

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

Light Dial

by Chris Rutter and Evelyn Bennett



Project Details

Name of Researchers:	Chris Rutter and Evelyn Bennett
Co-researchers:	Miguel Altunaga (Rambert Contemporary Dance) Collectress
Name of Output:	Light Dial
UCARO link:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/3463/
Output Type:	T – Other; multi component output comprising costumes, live drawing to create the set for a performance, and exhibition
Year and mode of dissemination:	<i>Light Dial 1</i> , 2016: open rehearsal and live performances (2 nights) at Rambert Contemporary Dance, London <i>Light Dial 2</i> , 2017: live performance at the Digital/Material Conference, University for the Creative Arts <i>Light Dial 3</i> , 2018: live performance and exhibition at Leaf Hall, Eastbourne (Devonshire Collective)
Key Words:	performance, drawing, costume, collaboration, improvisation, dance, digital printing, textiles
Funding:	Rambert New Choreography Platform

Synopsis

Light Dial is a linked series of live performances (*Light Dial 1, 2 and 3*) bringing together dance and music with patterned, sculptural costumes and 'sets' generated by live drawing. The research tested the constraints of the dancing body, exploring liveness and improvisation against inherent restrictions in bodily movement, sound and form.

Light Dial 1 was commissioned by Rambert New Choreography platform. Artists Rutter & Bennett, choreographer Miguel Altunaga, musicians/composers Collectress and dancers from Rambert Contemporary Dance together explored collaborative processes that resulted in a new work performed at Rambert in London. Rutter & Bennett's contribution to the research was to extend the collaboration of dancing bodies and musical improvisation to drawing, pattern and sculptural form by creating wearable sculptures as costumes for dancers and musicians. Rutter & Bennett worked collaboratively and jointly on all aspects of their research in *Light Dial*.

In *Light Dial 2* Rutter & Bennett and Collectress performed a development of the work in which Collectress played and promenaded and Rutter & Bennett collaborated with the audience to create live drawings, projected into the performance space. This provided an improvised set, developing with the performance. *Light Dial 3* further extended participatory drawing by Rutter & Bennett and the audience, in a new location and with a new improvised score by Collectress.

Music and dance frequently use collaborative, improvisatory techniques. Rutter & Bennett's research in *Light Dial* extended liveness, collaboration and improvisation to the visual and material contribution of costume and set to a performance. Supporting contextual information on *Light Dial* provides further explanation of research methods, processes and insights, and a range of visual material that represents the output, including films of the making of *Light Dial 1* and of the performance itself.

*Light Dial 1 performance,
Rambert Contemporary Dance New
Choreography Platform, 2016*



Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:

How can collaborative play and 'experimental doing' be used as a form of making and thinking in a practice-based research approach?

Can the limits and constraints of the 'body' as a continuously 'live' object, be explored as a means to drive improvisational composition and design for performance?

What are the common methods of each discipline (dance, performance, musical composition, pattern design, sculpture and costume design) that relate to the body's physicality?

How can the idea of 'motif' and pattern be explored across dance, music and image/textile/costume?

Research aims:

To investigate collaborative, creative methodologies through improvisation and workshop-driven practices, using digital media to pass elements back and forth between disciplines.

To explore the disciplinary boundaries between musicians, dancers/performers, choreographer and visual/material artists.

To test out individuality and 'collectiveness' among the participants and to explore conflicting requirements for cohesion, discipline, spontaneity and improvisation in the development and performance of the work.

Context

Chris Rutter and Evelyn Bennett have worked together since 1996 on projects spanning large-scale public sculpture, performance, artist books and installation. Rutter is a sculptor and stone carver who has worked within architectural traditions in the production of carvings for historic buildings including Westminster Abbey. Bennett is an artist whose work originated in textile practice, characterised by two-dimensional patterns and vivid colour. Together they explore a fascination with the surviving polychromatic carvings of Romanesque architecture, which they parallel in their own blend of two-dimensional pattern and colour with three-dimensional sculptural form.

Light Dial builds on Rutter & Bennett's practice in collaborative and cross-disciplinary experimental performance. They have worked with Needless Alley Collective and dancers from Trinity Laban to produce *Cabaret Voltaire* at the Kings Head Theatre London (2013) and *In Embryo* at the Peoples' Theatre London (2014), and with members of Collectress, Genetic Moo and Circo Rumbaba in the *Gunfighter* experimental performance (2015). *Light Dial* (2016 – 2018) drew on these precedents in a new work that is a contemporary embodiment of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and owes debts to the Futurist opera *Victory Over the Sun* organised by the group Soyuz Molodyozhi in 1913, and to the interdisciplinary theories of the Bauhaus and projects such as Schlemmer's *Ballet Triadische* (1922). It responds to the meeting of dance performance and drawing in works by Lygia Clark (1920-88) and Trisha Brown. The project originated in the Rambert's New Choreography

