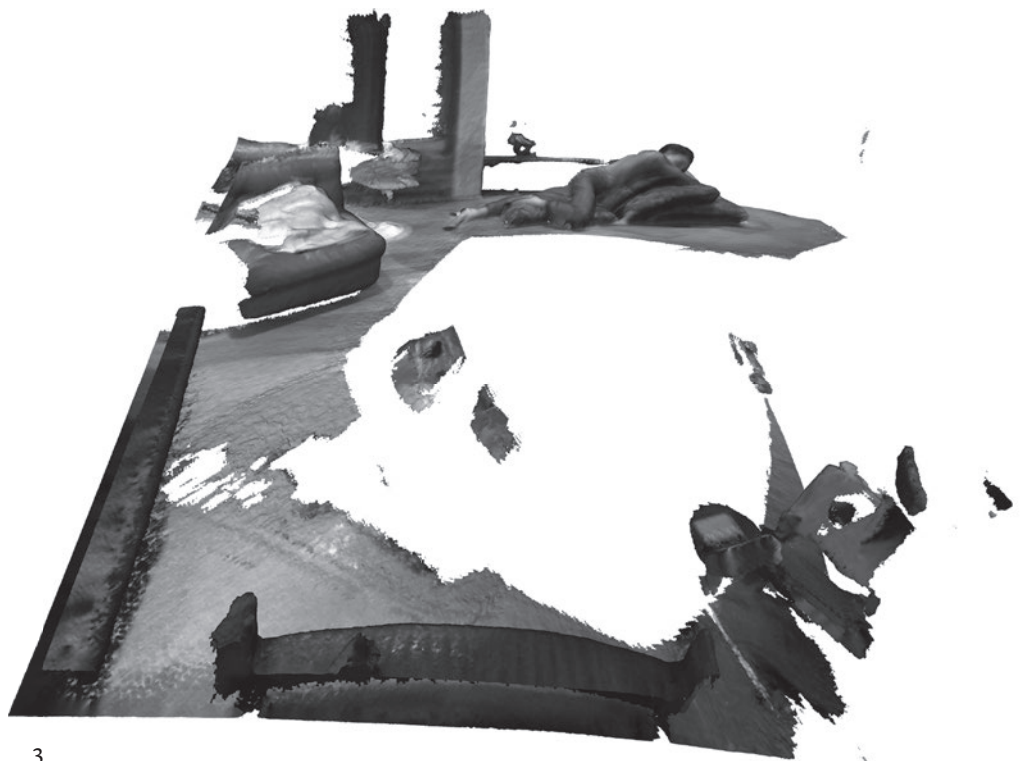




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ARCHITECTURE OF MEMORY

Brittany Engel-Adams



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1 Brittany Engel-Adams, *lying inverted figure on couch*, 2020, 3D scan. The image is a 3D scan of myself laying on a couch with legs inverted during Tea Time practice. I'm imagining that I am resting on a mass of clouds. Blending the weight of my body with its light and delicate texture. Momentarily I disembod-

experiencing a freedom of existence that happens on the spirit or soul level. My mind goes in one direction while the body goes in another.

2 Brittany Engel-Adams, *profile figure*, 2020, 3D scan. The image is a 3D scan of a re-enactment of Sue Lemay Cooper (my great, great grandmother) that I rotated 90 degrees.

Grandma Sue is standing in stillness, captivated by the beauty of her lush garden. She reaches her left hand high towards the blue sky, to express gratitude for the abundant blessing she has received from God.

3 Brittany Engel-Adams, *Resting figure*, 2020, 3D scan. Color data of a 3D scan of myself.

A dreamer
I am an architect of memory
I live in the clouds
My body recomposing
Shifting the almost-disappearing landscape
between perception and sensation
my body-worlding
displacing linear time

Architecture of Memory is a choreography of recollections that come from me but connect to something I don't know. In this project, I'm trying to embrace my family and ancestors by imagining memories that don't exist. I'm attempting to establish this connection, but there is a paradoxical tension between what is present (in the form of my body and its intuition) and what is missing (the rituals, stories, and cultural traditions). What I've inherited (the *thereness*) has been missing (or partially missing), yet its absence is present. The instinctive capacity to bridge the past to the present is not enough.

