist traditional formalised choreography structures, thus becoming sites for further investigation.
- Each study, which following ethical approval will now involve other dancers and choreographers, will accumulate processes of improvisation and the pre-choreographic with the aim to create performances that are designed to signpost and consolidate each phase of my doctoral study, bringing together theoretical inquiry that resonate with New Materialisms (Barad, Bennett) and embodied experimentations with lighting-scapes.
- Documenting the research through photographyfilming and performative writing (Pollock) support the knowledge findings in the ephemeral encounters with light. The latter pays attention to, and keeps track of alterations or disturbances in bodily tension, breath and balance.

# **Attenuating Light and the Choreographic**

light

behaviours of Tungsten assemblages, Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) assemblages and mixed assemblages gauged through embodied exploration



Image of *Light Space* (Hulls, 2017) as part of No Body (2017)

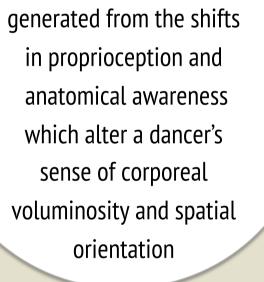
coalescing energies of light and the dancing body: acts of copoiesis

a sensorial engagement that is not bound to form-seeking dance techniques



choreographic

mobilization of language through choreographic thinking



collation of materials



# Breaking new ground with light and the choreographic:

- My research, by focusing on the affective and productive relationship between light and the dancing body within contemporary contexts, responds to a gap in the scholarly fields of performance, choreography and scenography.
- Of significance is the interdisciplinary nature of my work that is written from a researching, choreographing dancer's perspective, offering a critique in this field through the lens of the experiential practitioner working alongside lighting designers.
- Due to immanent modifications to EU1194/2012 European Union (EU) legislation, stage lighting regulations are currently facing potentially radical changes, that would see the disappearance of many lighting systems across all performance venues. In response to this threatened loss, as part of a collective effort organised by Association of Lighting Designers (ALD) I have offered a written statement as researcher/choreographer/pedagogue to the European Commission that has contributed to the extension of the public consultation period regarding this legislation.







### Findings so far, leading to further questioning:

- That a sensorial approach to working with light may invite a photological fascination that extends beyond semiotic and theological associations of light.
- Key to my interdisciplinary research practice is that both light and the choreographic are at the start of every investigation, thus avoiding a privileging of one medium over the other. This has led to specific choreographic traits emerging in the sessions such as: coming face to face with the light source, turning and returning to the source, and placing attention on qualities of refraction in the reciprocal relationship between ambient light and the moving body.
- I have recorded reoccurring patterns of breathlessness, agitation and physical tension generated by the anticipation of the appearance of a dazzling light, as well as being within intense luminance.
- For a dancer to navigate dazzling and attenuatinng lighting-scapes it is necessary to engage with peripheral vision systems that would appear to support proprioceptive awareness in challenging environments of brightness and darkness.
- With intense lighting-scape environments I have noticed a gap between which I understand to be perception, and affect upon which my improvised or choreographic responses are generated. This leads me to question what the ontological implications of researching with intensifications and attenuations of light are if, according to Henri Bergson, in the intensity of such sensations "we lose for an instant the consciousness of our personality" (2005:39).

#### Bibliography:

Abulafia, Y. 2016. The Art of Light on Stage. Oxon: Routledge. Albright, A. 2007. *Traces of Light, Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. Barad, K. 2007. Meeting the Universe Halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning. Durham: Duke University Press. Bennett, J. 2010 *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Durham: Duke University Press. Bergson, H. 2005[1898]. *Time and Free Will*. London: Elibron Classics. Garelick, R. 2007. *Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller's Performance of Modernism*. London: Princetown University Press. Hulls, M. 2017. Light Space as part of No Body (dir) Michael Hulls. Sadlers Wells Theatre. First performance 07.06.17. Man, M. 2013. *lightouch*. Michellle Man (dir) Arts Centre, Ormskirk. First performance 26.09.2013. Moran, N. 2017. *The Right Light*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. Palmer, S. 2013. *Light: Readings in Theatre Practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Pollock, D. 'Performing Writing' in Phelan & Lane (eds.) (1998) The Ends of Performance. New York: New York University Pres. Salter, C. 2010. *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance.* Massachusetts: The MIT Press. Sutil, N. S. 2015. Motion and Representation: the language of human movement. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

> manm@gsa.surrey.ac.uk www.michelle-man.com



All images ©Michelle