





Material of Movement and Thought: **Reflections on the Dancer's Practice and Corporeality**

Edited by Anna Petronella Foutier and Cecilia Roos

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Drawings by Chrysa Parkinson

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Preface

Anna Petronella Foultier and Cecilia Roos

The present anthology has its point of departure in a research project entitled “From Movement out of Reflection in Becoming: The Dancer and the Creative Process”, which received funding from the Swedish Research Council for a period of three years. The overall goal of the project was to approach an understanding and a conceptualization of the artistic process of the dancer, illustrated by the dancer’s work with a particular choreography. The focus was both that of the dancer from within the process, and that of external observers. These perspectives were not deadlocked but rather aimed at an interaction and a dialogue between the theoretical and the practical levels.

At the outset, the research group consisted of Cecilia Roos, dancer and professor of interpretation at The University of Dance and Circus in Stockholm (DOCH), Katarina Elam, PhD in aesthetics and lecturer at University College West, Anna Petronella Foultier, PhD candidate in philosophy at Stockholm University, and Cecilia Sjöholm, professor of aesthetics at Södertörn University. Towards the end of the project, Chrysa Parkinson, dancer and professor of dance at DOCH, and Iréne Hultman, a dancer and choreographer, became involved and contributed to this anthology.¹

The project took its starting point in the work in the creation of Ina Christel Johannessen’s dance piece *NOW SHE KNOWS*, where Cecilia Roos, was one of the dancers. Periodically, the other researchers observed the rehearsals of this piece, following Cecilia’s artistic process. The research methods grew out of the teamwork, inspired by the preparation of Johannessen’s choreography and by discussions of dance theoretical and philosophical texts. Early on, the need arose to have an exchange also in movement, so the group started to devote a part of the regular meetings to physical exercise and studying aspects of the choreography.²

¹ A Swedish anthology with articles by Cecilia Roos, Katarina Elam and Anna Petronella Foultier was published in the beginning of 2013, *Ord i tankar och rörelse*, Stockholm: DOCH, 2013.

² For a more detailed account of the research process, see Cecilia Roos’s article in the present volume, p. [?].



A number of issues were explored: How does the dancer work in the process where the dance – either improvised or written – takes shape? How does the understanding of a movement material shift through the actual performing of it?³ What is it to understand or experience a movement from the perspective of the performer? What is it to understand or experience a movement from the perspective of the spectator? What kind of body is the dancing body and how can it create a variety of meanings? Through what concepts are we to think the dancer's practice and corporeality?

In the beginning of the project, conceptualization of the dancer's creative process seemed essential so we searched for texts that could provide or help develop an adequate terminology. As time went by, we came to realize that there were different ways to articulate this process, and that we could have recourse to a great variety of language forms in approaching the questions that appeared. Moreover, the very gap between the perceived and the verbally articulated is a multilayered and ambiguous space that is crucial for the working process, both with movement and with thought. The articles in this volume reflect our different perspectives on the questions at issue, but also cross and intersect with one another, being the outcome of an at times quite intimate exchange of experiences and ideas.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the financial support from the Swedish Research Council, and the generosity of Ina Christel Johannessen who let us take part in her creation of a choreographic piece, attend the rehearsals and have access to the material under development. We also would like to express our gratitude to all the dancers in *NOW SHE KNOWS*, for allowing us to follow their artistic processes, as well as to DOCH, The University of Dance and Circus in Stockholm, for administration and access to dance studios and seminar rooms. Finally, we are highly indebted to Dr. Jon Buscall for transforming the articles in the present volume into readable English.

The articles

In "From Movement Out of Reflection in Becoming: The Dancer and

³ On the notion of movement material in contemporary dance, see Chrysa Parkinson's note below, p. [?].

the Creative Process”, the dancer’s process with a movement material is researched by Cecilia Roos from within the creation of the dance piece *NOW SHE KNOWS*. To begin with, the author gives the background to the project with the same name and how its methodology evolved. She also discusses dancers’ experience of problem solving in interpretation processes, and in what way it can be conceptualized. Next, Roos describes what goes on in producing and rehearsing the movement material of *NOW SHE KNOWS*, investigating how the movement material evolves in different ways depending on the approach and methods used, and how this affects the development of the methods itself.