My ancestors are present within the most quotidian gestures—leaning, sitting, resting, or reaching. It is an invisible but almost tangible connection that links to my body, which is always more-than-one. It is the movement that pre-accelerates me. It colors and shapes every movement that I make. I experience this relation most palpably during long periods of stillness, when subtle shifts in and around the body become perceptible on a microscopic level. Staying still, time slows down and my sensations are heightened. This is where stillness becomes relevant in my work. There's so much movement happening in stillness.

While 3D scans are similar to photographs (so far as they capture a moment in time), the process of making them is tedious and involves several stages. The scan has more dimensionality than the photograph. It can be viewed from many angles. It has the potential to take on many forms, functioning like a mold or replica.

There is something beautiful about the transformation from the real moment to the digital scan of it. This process shapes a moment that is similar to mold-making or even mummification—a methodology for preserving a body. Preserving a moment is preserving a body.

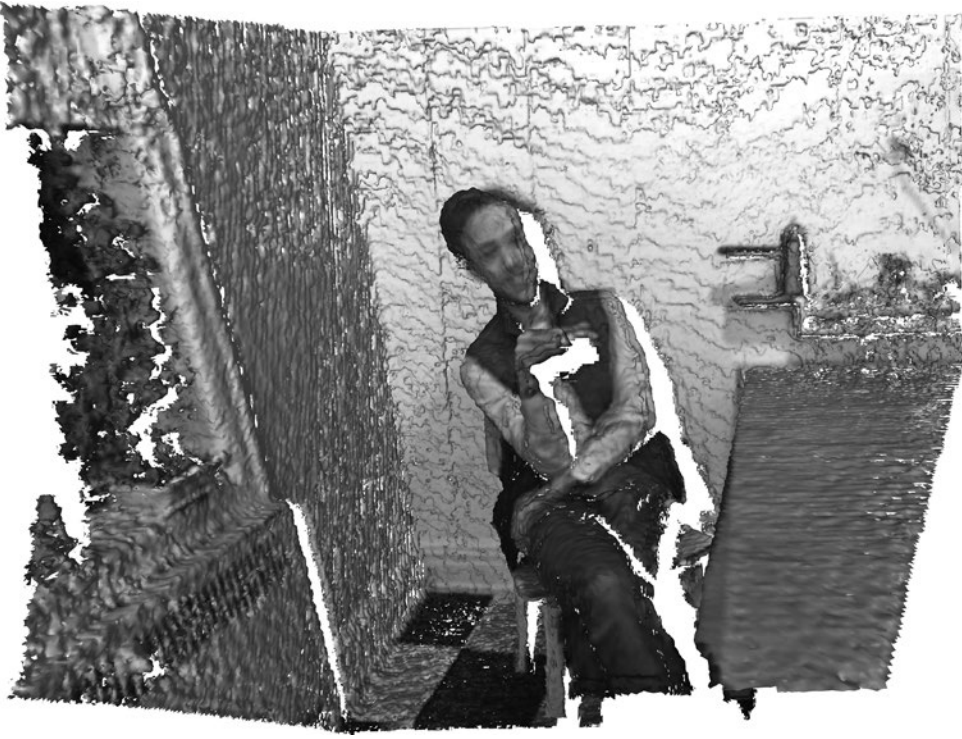
There is a palpable and conceptual connection between making 3D scans and meeting ancestors—a similar procedure of zooming-in. One process zooms inward toward my body; one process zooms into deep consideration of family. Recovering ancestry from your own interiority produces an imaginative space. The recovery is transformational.