Platform, which commissioned Miguel Altunaga to develop a new performance, working with dancers from the company, experimental music collective Collectress (funded by the British Council), and Rutter & Bennett. The goal was to work entirely through collaboration and experiment as a methodology, guided by the research questions, but with no set brief and, at the outset, no clear sense of a planned outcome apart from dates scheduled for the final performance, whatever form that might take. Whilst there are plentiful precedents for the collaborative development of performance by dancers, choreographers and musicians, Rutter & Bennett's innovative contribution, as visual artists, was in the design and fabrication of costumes through these collaborative workshop methods.

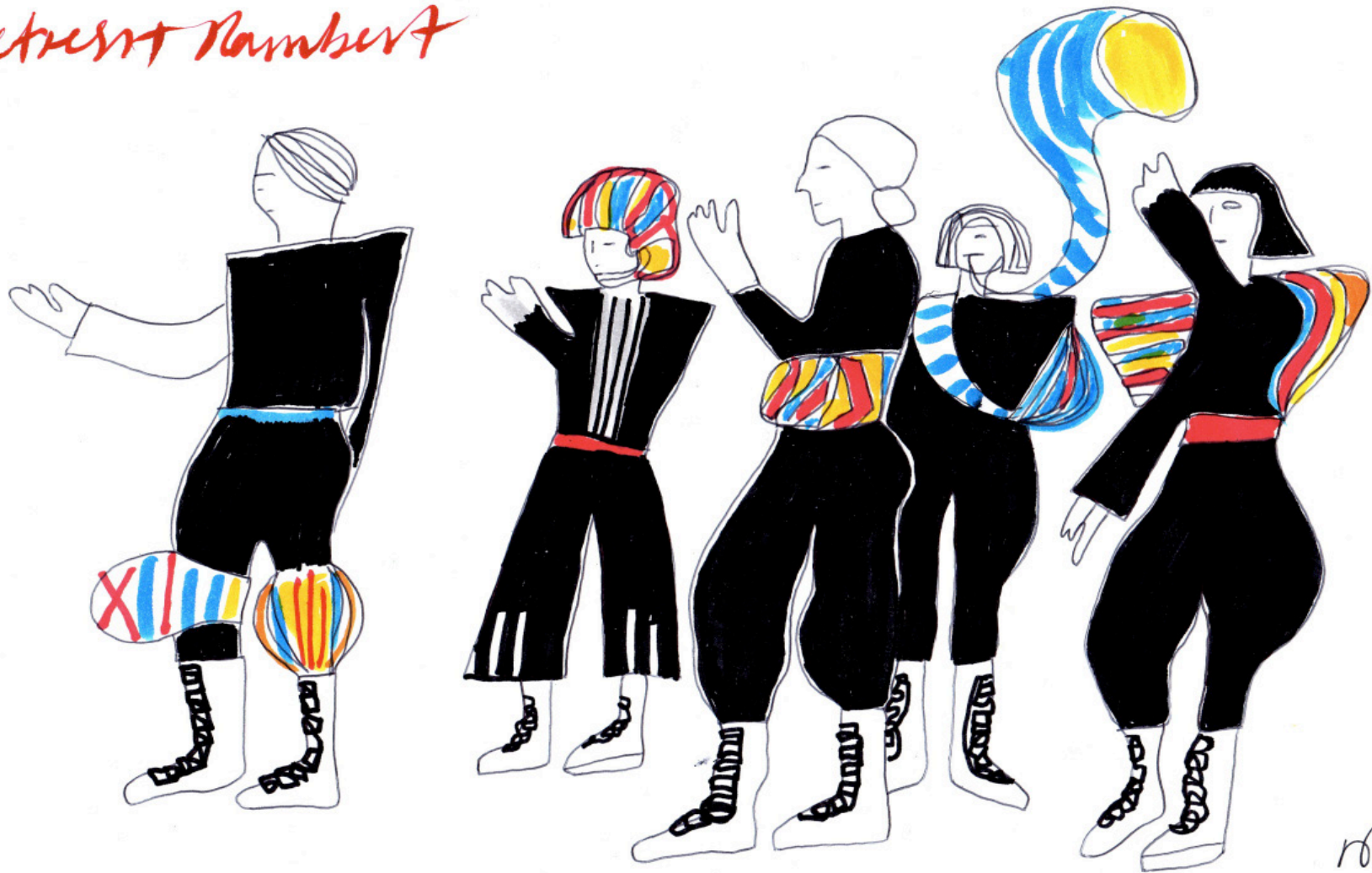
Key Texts:

