

# Unstablelandscape: : Bottom-Up Composition and a Post-humanist Era

<b>Title</b>	Unstablelandscape:
<b>Subtitle</b>	Bottom-Up Composition and a Post-humanist Era
<b>Lead-in / Abstract</b>	<p><i>UNSTABLELANDSCAPE</i> is my artistic and research platform to investigate and deploy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Dance improvisation within digitally augmented environments.</li> <li>-The dramatic tension between design and desire, abstract patterns and anthropomorphic depictions.</li> <li>-Real time composition or improvisational performances with hybrid systems (humans, computers and other living systems).</li> <li>-The improvisational creative act with generative strategies and systems.</li> <li>-Alternative human-computer interfaces for dance performance and multimedia installations.</li> <li>-Embodied, embedded and distributed cognition.</li> <li>-The relation between moving bodies, cognition, technology and the design of experiences and realities.</li> <li>-The intelligence of biological systems and bottom-up or biologically inspired architectures for art making and performance systems.</li> <li>-The relation between improvisational digital pop-culture (DJ/VJ), art making and social events/performances.</li> </ul>
<b>Participants and speakers</b>	Barrios Solano, Marlon (VE / US)
<b>Short biography of participants</b>	<p>I am a Venezuelan dance and new media artist/researcher, based in usa since 1994. My work explores dance improvisation, "real time" interactive technologies, artificial intelligence and embodied cognition. As a dancer in USA, i performed with new york choreographers <b>Susan Marshall, Lynn Shapiro, Bill Young</b> among others, and with the musicians <b>Philip Glass, John Zorn and Eric Friedlander</b>. I have participated in festivals in Venezuela, Austria, Scotland, Poland and the USA (New york improv festival 97-98-99) and lectured internationaly on improvisation, interactive media and perspectives on embodiment.</p> <p>I have been invited to present my research at the conferences towards a science of consciousness:Tucson 2000, 2002 and 2004 (USA), consciousness and its place in nature: Skovde 2001 (Sweden), Interaktionlabor 2003 - 2004 (Germany) ,isea2004 (Baltic sea) and art and technology (Utah, 2004).</p> <p>I am participating at the oik/junxion project at steim (Amsterdam, the Netherlands) and i am a third year mfa student in dance and technology at the ohio state university. I was a guest lecturer in new media at denison university and a 2004 dupont series lecturer at the art institute of Boston at Lesley university.</p>
<b>Full text</b>	<p>As a dance/new media artist (dance improvisation, digitally augmented performance, interactive installations, generative media) and a researcher (relationship between socio-technological discourses about mind, intelligence and bodies and their instantiations in dance training and compositional strategies), I am interested in an a trans-disciplinary and "hands on" approach to understand improvisational systems, their intelligence and aesthetics.</p> <p>As a director of improvisational performances, I have been developing a model of performance of improvisation that enhances the skills needed by the improviser, so as to handle simultaneously, the dynamic design of choreographic composition and the ongoing generation of meaning with physical actions. It is a model that intersects algorithmic notions of movement and composition with awareness/embodied training. It is focused on the interaction among performers, as observers of their own actions and the movements and changes observed by the audience.</p> <p>I integrate "real-time" interactive multimedia technologies (mainly using MaxMSPJitter and alternative interfaces) to create environments where the improvisation takes place.</p>

I develop digital contexts where I play with metaphors and physical tasks, inhabiting them and recreating precise, yet mutable performative worlds. I amplify the dance improvisation with improvisational multimedia environments.

I attempt to reformulate the investigation on dance and new media technology to an actualized paradigm that takes into consideration new theories of cognition and embodiment, biological models of intelligence, emergence and complexity theories, and a post humanist perspective on our relation with techno-scientific discourses and representation about minds, bodies, dance and digital tools.

I believe that the composition of aesthetic improvisational systems is based on the discovery and re-application of simple rules of interaction within a system, where embodied cognitive processes have complex emergent properties that we call the dance or the aesthetic experience.

I am interested in investigating the possibilities of new media to continue the re-examination of dance, performance and art making that was initiated by **Duchamp**, continued by **Fluxus** and **Judson Church pioneers**, among others.

I believe that dance and digital technologies as a field needs the reformulation of the dance artist as a researcher with a more scientifically based approaches on fundamental processes of motion, sensing, composing and experiencing (embodied cognition). At the same time, this artist researcher must think deeply the complex relation between embodied practices, epistemologies and the philosophical lineages of the practices themselves.

Dance improvisation and interactive/generative systems are the perfect domains to investigate questions of agency, control and autonomy in relation with the phenomena that we understand as design, motion, change, growth, development and evolution: an ongoing changing composition.

Currently, my work has two main conceptual manifestations that are not totally separate but deploy a dialectic tension:

-Deconstruction of the compositional premises of what we understand as a dance or a video. Total real time interaction towards exploring the aesthetics of patterns and changing forms. Nothing is pre-recorded.

-Metaphorically oriented pieces with extreme sampling and pre edited material.

My work is about change and explores the ecology of what is already present: our memories embodied in biological bodies, digital tools, trainings and procedural parameters.