Tea Time for the Imperfect Memory is a restorative practice that I developed to calm my nervous system. It heightens

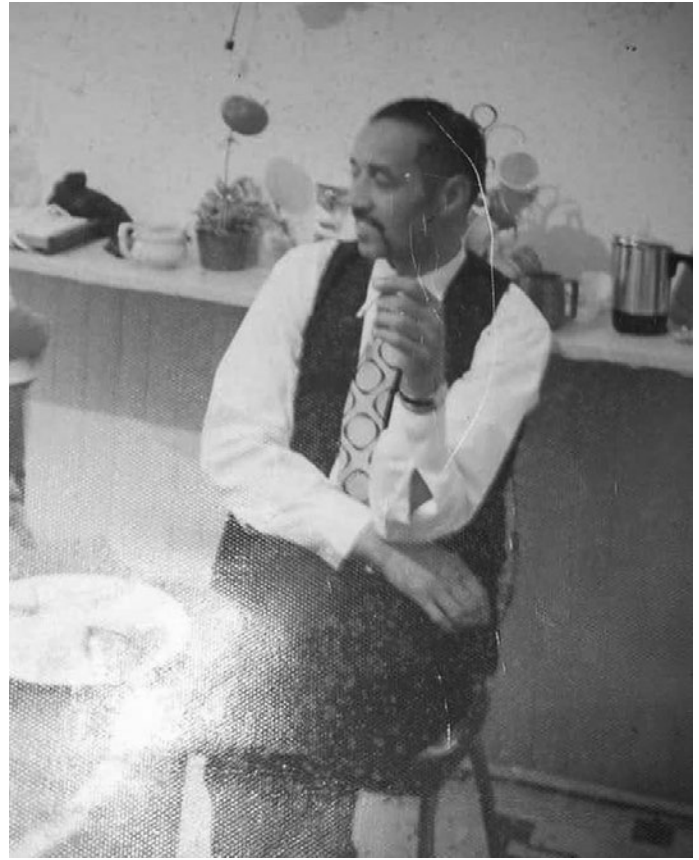
and amplifies the sensorial sensitivity and receptivity of the body. *Tea Time* is about moving the interiority of the self, outward. It involves long periods of stillness in lying or seated positions and slow movement that attunes the body, finding balance and unity between the environment, mind, and body. While in this meditative practice and calm interior place, I make body scans using Kinect Motion Capture devices and artificial intelligence software that three-dimensionally scan and render my body.

Rendering a Memory interprets and re-enacts individual gestures from family photographs as a way to embody my ancestors. I had many conversations with family members via Zoom calls and letters before (re)performing family photographs. I asked questions about our family heritage, traditions, customs, and practices that were passed down from previous generations. I used Otter.ai, a transcription app that uses artificial intelligence, to convert audio recordings of these conversations into texts. The results were not always consistent with what was being said. The software was way off, at times, misinterpreting the words or creating fragments in the text. I found these errors interesting, because they are consistent with the glitchiness that often occurs while recalling a memory.

Virtual Correspondence between my grandmother and myself on a Zoom conference discussing Sue Lemay Cooper (my great-great-grandmother). The call was transcribed with the Otter.ai audio-to-text service. Its content is fabricated using fictional memories that are interspersed throughout the conversation. I rearranged the text and omitted parts. According to the AI program, my grandmother and I are unidentifiable. It refers to me as Unknown Speaker 1, and to my grandmother as Unknown Speaker 2. My grandmother is a very lovely and very private person. I intentionally kept her identity anonymous to respect her privacy. Our exchange occurred during the summer of 2020, amidst the Covid-19 lockdown. I reached out to her during that time to be closer to her, as I did with many family members who I feel distant from. This conversation is one of the very few times that I've spoken to my grandmother. I met her in person, only once, when I was just a few months old.



