On Emotional Time

Anna Gallagher-Ross

Jane Frances Dunlop and I have emailed each other almost every day for the last ten years.

For the first four years we lived in the same city, but for the last six we have been an ocean apart. Our email exchanges, supplemented by reams of text messages, allowed us access to each other daily: hangovers, anxieties, new ideas and their articulations, triumphs and heartbreaks, all shared through our screens. We even formalized these exchanges as a durational performance project called *#transatlantictheatre* (2010-2015) that experimented with the networked technologies of the internet—our artistic hack to bridge the distance that separated two friends. Ten years later, Jane and I still email as much as our schedules permit in order to stay up to date on her expanding artistic practice and my forays into curating, or simply to send the latest meme, article, or observation peppered with emojis. On Saturday, August 24, 2016, in my early morning in New York and her lunchtime in London, Jane wrote to ask if I would write something about her latest work, hurl outward at certain pace, an installation appearing online and in ONCA Gallery, and I agreed. Maintaining togetherness while living apart, inhabiting common virtual spaces in order to transcend geographical places, sharing and spending the same emotional time, has always been the concern in our friendship, as well as Jane's artistic practice. So it seems fitting that I write this short essay on her online installation and its counterpart in a gallery 3,500 miles away, using only my glowing screen as my guide.

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Jane is a London-based artist whose performances, installations, and exhibitions appear in online spaces and gallery spaces. She uses the internet—its applications, platforms, and functions—as her medium and material in order to explore the radical potential and politics of a personal ecology of emotions, relations, and exchanges online. Jane's work asks us to rethink our understanding of in real life (IRL) and mediated communications by situating her artistic practice in the productive space in-between. In doing so she acknowledges that in our digital age, with our weak or strong wifi connections and varying time zones, we are all accustomed to buffering. Her work communicates the challenge of maintaining friendships at a distance, the infinite maintenance and care work involved, but also the political and affective potential of the syncopated space of the internet.

In her writing and art practice, Jane often invokes Gertrude Stein's notion of "emotional time," taken from Stein's essay on watching theatre, 'Plays', which refers to the emotional syncopation of audience and what transpires on stage. Stein saw each of our encounters with an artwork as having a distinct emotional tempo, one that is personal and unique to each viewer, and that we experience "nervousness" when we feel our tempo cannot remain in step with the narrative events on stage. Similarly, Jane views our everyday exchanges and relations on the internet as syncopated, rather than synchronized, and necessarily occupying different emotional times. Rather than striving to assemble the facts of internet life into linear narratives, Jane's work identifies the rhizomatic experiences of the online, all of our connections and platforms branching outwards, riddled with regular glitching and discomfort, which for her does not represent an inability to communicate but simply a different mode of experience unique to the online—as Jane would say "we live in nervousness these days." Jane sees syncopation as a modern condition that shapes our communication, which at times is extremely challenging to maintain,


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but also demonstrates our will to try harder, to reach across the static and touch. For Jane, the internet is not an alienating, elusive ether keeping us floating in our separate spheres, but rather a tactile space that we inhabit and remake in deeply personal ways.

Recently, Jane has been rethinking the digital by way of the neo-classical, reaching back to ancient Greek myths and pulling them into our digital, networked present in order to illuminate our daily experience. *(tfw) spin measure cut* (2016) engages with the myth of the Moirai, the three goddesses of fate who spin the thread of life and have the power to measure its length and cut it. Jane takes the idea of spinning the thread of life and quite literally weaves together recorded material from her everyday actions online to create a series of glimmering digital textiles. This interest in textiles began with *minor fabrics* (2016), a desktop performance in which Jane layered recorded and live video chat windows of her performing on her desktop, multiplying herself to create an electric collage of performances. Taken together, the videos, with their ambient and spoken word soundtracks, combine to create a reverb-ridden choral performance, occasionally punctuated by shrill, echoing feedback. Watching Jane's performances pile up on her desktop, creating a cacophony of sound and image, while seeing her perform live, reminds us of the ways our online presences are constantly being performed, dispersed, and archived.