Bugg, Jessica (2011) 'The clothed body in fashion and performance' in *Journal of the Museum of Applied Art* (7). pp. 64-74

Butler, C. and Pérez-Oramas, L. (2014) *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art* (New York: MOMA)

Eleey, P. (2014) 'If you couldn't see me: the drawings of Trisha Brown', online essay, Walker Art Gallery, Minneapolis, available at: (<http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/drawings-of-trisha-brown/>)

Collectress Rambert



Collectress + Rambert
80's suits tucked into boots' wearable sculptures: knee pads, elbow pads, helmet, waist pad,
sound piece + shoulder pads boxing white boots + bells

r6/6

Initial drawings for Light Dial 1,
Rambert Contemporary Dance New
Choreography Platform, 2016

*Pattern development for Light Dial 1,
Rambert Contemporary Dance New
Choreography Platform, 2016*





*Initial collages for Light Dial 1,
Rambert Contemporary Dance
New Choreography Platform, 2016*

Research Methods and Process

The group of collaborators worked with a number of approaches to develop the project: using play and experimental 'doing' as a form of making and thinking; sharing collaborative approaches to improvisation; exploring motifs within dance, sound and image; sharing methods inherent to each discipline that relate to the body's physicality; testing and expanding on ways of presenting experiments through dance, performance, composition, sound, object, pattern and costume.

As the choreographer and dancers workshopped their movements and the musicians developed a score through repetition and improvisation, Rutter & Bennett made multiple rapid drawings, using digital techniques to quickly turn these into prints that were taken back to the workshops for feedback and further development. The prints were transformed into wearable sculptural costumes for the five members of Collectress and two dancers. For the dancers in particular this approach was unfamiliar. They were accustomed to being given a designed and fabricated costume, requiring only a final fit. Rutter & Bennett's approach located the design of the prints and wearable sculptures within a development process that combined choreography, music and two and three dimensional form, based on spontaneity and improvisation, breaking down the demarcations and hierarchies used in traditional modes of production for performance.

This process is documented in a 'making-of' film:
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww5be9Z_Pmw)

The final performance can be seen in the Light Dial trailer:
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AakdpdZCN6U>)

A blog of the design process is also available:
(<https://rutterandbennettcollectressrambert.wordpress.com/>)

Light Dial 2 extended the workshop process to the performance itself, drawing in the audience as active participants, and moving from the generation of wearable designs to the creation of an improvised 'set', created by the projection of live drawing onto the walls of the performance space as the performance unfolded.

In the exhibition that accompanied the performance of *Light Dial 3*, the process of collaboration was itself recycled back into the outcome. An 'email reader' built by Rutter & Bennett from scavenged parts of old computer equipment displayed various looped email communications sent in the course of the collaboration alongside videos of repeated movements by dancers and performers. A large wall-drawing of the various collaborators was fitted with electronic triggers for music samples from Collectress's new musical arrangement, allowing the piece to be 'played' by the viewer.

Key Texts:

Barr, S. (2015) 'Collaborative practices in dance research: unpacking the process' in *Research in Dance Education*, 16:1, pp.51-66

Freeman, J. (ed) (2010) *Blood, Sweat and Theory: Research through Practice in Performance*. London: Libri

Gell, A. (1998) *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon

Research Insights and Contribution

Research insights and contribution:

The *Light Dial* project, and Rutter & Bennett's role in it, set out a working method for how collaboration and improvisation in the creation of performance can be extended across all the creative disciplines that contribute to that performance, including costume and set design.

The research showed how the visual and material contributions of drawing, pattern and sculpture to costume and set design can be developed through live improvisation in performance, and how pattern as an expanded notion crosses disciplines, and can be explored productively using digital techniques to facilitate rapid improvisation.

Research Dissemination and Recognition

Dissemination:

Light Dial 1, 2016: open rehearsal and live performance (2 nights) at Rambert Contemporary Dance New Choreography Platform, London (<https://vimeo.com/202561699>).

Rambert is the UK's oldest dance company, founded in 1926. It is one of the world's leading dance companies, based on London's South Bank and touring its productions internationally. It is an Arts Council England National Portfolio organisation.

'Making-of' film: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ww5be9Z_Pmw)

Light Dial trailer: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AakdpdZCN6U>)

Blog of the design process: (<https://rutterandbennettcollectressrambert.wordpress.com/>)

Light Dial 2, 2017: live performance at the Digital/Material Conference, UCA Rochester with exhibition at Zandra Rhodes Gallery and conference paper.

Light Dial 3, 2018: live performance and exhibition at Leaf Hall, Eastbourne (Devonshire Collective).

Devonshire Collective is an arts organisation based in Bournemouth which supports and develops emerging, mid-career and established artists in the visual and performing arts. It runs several venues including Leaf Hall.