I place my work in the confluence of an epistemology that is attempting to understand the relation of the pervasive exactitude and mutability of this inhabited form, that is our body, with the elusiveness of metaphor and thought.

I elaborate on the ideas about the Posthuman postulated by **Katherine Hayles** in her book titled: *How We became Posthuman*. Hayles reflects on the lineage of cybernetics ideas as discursive constructions. Hayles simultaneously distills a very flexible and innovative way to approach the materiality of the human body in our world ubiquitous computational systems. She presents the human body as a discursive construction and places embodiment at the core of several dialectics that simultaneously interact in the creation of the posthuman subject. For Hayles, the main dialectical pairs introduced by her are: the body and embodiment, and inscription and incorporation practices.

These dialectics are presented as heuristic devices rather than as categorical distinctions. She focuses on the differential tensions between the normative aspect of discourses and the phenomenological reality of the lived bodies within performative practices. The posthuman is relevant to different strands of inquiry: epistemology, phenomenology, socio-technological studies on human-computer interaction, dance and performance studies.

Hayles, building upon **Foucault's** archeology of knowledge, questions the ways in which the Focaultian view tends to construct the body only through discursive formations and material practices that fail to account for the embodiment's contextual enactment. Instead, Hayles advocates an understanding of embodiment in conjunction with inscription processes, technology and ideology.

Hayles expresses that a parallel focus on embodiment would "...help to clarify the mechanisms of change, for it links a changing technological landscape with the instantiated enactment that create feedback loops between materiality and

discourse."<sup>1</sup> She redefines embodiment, contrasting it with the Foucaultian view, and suggests that the idea of the body is definitely socially constructed and normalized. Embodiment, for her, is contextual, merged with the particulars of place, time, physiology and culture. It is within the differential tension between the two that enactment take place and experiences of embodiment are generated in continual interaction with the constructions of the body.

The dynamism of Hayles' model appears when she juxtaposes the body and embodiment with another binary distinction: inscription and incorporation practices. She imagines both binaries acting in complex syncopation with each other. Inscription is normalized and abstract, representing a system of signs that operate independently of any particular manifestation. In contrast, incorporation exists only when it is instantiated in its embodied medium.

The shift of focus to embodiment creates an awareness of the specifics of the materiality of the experience and the particularities of the inscription practices instantiated in incorporating practices. In this approach, being a knowing creature in the world is inherently a performative phenomenon, subject to individual enactment, and therefore improvisational.

I contend that this model is relevant for dance and technology studies mainly in its potential for explaining many embodied actions as incorporating practices that will be encoded into body memory through repeated performances that make them habitual. Our bodies are cultured and trained by both kinds of practices: incorporating practices performing the bodily content and inscribing practices that correct and modulate the performance. Hayles emphasizes improvisational aspects that are context specific and incorporation processes that emerge from the interplay between the body and embodiment, between the abstract model and the specific contexts in which the model is instantiated. Incorporation can never be entirely separated from the context of enactment. The body is never just a text, but texts that can inscribe representations, shape enactment and become part of a socio-technical landscape of an incorporating practice.

Hayles proposes that, it is in these contexts or environments that changes in technology affect how people use their bodies and how space and time are experienced. In other words, technology impacts incorporating practices. For her, embodiment mediates between technology and discourse creating new experiential frameworks that serve as markers for related discursive systems.

For Hayles, the term posthuman indicates the end of the humanist subject, a concept that may have applied only to a fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice.

The posthuman implies the recognition that we have never been in total control and that we have to relinquish fictions of total agency. We now understand about the nature of emergent processes that dynamically construct the landscapes of our experienced bodies and environments.

I advocate for an actualization of our analytical devices to understand the relationship of dance with technology as a system that encompasses more than external prosthetic devices in performative environments. We have always danced within semiotics, physiology and forms that change and interact within environments that we have already changed and made more intelligent.

The posthuman is in itself a construction that is reflexive, and physically grounded in its own material changes. It is a new epistemological and metaphorical device that de-tangles and recomposes age-old knots and conceptual splits about bodies, minds, experience, language and biology.

Performance of Improvisation and interactive media had worked as amplifiers of the dynamics characteristics of the human embodiment and the cultural context in which the body composes as it moves. I conclude that improvisational performances with humans and/or computers manifest the pervasive generativity of living and intelligent systems and I propose the posthumanist account as an integrative paradigm. In the Posthumanist account, principles of emergence replace notions of teleology, objectivism is replaced by reflexive epistemology, autonomous will is replaced by distributed cognition, and the body as support of the mind is replaced by embodiment. In this way the posthuman becomes an epistemology that recognizes the dynamics of human bodies interacting within environments and semantic domains that in multiple feedback loops co-create the characteristics of human experience.

We, dance scholars and practitioners, must expand (actualize) our models and take advantage of the increasing relevance of the embodied cognition approaches within

cognitive science. On the other hand, cognitive scientis are realizing the relevance of the embodied knowledge and sofistication of dance practices in the levels of phenomenological exploration and psychophysical behaviour. We can joint efforts to appoach the mutable patterns of the emergent dance that we call life.

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**Related internet addresses**

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