Jane's work to date acknowledges that we live in an age saturated with emotions and the internet is where we upload them. In her performances, Jane creates intimacy with her internet audience, but not in the manner of the empowered selfie or the confessional blog post. We may catch glimpses of the files littered on her desktop, or the clothes hanging behind her as she performs in her bedroom, but more significantly, she presents us with conversational poetry that reveals her grappling with the minor and the mundane like we all do. Her eloquent statements elevate and reframe these taken-for-granted feelings and experiences. She invites us into her process of forming and reforming ideas—uncurated, unphotoshopped, but nonetheless elegantly articulated.

It is in the presentation of her artistic process that she makes herself vulnerable to us—through her relationships to others and her ideas but also through her networked surroundings, and it is at once charismatic and generous. Charisma and generosity are two words that recur in Jane's work, and inflect her practice. They speak to her extended and supportive artistic collaborations, her willingness to invite people into the intimacies of her desktop, and also her quite genuine search for how to be a woman, a friend, and an artist who practices and performs charisma. Much of her work has been about exchange with artist friends, such as her long-standing collaboration with London-based photographer, Mira Loew, whose photographs make frequent appearances in Jane's performances and installations. In 2013, while Loew was on a residency in New York, and Jane was working and living in London, they exchanged daily emails, which catalogued their experiences, and in which Jane also included directives for urban choreographies and positions that Loew realized around New York and then photographed. These texts and images were then published, and also provided the basis for a later performance. In this exchange, as in all of Jane's work, the focus was "on the exchange as it occurs in its moments as opposed to thinking about the benefits of its results." As always, it is about the process of living, making, and thinking that characterizes her work rather than a product or end point.

hurl outward at a certain pace is less about exchange and more about the individual ecologies we make and inhabit online. It consists of two installations: a five-channel video and sound installation housed at ONCA gallery and a video and sound work that can be viewed online. At ONCA, five video monitors line the four walls of the gallery, each displaying a captured recording of Jane's desktop displaying different compositions of multiple recorded video chats open and playing. The screens are installed

at awkward heights, sitting uneasily just below eye level, the result being that although each screen occupies a different part of the wall, the viewer cannot look at one without the neighbouring screen edging into view. In keeping with everyday capture, the videos are unedited, and repeatedly arranged and rearranged on the desktop. Jane made her manipulations—dragging, clicking, minimizing and maximizing—invisible and so the windows appear animated, as if moving of their own accord, layering and recombining across the desktop, reminiscent of the techniques of modernist montage. Digital textiles serve as a backdrop to the videos, which recall Jane's earlier work, woven from multiple recordings, cast in the monochrome greys of early Windows.

In each video Jane performs slow and deliberate gestures that resemble sculptural poses. The camera in each video chat window isolates and focuses on just one part of her body—through one window we see her legs and waist standing still, wavering almost imperceptibly; in another her shins and feet are in repose on hard gallery floor; in another, a mass of her brown hair cascades and sways. At one point, we see a kaleidoscopic view of Jane's entire body multiplied across all of the windows: she is speaking as if from another dimension, the sound of her voice just out of hearing. At other times Jane's body steps out of view and instead the videos concentrate on architectural elements of the gallery, such the corner of the gallery, a crack in its wall, the point where the white floor and wall meet. Jane's statuesque poses echo Loew's photographs, which portray the uncanniness of an isolated body part or gesture, stark against a white backdrop. This uncanniness is felt, too, as the viewer watches Jane's body against the white gallery, split apart by different windows. She gently steps from one window to the next, only to reappear in another window, as though she is inside the very architecture of her computer. Or she will disappear on one screen, and reappear across the room on another monitor as if her body has passed through us unseen, like a ghost or wifi signal.

Sometimes the many screens in the gallery display identical images, working in synchronicity, but more often they remain syncopated. A haunting soundscape also appropriately out of sync with the videos on display plays from speakers installed in opposite corners of the room. The soundscape is composed of a mixture of crunchy ambient static reverb and the shrill whistle of feedback derived from the multiple videos open simultaneously. The result is an electric collage accompanied by a wondrous but eerie soundscape that bears traces of its own production. Taken together, the sound and video create the effect of space and time folding in on itself, the space of the virtual and actual blurring. Surrounded by these screens that are suddenly windows, the viewer stands with one foot in her virtual world and one foot in our own. We have entered her individual ecology, a system through which her image and information is fed, and this perceptual shift of scale reminds us that hers is just one performance among trillions of networked performances that populate our online world.