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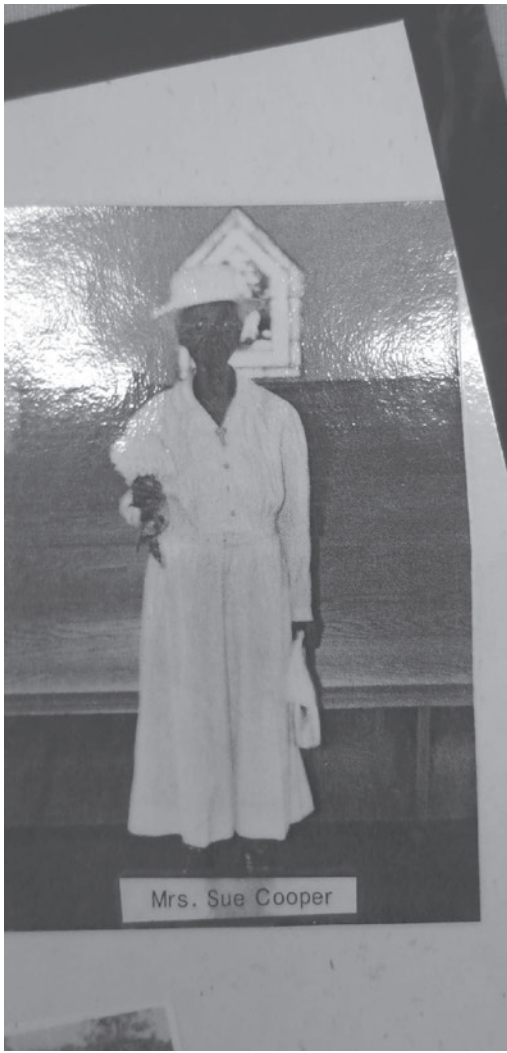
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4 Brittany Engel-Adams, *Re-enactment of Benjamin Bobbit*, 2020, 3D scan. Color data of a 3D scan of myself re-enacting a photo of my great-grandfather Benjamin Bobbit Sr., ca. 1960, hanging out and smoking a cigarette in his kitchen in Henderson, North Carolina.

5 Photo of Benjamin Bobbit, 1960, family photograph. Benjamin Bobbit Sr. (great-grandfather) born in Franklin County, North Carolina, on March 15, 1920, to Cynthia and Thomas Bobbit, married Bessie Cooper on August 28, 1941. He fought in World War II.

6 Brittany Engel-Adams, *Re-enactment of Rebecca John Roberts*, 2020, 3D scan. Color data of a 3D scan of myself re-enacting a portrait of my grandmother Rebecca John Roberts ca. 1970.

7 Photo of Rebecca John Roberts, 1970, family photograph. Rebecca John Roberts (grandmother), born in Henderson, North Carolina, in 1945 to Benny Bobbit, Sr. and Bessie Lou Bobbit.