Follow-on activities:

Collaboration with Aline Helmcke of Bauhaus Universitat, Weimar incorporating wearable sculpture into live action animation. Funded by Bauhaus Universitat and UCA.

Dissemination through Weimar Poetry Film Festival, Exhibition at ACC Gallery Weimar (postponed due to Covid 19)

Publication for Bauhaus Universitat, funded by Bauhaus Universitat.



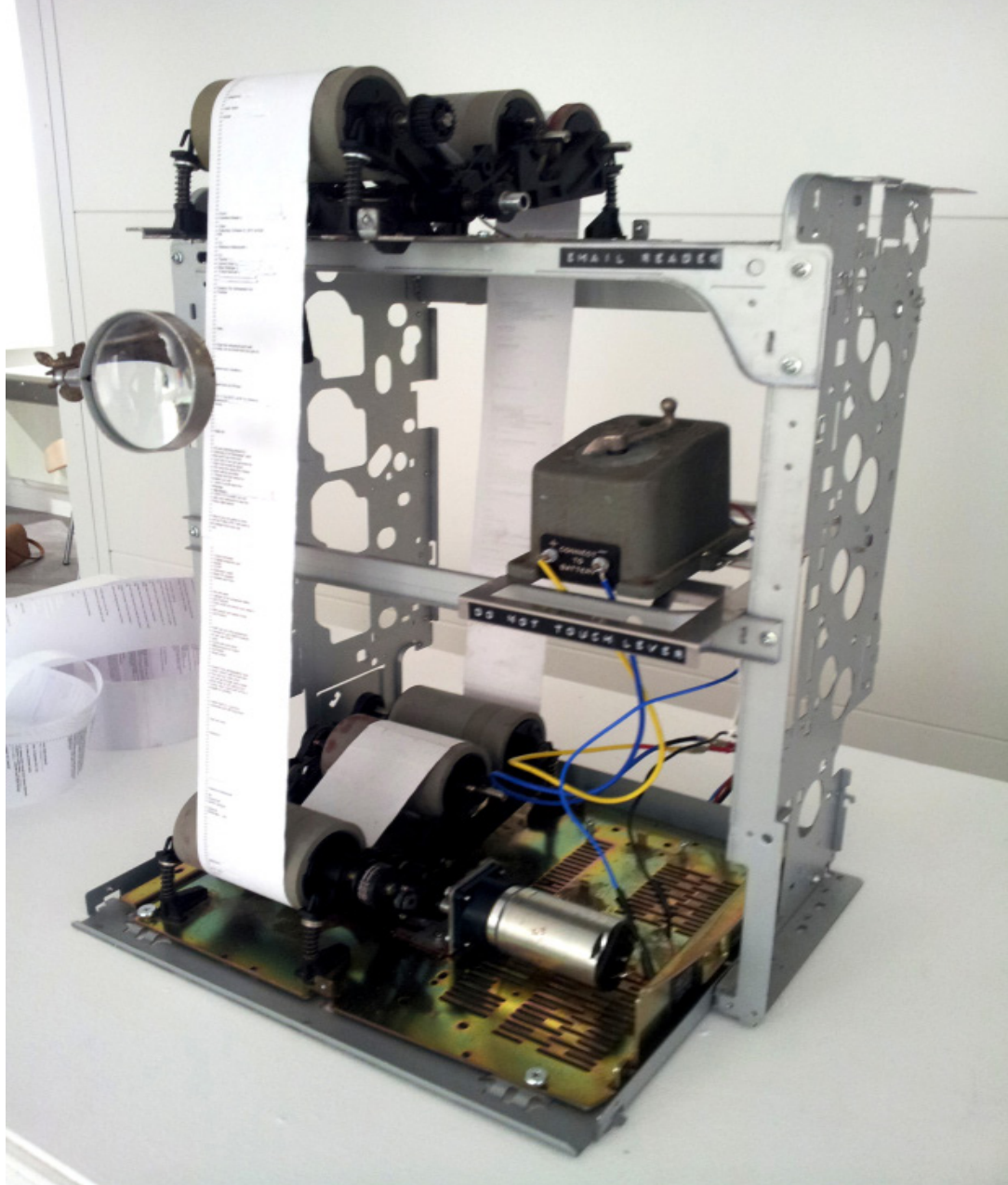
*Light Dial 1 performance,
Rambert Contemporary
Dance New Choreography
Platform, 2016*

*Light Dial 1 performance,
Rambert Contemporary Dance New
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*Light Dial 2,
Digital/Material conference
UCA Rochester, 2017*



*Light Dial 3
Leaf Hall, Eastbourne, 2018
Email reader; Rutter and Bennett
drawing on the overhead projector*



Light Dial 3
Leaf Hall, Eastbourne, 2018



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