Rather than being work about connecting to others, *hurl outwards at a certain pace* highlights how much time we spend alone, spinning our own cloths of connectivity and inhabiting the online world. Rather than being a lonely work, it is more an eerily accurate depiction of how much of our time is spent alone, but in conversation with others. If you were to strip away the technologies, there we would be, performing slow, silent choreographies in our apartments, swiping and clicking at nothing. Jane does not appear to be performing for us but rather we are cast as voyeurs peering into her windows, watching her go about her business. She does not make an acquaintance with us, but we, the viewers engrossed in her performance, make an acquaintance with her.

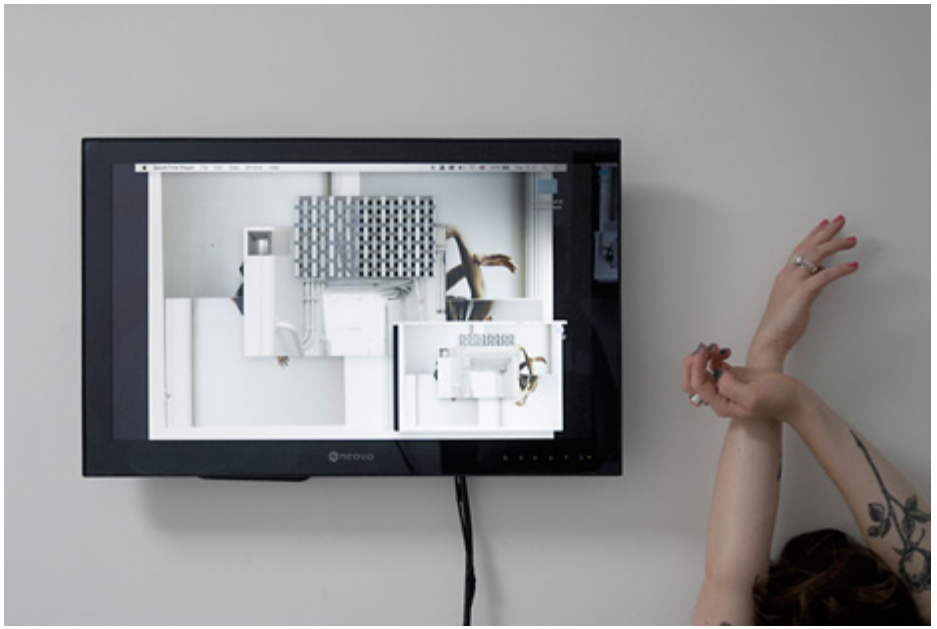
The topographies of Jane's desktop videos in *hurl outward at a certain pace* call to mind another part of Stein's discussion of theatre: her idea of the theatrical landscape. Stein viewed the performance on stage as a "landscape": you "make acquaintance with it but it does not with you."[1] Similar to the experience of viewing a painting in a gallery, Stein emphasized the spectator's ability to acquaint themselves at their own pace with a performance that does not reveal itself readily. Stein was moved by the sense of stillness and of a "continuous present," engendered by a landscape and its constituent elements. The viewer watching the play-as-landscape feels their nervousness dissipate when they abandon the dictates of space and time implied by narrative and instead perceive the performance as a rhizome: a series of dispersed but networked elements occurring in a continuous present that the viewer can attend to, be in relation to.

Watching the videos on Jane's desktop collage perform across multiple windows recasts Stein's experience of theatrical landscapes for the computer desktop and the digital age. We watch Jane quite literally traverse the landscape of her desktop: the ambient fuzzy silence of the gallery space multiplied across the screen, punctuated by her ricocheting footfalls, combined with high-pitched feedback. Jane's attention to the parts of her body, the desktop, and the actual gallery create a networked landscape, an expanded architecture that our eyes can traverse as we choose which window to look through.