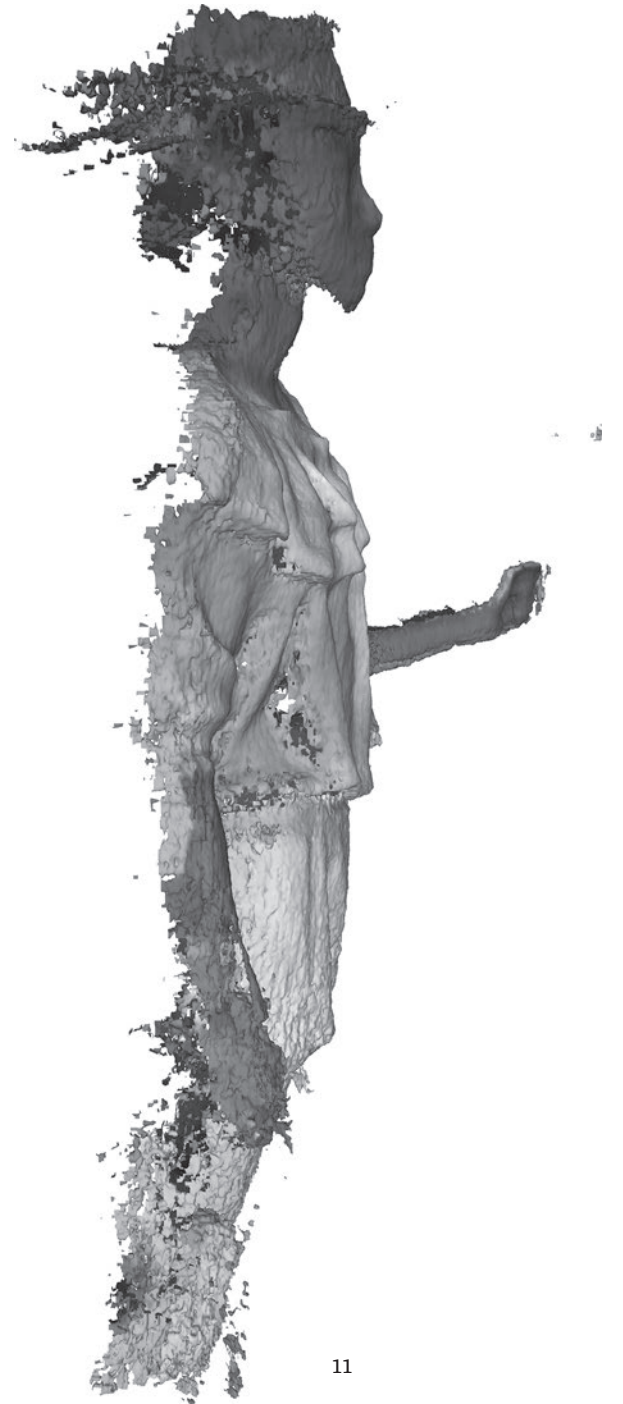
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8 Photo of Sue Lemay Cooper, 1930, family photograph. Sue Lemay Cooper (great-great-grandmother) born in Henderson, North Carolina, on June 15, 1887. Grandma Sue was a very strong, spiritual elder in her community and an incredibly gifted woman. She was one of the mothers of the church, which is equivalent to being a deacon. Sue Lemay Cooper died in Henderson, North Carolina, in 1983, and was buried in Red Bud Baptist Church next to my great-grandmother, Bessie Bobbit.

9 Brittany Engel-Adams, *Re-enactment of Anna and David Rackman*, 2020, 3D scan. Color data of a 3D scan of myself and Ron Erlih re-enacting a photo of my great-grandparents at their 50th anniversary in Albany, New York.

10 Photo of Anna and David Rackman, 1960, family photograph. David Rackman (great-grandfather) born in the early 1880s in the city of Sluzk (Slucki, Lithuania) to Menachem and Rachel Rachmilewich next to Chana (Anna) (great-grand mother), born in Albany in 1892 to Israel and Chaya Manaschewitz. They ran a dried-good store in Albany, New York, Anna would run the store while David, a Rabbi, studied Torah all day.

11 Brittany Engel-Adams, *Re-enactment of Sue Lemay Cooper*, 2020, 3D scan. Color data of a 3D scan of myself re-enacting a portrait of my great-great-grandmother Sue Lemay Cooper. She is standing inside of our family's church, Red Bud Baptist church in Henderson, North Carolina.

Unknown Speaker 2: I was born. I was born. I was born during the apartheid era, you know, where you have colored fountains and colored bathrooms and couldn't go into a movie theater, but you had a special place there for you. So, I was little girl in that era. I lived with my grandmother. Because my mom and my dad after the war, left and went up, went to Schenectady to work. And so they left me with my grandmother. Can you hear me dear? Yeah, yes. Okay. Yeah. And, and so I was raised by a very, very wonderful, beautiful lady named Sue Cooper. And the word Cooper means barrel maker, because that's what my grandfather was. His family was back in the day when we were servants not paid, unpaid servants. He was a barrel maker. And so they usually named their workers last name sometimes after their job. So he was what they call the Cooper and my grandmother and who got married and their family put their land together in North Carolina, and, have a nice plot of land there. So, we all lived there. And Henderson, North Carolina, the land there, is so special. Can you hear me dear? It is a gift from God. The house there sits on a plot of land, they say that soil there is made from magic.

Unknown Speaker 1: It's fading away. Oh, there's grandma. I think she's getting back in.

