



Lisa Freeman

Slipped, Fell and Smacked My Face off The Dance Floor

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<https://aemi.ie/works/lisa-freeman-slipped-fell/>

The video of *Slipped, Fell and Smacked My Face off The Dance Floor* offers a compelling viewing experience of the site-specific performance of the same name by Lisa Freeman presented in June of this year with Mermaid Arts Centre. Her flair for activating the now defunct sea bathing pool at Naylor's Cove in Bray is evocatively captured in this twenty minute work. Freeman's intricate staging and choreography reveal a complex interplay and overlay of ideas around health, leisure, emotion and the body that are amplified by her rhythmic and pathos-infused script.

Dennis McNulty opens up the work even further in his accompanying introductory text. Drawing on a rich set of references, ranging from Beckett to the semiotics of fashion, the text weaves seamlessly between concept and context. McNulty considers the significance of the cove, the physicality of the performers and the styling of their costumes to capture the exquisite energy of *Slipped, Fell and Smacked My Face off The Dance Floor*.

The closed captions were produced by Eat the Pips in collaboration with the artist. To activate the captions, click the CC button and select English (Ireland) CC.

Introductory text by Dennis McNulty

A Collection of Differences

Slipped, Fell and Smacked My Face off The Dance Floor propagates outward like a Mandelbrot fractal animation, the parts containing the whole. It tumbles in time and space, occasionally threatening to shake itself to pieces with the asymmetric energy of a lopsided motor. It has been said that the truth of a mechanism emerges in its moment of collapse. Here, we see the vibrations in close-up. Each oscillation flickers like the shadow of a cloud across the performers' faces, passing through their bodies and into their limbs before being absorbed into the environment. Anguish. Anxiety. But totally normal. Totally fine. I'm grand. People keeping it together: trying, failing, performing. Totally fine. No, seriously. I'm fine. They play/ act the kinds of motifs that humans play/ act for each other in the run of the mill, as a reassurance that things are proceeding as expected, as hoped. Fingers crossed. Please God. The rules of encounter and the words they say are embodied in a manner that communicates a kind of calm working through of the shame, or confusion, they feel at their inability to account for the situation they find themselves in. The parts are recognisable but their arrangement is... challenging. They talk into the air, not really saying things to each other. Just putting it out there. Monologues come out of their mouths and land in an unsettling quasi-apocalyptic real-world faux-CGI scenario. Norms are deployed in the face of an abnormal state of affairs. Like their clothes, it's all a bit uncomfortable, a bit mismatched, but carefully, consciously so.

Lisa Freeman's video *Slipped, Fell and Smacked My Face off The Dance Floor* is steeped in its context, specific to a tidal setting, a place of nature at the edge of an island; at the edge of a continent. Naylor's Cove is the site of a historical attempt to wrangle a framework for health and leisure into being. If you're Irish, you'll know Bray. If you're not, just think of any Victorian seaside town. This particular seafront crescent is currently somewhat neglected, separated as it is by geology from the sweep of the town's main stony beach. It's a shadowed space where teenage couples hang out in the evenings and people walk their dogs in the daytime. Of the former baths, only discontinuous planes of concrete remain, strange stage-like chunks, some cast adrift among the wave-worn pebbles and stones. A long, thin limb pokes out into the sea like a makeshift concrete catwalk. The *Slipped, Fell...* performers definitely feel styled for the season, the slicking of their hair and the tangle of their garb echoing fashion's knowing nods to the just-past; the marrying of

sportswear and formal elements in the same look communicating mixed messages; a work/ life imbalance.

There's something of the air of a fashion shoot in the performers' restlessness too, the way they shimmer in front of the camera, the way they repeatedly re-style themselves. Clothes are removed, draped over others, shifted around and put back on again. There is layering and a feeling that someone may lose track of where everything is or should be. It's like that dream where you realise you're in a public space but you're only wearing your underwear. These incredible performers feel closer to models, in both the fashion and scientific sense, than characters. They are blank but they bring their own energy to the presentation. They are a substrate but they contaminate the material they host. They are delivery mechanisms but like all infrastructure, they shape the thing they support. They are not neutral. They're magnetic. To watch them do the things they do is to watch them disprove the idea that thinking happens only inside the brain. What a hilarious thought! Haven't you ever slipped, fallen and smacked your face off the dance floor? Some philosophers have suggested that in certain circumstances objects outside of the body become part of the mind. *Slipped, Fell...* seems to suggest that we could go further, proposing that, under certain conditions, people can mutually extend each other's minds. The on-screen humans perform this kind of mutual mind extension, smudging the boundaries between self and other, between body and object, between inside and outside. I am happy in the knowledge that they're out there, somewhere, doing this research for us.

At some basic level, *Slipped, Fell...* asks the 'nature of reality' question. Is reality always already out there or is it something that's happening inside us? As we watch, we turn to each other and wonder, "did you just see what I saw"? In this working through of philosophical fundamentals, Freeman's video has much in common with the works of Samuel Beckett. Other parallels include the precision of its choreography; the musical, permutational nature of its structure and 'script'; its deadpan, deadly serious absurdity; and its concentration on all of the things that language can't do. It has always seemed to me that the stage is a mind in Beckett's works. His plays establish an internally consistent logic at odds with the non-stage (non-mind) world and ruminate on the gap. Therein lies their value. Likewise, the space of *Slipped, Fell...* could be considered a mental space, one rendered with bodies and words and clothing and music and the sea. It's not that the on-screen bodies map directly onto thoughts. It's not that they converse, like Beckett's bodies,

in a way that might resemble a subject's internal dialogue. It's more that – in their doubt and anxiety, their clustering and repeated reconfiguration, their attempts to fit in, to mimic each other, the objects present in the setting and the setting itself – they enact a process of cognition, a process of acquiring knowledge. They don't have the answers but they face their world's contradictions head on, attempting to map an understanding of its ongoing weirdness through mutual support, recognition and action.

What is an artwork, if not a device for simmering contradictions, for reducing them, not in the sense of lessening them but in the sense of thickening them and heightening their intrinsic flavours? Video is the perfect vehicle for this kind of cookery. One common ingredient in media compression algorithms is the concept of storing the variation between consecutive frames rather than the frames themselves. Redundant information is systematically evaporated from the file, boiled down until all that remains is a collection of differences. In the case of *Slipped, Fell and Smacked My Face off The Dance Floor*, this feels particularly apt.

Dennis McNulty

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