"This is a slow and mostly empty work & so to be worried about it being exciting enough would be to misunderstand myself…" Jane wrote to me in one of her emails this week while installing hurl outward. Each desktop performance is not bound by narrative, but is indeed a gradual and steady aggregation of images, a loop leading nowhere, as we watch multiple screens simultaneously and wait for the protracted wheel to turn and deliver an action that never comes. Instead, Jane keeps us buffering with her slow, "empty performance," which does not rely on narrative, but rather allows us to explore each little action on our own terms, neither

1 Lectures in America, 122

feeling out of step nor out of place. Like Stein, we are moved by the sense of stillness and of a “continuous present” engendered by a landscape. As Stein says, “the landscape is not moving but being always in relation.” Acknowledging this syncopation relieves our nervousness—we don’t feel we have to catch everything transpiring at once, but rather we can feel free to choose which video to devote ourselves to, which point to observe. Rather than feeling out of step, we feel the relief of accepting the conditions of viewing—the glitch, the buffer, the elevation of mundane events—which are also the conditions of our digital age. In Jane’s digital landscapes, we see her alone, living her everyday life through recorded performances re-recorded, at home with her multiple presences and spaces folding together into a continuous digital present.



Trees for the Forest

Natalie Kane

‘It was / an ordered absence.’ - Margaret Atwood

One spring, I visited Liverpool’s Walker Art Gallery, an old institution that welcomes visitors with a labyrinth of white, naked bodies suspended in marble. In one of the exhibitions, I walked through an empty room with bare walls and nothing but a bench. I checked for signs of art, for mistakes, or an indication of something I wasn’t immediately seeing. My years of listening to avant-garde sound installations had told me to stop, listen, and look for disturbance. Yet, nothing. To quote Beckett, ‘the sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new.’ Its emptiness was unexpected, but welcome in a journey through an exhibition I wasn’t enjoying very much. For a few moments, I was a body inhabiting a room, filling up its absence with my own sound and movement.

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In Jane Frances Dunlop's work, *hurl outward at a certain pace*, absence is multitude, absence is many. Within the gaps that fall between software, hardware, and the body are places to hide, to conceal, to walk away from and back into. The voices and movements fed through Jane's digital systems become unnatural and subject to the limits of the technologies at use; their loss of clarity and definition is its own mutated communication, its own appearance of language. In repetition resolution is lost, just as many words heard online simultaneously cause feedback and corrupt their medium, transforming it into a new shape. The digital space that Dunlop inhabits shifts and buckles under the weight of its own capacity.

The moments of emptiness shown and detailed, non-presence controlled solely by the artist, are reminiscent of the early games played in artworks by Ana Voog and Jennifer Ringley, better known as 'Anacam' and 'JenniCam.' These late '90s performance artists used the webcam as their broadcast medium, choosing when to be seen, when to hide, when to turn off. And turning off did not necessarily mean to power down the camera but also to be absent, out of frame, with the webcam still transmitting even after the artist had left. In art critic Joanne McNeil's essay 'Connected by Camera', which looks at the rise of new visual technologies in early internet art, she argues that 'we are all nodes on the network, approaching the Internet as solo beings…Webcams allowed the Internet public to be a witness to another person's existence.'[1] An existence that arises as a product of absence.

As our understanding of a life "made digital" unfolds, the Internet allows access to another person's developing ecology within an unfolding technological landscape. We have always been able to see ourselves in position to others online, but there is a critical gap in understanding where the absences are, the places to fall through

1 McNeil, *Art and the Internet*, 18.

and become lost in. When a face moves out of shot its expression is no longer seen; when a body leaves focus, it is surrendered to the representational limits of the medium, rendered into flesh without borders. In his book *The End of Absence*, Michael Harris argues that the invention of the Internet marked the end of absence, 'the loss of lack.' But I think it has prompted a different understanding of absence, which moves away from the isolation often thought to define individuals online, as they browse sites and social media alone, illuminated in blue light. Instead, the progress of the Internet has shown the vast depths of absence still left to explore.

What is not being seen, or what has been chosen to be hidden, is not a new territory, but rather a known terrain that needs reanalysis or rediscovery. These absences can be both made perceptible and concealed, but by whom or how is for us to interrogate with all the ferocity of the pioneer, while being mindful of our position as a potential colonist.