Unknown Speaker 2: Hear me? Can you hear me dear? Well. I hope you don't see me. I don't want to be seen on camera. Okay. Am I on camera?

Unknown Speaker 1: No. Only your voice, only your voice is...

Unknown Speaker 2: Let me go back. Let me go back, to my childhood, my grandma Sue, let me go. I'm having all kinds of crazy... I want to stay with Grandma. Grandma Sue, she was a beautiful lady. She set the pace for our family. She made herself a wonderful example of a human being... I never saw Sue get too angry, or too sad. Of sorts. In a big way. She was a very strict and devout Christian lady who believed so holy in the Lord. And she loved the Lord very much. She was very active in her church, which is, you know, Redbud Baptist Church. It's a country church, very beautiful. If you could see it. It's sitting in the woods. It's a beautiful chapel out there in the woods. One day, maybe you'll get to see it there. Brittany, can you see it? It's just a gorgeous place. And I was raised in that church. And I went every time the door opened. Every time. My grandmother was a great woman in that church. She worshipped there. And we went to the pastor's house for dinner. They came and in the summertime. Summertime, we have what they call revival at the church. So my grandmother, and my aunt would entertain the guest speakers there. So you know they would cook for them. I don't know how they did it. They, my grandmother and my aunt work all day at a job. But before they went to the job, they would make breakfast for these pastors. And this breakfast would be chicken, a fried chicken.

Unknown Speaker 1: you're fading in and out.

Unknown Speaker 2: I'm sorry. I don't know what to do about that. What do you do about that?

Unknown Speaker 1: Is there a spot with a better connection? Can you move closer to a window?

Unknown Speaker 2: I got this huge window right here in my bedroom. This way, I face gorgeous bougainvillea trees. There are wild lilies and dandelions, many lovely things dear...

Matter of fact, my grandmother, Sue Cooper, my grandmother, and my uncle Moses her brother. They have a beautiful stained-glass window there that's dedicated to them. Because my grandmother was sort of the founder of the church. And so in the end in the maze, that's your uncle Moses. The Lemays were a big part of that church. Let me go back... Let me go back. My grandmother's maiden name is Lemay. That was our uncle Moses' name. He had a huge farm in what they call Kittrell, North Carolina, a huge farm. And, he grew tobacco, and cotton. No, no, didn't grow tobacco. He grew cotton. And he had twenty-three children... my sister and I used to go and live with Uncle, uncle Moses, sometimes in the summertime, just to be on his farm. And we have fun. And so... You know, I could tell you things, but I couldn't tell you things. While I'm sitting here, just saying. Is this how it happened? ... I wonder, especially when you're trying to tell something over a period of years. You only remember bits and pieces, right? But, when you have, you see people on a regular basis, and you remember things, they become a little bit more personal.

Reenactments create togetherness with my family. They bring a sense of belonging and are an attempt to recover and reach for something from my past that feels incomplete. I hope to establish a foundation from which to grow. I don't have a lot handed down to me from my family, but I have what I imagined I've inherited from them.

The machine learning app and I are looking at the photograph, the frame, and trying to find the human pose at the moment the photograph was taken. The app's model returns a prediction. In the reenactments of my family photographs, I have my own predictions, assumptions and imagination, and I bring all of that richness back to the digital AI model.

Through this process I'm distancing myself from my identity—the digital portraits override reductive categorization, and help communicate my complicated relationship with my identity.

Not knowing my family stimulates a feeling of loss that is echoed in the quality of the scans. They look like digital leftovers as if it's deteriorating—fading and imperfect, but with a richness to the texture; visually, the digital scans contain the quality of these imperfect memories.

Legibility of memory, a digital catalog with maps, tessellations, scans, and 3D models. It combines archival research with manipulation of fictional memory via hacked Kinect equipment, a retrofitted game console controller that I use to create 3D scans of my body as a form of self-portraiture. The portraits are distilled from performative moments of practice framing an intimate moment, an inward reflective gesture. In this place I connect to my ancestors.

