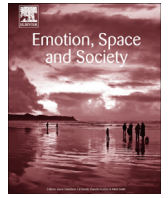




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## Dizziness—A Resource: Dizziness and the compossible space in research-creation

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'[O]n the one hand we are in danger of burning up, of evaporating, of going too fast, of dissolving, and on the other hand we are in danger of freezing, rigidifying, of becoming mummified and unable to move. Dizziness contains within it both extremes.'

(Katzmair, 2015; <http://on-dizziness.com>, no pagination)

'For most who tend to seek balance, the lack of it leads to a state of crisis and loss of control; for explorers, boundary crossers, and creative personalities, this is in fact what drives their works.'

(Shmailov, 2016; <http://on-dizziness.com>, no pagination)

### 1. Introduction

This article summarises part of the findings of our research-creation *Dizziness—A Resource* (2014–17) funded by the Austrian Science Fund and hosted at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. We will introduce the two underlying key concepts, related practice examples, and tell the story of experimental filmmaker Oskar

Fischinger's wax-slicing machine. Furthermore, we will give insight into the philosophical background of the methodology that we have developed throughout the research process. This article underlines the creative potential of dizziness by introducing new ways it may be conceptualised, thinking with and through the frames of emotions and space.

Dizziness is understood as a phenomenon of embodied knowledge (Manning, 2009; Varto, 2013), blurring categorisation between the perception and conception of dizziness. *Taumel*, German for 'dizziness', implies a broader semantic field including medical indications of vertigo and further notions of physical and emotional disequilibrium, exhilaration, confusion, uncertainty, disorientation, and turmoil. *Taumel* therefore includes positive, negative, and ambiguous connotations. Mirroring the research trajectory, this jointly written text oscillates between cross-disciplinary conceptualisation and practice, approaching dizziness in a metaphorical sense as object and method. Research-creation as the combination of arts-based research and research-based art (Loveless, 2015; Manning, 2008) allows for manifold approaches, heterogeneous formats, diverse outcomes, and contradicting methods as modes of 'curiosity, sustained questioning, and analysis' (Green, 2012: 272). As in dizziness, we believe that the strength of research-creation resides in its ambiguous, wide-stretched and diversity-affirming nature. The first key concept we introduce in this paper relates to dizziness as a possible resource for creativity. The second explores 'compossibility' as an actual and theoretical space for the experience of, and reflection on, dizziness. Both concepts are mutually dependent if they are to bring about their creative potential.

*Dizziness—A Resource* started from the assumption that feelings of dizziness – of being lost or disoriented (Solnit, 2005; Ladewig, 2016) – are not only a part of the artistic and philosophical, but also of any creative process (Anderwald et al., 2013; Anderwald and Grond, 2015; Feist, 1998; Feyertag, 2015; Jullien, 2012; 2015; Montuori, 1994). Consequently, we inquired when, where, and how dizziness arises and how the experience of, and reflection on, dizziness and its conceptualisation can lead to a better understanding of inherent creative processes. Relating to the first key concept, our proposition is that the notion of dizziness could provide a critique of simplistic views on creative processes that describe them as logical circuits, e.g. 'break in, break down,

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break through' (Anderwald and Grond, 2015; Deleuze, 2003; Katzmaier, 2015; Marks, 1998). Moreover, dizziness as a 'concept in motion' needs a mode of thinking infused by movement, not relying on fixed points but on moving relations and shifting anchor points (Strong, 2004). Our critique underlines the importance of the creation of 'compossible spaces' by the interaction and collaboration of persons who feel affected by dizziness in different or even conflicting ways, experiencing it as fear and/or pleasure. Within these 'compossible spaces' dizziness as movement becomes a resource, shaking and swiping away long-established oppositions and making room for the unfolding of seemingly contradictory feelings, processes, theories, matters, and disciplines.

## 2. Falling into dizziness

Dizziness arises locally and combines various elements: theory and emotion, momentum and disorientation, time and space. It can clear, cause a great stir, or move heaven and earth – it destabilises. According to Plato, dizziness constitutes all philosophical thought by destabilising the basis of knowledge to a state of uncertainty: as an ontological state it can prompt transformation and innovation (Plato, *Timaeus*: 49e; Echterhölter et al., 2010). The dizzy individual experiences an emotional rollercoaster ride involving feelings of exhilaration, anxiety, and disorientation. Exposure to dizziness increasingly reduces predictability and our ability to exercise control.

From a medical perspective, dizziness is considered a symptom, not a sign. Similar to vertigo, it can only be described by the experiencing subject and cannot be measured objectively. As a medical symptom, dizziness is ambiguous and can lead to a multitude of diagnoses. The vestibular system is the sensory apparatus that signals the coordinates of our spatial position to the brain, affording our sense of balance and spatial orientation. Together with the cochlea, it constitutes the labyrinth of the inner ear. As our movements consist of rotations and translations, the vestibular system comprises two components: the semi-circular canal system that indicates rotational changes in velocity and the otoliths that indicate linear changes in velocity. The vestibular system sends signals primarily to the neural structures that control our eye movements and to the muscles that keep us balanced. Psychobiologist Matti Mintz's research suggests a connection between our ability to maintain emotional and corporeal equilibrium and flexibility. His research particularly indicates comorbidity between anxiety disorders and a poor sense of orientation and balance (Mintz, 2016; Erez et al., 2002).