Some see absence as loss, and vainly attempt to fill it, just as data visualizers add elements to indicate where details are missing. Silence is misleading and a condition of uncertainty. It is not that our ears lie (they do), but that we don't quite know how to discern if sound will ever return.

Absence is often equal to death – not just in the corporeal sense – and in the death of information there is chaos. Consider the furor of the many-headed Internet when the 'audio' from John Cage's performance of 4'33" was removed from YouTube on copyright grounds and replaced with a complete and automatic silence (an absence replacing absence), or the secret courts that operate in countries worldwide, whose happenings are real but unable to be understood because of their enforced, and therefore violent, silence.

In Margaret Atwood's poem 'Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer', which is about the delicate balance of an ecosystem, interrupted, Atwood's protagonist attempts to understand a newly discovered forest:

'This is not order
but the absence
of order.

He was wrong, the unanswering
forest implied:
It was
an ordered absence.'

As literature scholar Karma Waltonen writes, the poem's repositioning is 'reversing who is in control and what the signs in the landscape mean.'[1] What we see as chaos is a form of order, unseen; what we see as absence is a form of presence, unseen. Waltonen continues, this 'ordered absence' is 'an implied threat… of apocalypse, the forced end of human society as we know it, an end that would allow the natural order to begin again.'[2] There are new ecologies of bodies forming in virtual space, breeding new behaviours both in their owners and those who attempt to coerce and control them.

Certain bodies are not shown in data, online, or in virtual space; bodies that we cannot, or are not allowed, to see; queer bodies, black bodies, trans bodies. In this understanding of ordered absence, you are made starkly aware of where you are, where you will be, and where you are not allowed to go or be seen. I do not mean dark spaces in the mythical "deep web," but rather the places where you are not represented well, or at all. We find that the

1 Waltonen, *Margaret Atwood's Apocalypses*, 9.
2 Ibid.

seemingly objective information universe wherein our online selves exist is increasingly governed by algorithms riddled with inaccuracy and bias. We find there are powers hindering our ability to see clearly and decide where to look. In these conditions, we are each the explorer misjudging of the environment and miscalculating the depth of the forest.

There are phantoms present of the self the Internet supposes you to be, fractured across the web by hordes of algorithms, like when you move your eyes too quickly on a projector screen and the colours separate, the image suddenly absent. All images look this way when you repeat this action, a slice of red-green-blue rendering all to a simple, primal, palette. We understand them as colours, as light, the original image forgotten as the context falls away. Background actors say “rhubarb rhubarb” to make a sound like conversation, but not; an ordered absence of how we talk with one another, mimicking our learned performance of speech.

In the death of information, in corruption and absence, a commonality of understanding is formed through necessity. When we are given nothing, we tie our hopes to the things we know we have survived before.

In game theory, the Schelling point, named after the economist Thomas Schelling, describes a solution that people use in the absence of communication or information, because it seems natural, special, or particularly relevant to them. In The Strategy of Conflict, Schelling uses an example to illustrate this concept, asking: where would you meet a stranger in New York City, when you cannot communicate with them and have no prior understanding with the stranger?[1] Where would you go to find them? Following a conversation with students, Schelling found that they most commonly decided to meet at noon at Grand Central Terminal,

1 Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, p. 56.

because of its reputation as a meeting place. For the students, this solution synthesised many assumptions, thoughts, and behaviours into a signal that was hoped to transcend the appearance of nothing.

This anti-cooperation, as in the case of the antihero – who “saves the day” despite lacking heroic characteristics or intentions – manages to generate equilibrium, albeit chaotically reached. In all of your actions, you bet on the fact that someone else will understand your meaning and intention. You hope that through signal changes and delays, they will understand the things you choose to make not-absent, the things you withhold and have withheld from you, and will know that what is perceptible is not all you are. You hope that someone will understand your ecology and the spaces it negotiates, just as you understand it too. Mediation of absence, on the terms of the potentially absent. It is all we can do to find a space we can negotiate, to create a frame to fit our bodies.

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2016