~~The imagination, a virtual chamber, landscape of potential force. It's an energy source that holds space and creates the conditions for the actual (for real events) to unfold. It precedes the hair toss, the application of the lip gloss, the hand wave, the grande jete, the leg kick, the karate kick, and the swan dive—or any gesture for that matter—it colors and shapes the quality of these gestures. Yet the movements have no beginning or ending. It's a matter of when we decide to dive in, to pay attention by looking, listening, seeing, tasting, smelling—or not.~~

And though every one of these gestures my body renders is a learned behavior, each contains the presence of prior knowledge, embodied knowledge that was inherited from my ancestors. The ancestors are always present in all my movements and gestures. The movements that precede us are the movements of the ancestors; the movement that pre-accelerates you is your family. Call it the incipency—or the movements of the not yet.

That movement was already occurring before we decided to displace it; it's the multiplicity of our embodied history and knowledge that's been carried intergenerationally through the vessel of the body. This cultural inheritance is not a concrete thing, rather it's embedded within a space between fact and fiction, between tradition and intuition.

The legibility of memory is a mystery. That is, it is there, but it might need activation to be perceptible.

There is sensual familiarity alongside and interwoven with the practice of re-performing family photographs I am making 3D scans and 3D avatars of myself. I collaborated with my partner Ron Erlih, a visual artist working with computers, on a series of data and software-based works that came out of a collaboration. For one of these works, *Memory Dance*, Ron wrote a program using an AI machine learning model (developed by Open Natural Interaction) that recognizes a human posture. The program creates a live mirror avatar replicating my changing postures. It functions similarly to a musical “looper,” where I can record my movement as the AI model recognizes my posture, repeats and overlays it with my other movement recordings.

The mind's ephemeral world filled with ideas and thoughts; sometimes incomplete, nevertheless rich and sweet. Thoughts have so much power. They might turn me into a monster,

frustrated and upset at the world, because of something I am holding on to, or they might reflect my best moments and memories that I cling to with fondness. Whether they bring up a positive or negative association, activating memory takes effort.

It's about paying attention in a sensual way; it's the kind of attention that sparks the familiar, a kind of attention that renders the legibility of memory.

Sensual familiarity reproduces scenes from the past, replaying them in the mind and signaling the anticipation of a moment before it begins. Automatically and unconsciously, sensual familiarity reproduces responses to feelings and associations from the past. The way we feel now is inevitably informed by what we've already experienced, and we can't help but compare every moment of our present to our past. We are carrying these feelings, always confined by the past, and these feelings condition the present.

Being inside the place of a memory—in that moment—you're there without being there. The mind goes in one direction, while the body goes in another.

The phenomenology of memory is experiential and sensual; it creates an environment and shifts the reality of both the present and the past. Experiencing a sensation is in itself a kind of environment that moves you out of linear time: It is a process of shifting between the interchangeability of perception, feeling, and action, each one of which impacts the other.

I experience memory as being induced by the senses that brings something familiar in the way memory is triggered by sensual recall. You can be overwhelmed by a swell of sensation from smelling lavender in your garden: Suddenly you are displaced to a similar moment when, as a curious six-year-old kid you first smelled the flower. The environment is conditioned by how we remember the past.

In the place where imperfect memories have escaped
between the gaps that have fallen by the wayside,
remains. Imperfect structures
fractured like shards of glass.

Shaping the body toward the past,
Slowing down,
more present in the moment,
listening more acutely to how
time and energy shape
my body.

Dancing with an avatar/understanding the gaps.
These sets of tools interrogate the things that
are missing.

There is no resolve, just exposing what is already there.
Facing the past, I remember why I've forgotten it
only to be reminded that the past isn't really the past;
it's always been there, and very present.
It's just a matter of when and how I became aware.

Brittany Engel-Adams is a dancer, choreographer, and teacher living in New York. Her work overlaps choreography with digital technology and photography to tell counter-narratives of the Black body that override reductive categorization.