Working on his film *Failed States* (2008) filmmaker Henry Hills literally used dizziness as his resource. Spinning around and becoming dizzy with his camera in hand enabled him to overcome a severe crisis in his work. Not only had the vertiginous perception of the world matched his uncertainties about his work, but his becoming dizzy also stimulated new sensations and brought back a childhood memory – spinning and falling into the grass while watching the world turning around him.

Speaking of filmmaking, dizziness in its corporeal sense can be transmitted by unstable or rotating camera movements of which abundant examples exist in art films such as Stan Brakhage's *Scenes Before Under Childhood* (1967–70), Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale* (1971), Steve McQueen's *Static* (2009), or Catherine Yass' *Lighthouse* (2011). Moreover, dizziness in its metaphorical sense has been employed in cinema from its very beginning, as in the Lumière's gravity-defying first special effect in film (*La démolition d'un mur, Auguste and Louis Lumière, 1896*) or Georges Méliès' early film *Un homme de tête* (1898) and was later elaborated in surrealist films such as Teinosuke Kinugasa's *A Page of Madness* (1926) or Hans Richter's collaborative film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947).

Furthermore, dizziness can be produced by abundant visual input such as the flickering of light, as used in Tony Conrad's film *Flicker* (1965) or Joachim Koester's *This Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points (after the mescaline drawings of Henri Michaux)* (2007). But dizziness can also be produced by a deprivation of visual stimuli, as seen in the 'prisoner's cinema' phenomenon reflected in, for instance, Melvin Moti's eponymous video work (2008). When a person – a prisoner for example – is subjected to prolonged visual deprivation, hallucinations in the form of colours and shapes might occur (Sacks, 2012). Therefore, dizziness indicates a situation in which the possibilities of reality can no longer be grasped in a habitual manner because of a lack or overload of stimuli, knowledge, or input.

Whether frightening or enjoyable, by falling into dizziness we enter a stage of uncertainty, disorientation, and heightened vulnerability where we are unsure of our abilities, perceptions, and processing – uncertain of ourselves (Butler et al., 2016). This manifests through feelings of excitement caused by a distorted perception of time and space, loss of proportion, and an increasing feeling of lack of control and/or temporary loss of memory and self (Katzmaier, 2015; Montuori, 1994). Dizziness can affect us as an individual, group, or society (Koller, 2014a,b) and the ensuing insecurity affects interaction with our environment (Lorey, 2015). To different degrees, these conditions of loss and feelings of insecurity are present in all dizziness processes, from crisis to flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), aporia to ecstasy, immersion in a film or book to philosophical pondering, or the creation of an artwork (Montuori, 1994).

Moreover, the emotional spectrum of dizziness must be considered in order to comprehend its potential as a resource. The experience of dizziness contains ambiguous and even contradictory feelings. This inherent unpredictability makes clear why dizziness cannot be seen as a means of 'self-design' (Groys, 2008). In its reflection, dizziness exposes related emotions as movements propelling the individual into a certain direction or perspective. For the aforementioned filmmaker Henry Hills, memories of being dizzy generated a positive reminiscence of childhood, which helped him come to terms with a creative crisis. However, not all recollections of dizziness necessarily need to be positive to have a constructive effect on navigation through dizziness. Therefore, the combination of the physical, emotional, and metaphorical experience of dizziness with the more reflexive and theoretical framework of compossibility proved essential for this research if dizziness was to be seen as a resource for creativity.

Dizziness represents the limit state of the challenged subject experiencing the vacillation between loss of control (staggering) and gain of control (equilibrium) (Echterhölter et al., 2010). In its metaphorical sense, dizziness starts with teetering and staggering at the limitations of knowledge, for instance when faced with a central problem or crisis (Alon, 2014) or aimed towards the creation of a new work of art (Anderwald et al., 2013). The compossibility of precipitancy and precision is what German philosopher Marcus Steinweg suggests for a situation involving dizziness in artistic or philosophical practice (2013). He further indicates a connection between the processes of thinking and art creation, both grounded in the groundless and the abyssal, starting from inherently aporetic moments (Kofman, 1988) and aiming at the impossible, in contrast to the self-reduction to the possible exemplified by politics (Steinweg, 2013). As Steinweg quotes Heiner Müller: 'Something new can only develop when you are doing something you cannot do [...] Art is what you want to do, not what you can do' (2013: 48). Describing this movement as headless or blind, Steinweg uses the practice of writing as an example in which the author develops a distance from the universe of facts without ever fully detaching from it. This striving to 'develop something new' by 'doing what

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