

Vital Signs: A Poem in Four Movements

This collaborative enquiry between dancer Sarie Mairs Slee and poet Scott Thurston explores three key research questions:

- How can collaboration between dancers and poets investigate both the embodied aspects of language and the power of the body to make meaning?
- In performance, how might the written word and the act of writing become animated in a movement context? How might movement performances enable poetry spoken aloud to signify poetically, rather than dramatically, and to be integrated with movement?
- Can an understanding of the *vitality dynamics* of time, space, movement, direction and force (Stern, 2010) help to facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and to create new forms of transdisciplinary artistic practice?

Drawing on our respective interests in American postmodern dance and European dance theatre, we explored a range of techniques to create and combine poetic and choreographic material, discussed in our article in *Choreographic Practices* (2017) and shared via the Vital Signs Festival and tour, funded by Arts Council England (2018).

The primary finding of the research was the discovery of the scope for a new, transdisciplinary art form supported by the usefulness of Stern's concept of vitality dynamics in helping to achieve the aesthetic effect of words and movement amounting to more than the sum of their parts – the moment in which movement and

text entered into a relationship of equivalence and 'translatability' by simultaneously communicating the same underlying vitality dynamics (for example: tensing, releasing, unfolding and turning). We also discovered the importance of gesture and syntax as ways of understanding the relationship between movement and text and between performers, and the necessity of aligning these with dramaturgical practice. The resulting original methodology of shaping vitality dynamics syntactically, gesturally and dramaturgically towards meaning has opened-up new potential for future exploration in this emerging field.

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