Anna Petronella Foultier’s article “Towards a Phenomenological Account of the Dancing Body: Merleau-Ponty and the Corporeal Schema” discusses the dancing body from a phenomenological perspective, against the background of the philosophical understanding of the lived body in tradition. Foultier argues that Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on the body-proper and its corporeal schema can be useful to elucidate bodily expression in general, and the significations that the dancer’s body manifests in performing a choreographic work in particular. Further, the specific forms of spatiality that Merleau-Ponty considers are opened up by artworks within and beyond the concrete space of the physical body, giving us a clue as to the elaboration of a phenomenology of dance.

In “Authoring Experience: a Dialogue on the Dancer’s Practice”, by Chrysa Parkinson and Cecilia Roos, a written discussion forms the basis for considering the dancer’s role and the methodologies it produces in performative processes. Examples are taken from studio work, teaching and being on stage. Topics include the use of the visual field, language, memory, innovation, craft, subjectivity, time and presence, and are presented as illustrations of artistic materials used in a dancer’s experiential authorship. By drawing on the experience of working as a dancer, teacher and rehearsal director, the authors collaborate in devising a linguistic ground for discussing the practice of experiential authorship in dance.

The fourth article, “Becoming a Spectator of Dance through Increased Kinaesthetic Awareness and the Intensive Reading of Theoretical Texts” by Katarina Elam, is about learning to watch and appreciate contemporary dance and especially two aspects have appeared important. Firstly, - language, and in particular how metaphors are used in

dance training and repetition. Secondly, kinaesthesia: a mode of perception that is a regular part of everyday training for a dancer. But kinaesthesia also seems to be important, if not foundational, for the spectator's aesthetic experience and construction of meaning. By becoming more bodily present and aware it appears possible to be able to watch with one's whole body, where kinaesthetics is a necessary component.

As we see and experience dance, is our experience grounded in perception, or is it primarily kinaesthetic? Or is it both? In "Whose Body? The Difference between Seeing and Experiencing", Cecilia Sjöholm examines Ina Christel Johannessen's choreographic work *NOW SHE KNOWS* from the perspective of ambiguity. As I watch a body move, I feel the movement in my own body; an experience we may discuss in terms of kinaesthetic impulse. At the same time, movement is invested with social, cultural or aesthetic meaning. The difference between perception and experience allows us to examine how social antagonism appears in and through moving bodies. As Sjöholm argues, Ina Christel Johannessen explores such antagonism in her work.

Finally, Iréne Hultman's article "Embrace the Unknown" inquires into the kinaesthetic and emotional aspects of the body and how the two are intermingled in the creative work of the dancer, choreographer and teacher. On the basis of her own experience in these fields, the author discusses how interpretation as well as improvisation are at play here, and also related to both self-knowledge and to the dialogue with others. In this way, she also gives a brief history of the last decades of contemporary dance in Sweden and in the US. The article also examines the very experience of dancing – how being in the present conflicts with remembering, how emotions matter and how dancing can be close to trance.



From Movement Out of Reflection in Becoming: The Dancer and the Creative Process

Cecilia Roos

30 years ago, in August 1982, I sat leaning against a sun-warmed wall in the garden cafe at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm. I had a blue notebook in my hand. The air was filled with the smell of cinnamon buns and coffee, and I was filled with anxiety. I was working as a dancer in the Swedish choreographer Margaretha Åsberg's dance company Pyramiderna, and we were in the middle of working on *Organon*, which would have its world premiere at Kulturhuset in Stockholm on 10 September the same year.¹

The notebook was new and empty. The idea was to write down my thoughts and reflections on the emerging dance piece. Margaretha wanted the entire group to meet on a regular basis to discuss and reflect on the process. She wanted to raise our awareness in and about the process.

Yes, here I was sitting in the hot August sun reflecting but nothing happened. I had learned all the moves and combinations but had no method, no tools, no language for how I verbally could go into it further. Or how I could reflect on it! I had recently graduated from the University College of Dance, currently the University of Dance and Circus (DOCH), and this was my first engagement as a dancer. There I had trained my body for three years, but I had not practiced thinking about what my body was schooled in. Above all, I had no habit of talking about it and I had not, in truth, been particularly interested in it. The first page of the notebook was roughened; I had written and erased, written and erased. My own demands on the writing I would perform were skyrocketing and quite, as it turned out, unnecessary.

When I biked home a few hours later I had managed to write half a page, and a few days later when we had our first meeting the half-page had grown to a couple. In the conversation that followed, something important happened to me that I did not understand the extent of at that time. I came to a realization, albeit vague, that for the dancer the experience of every single movement is individual. I understood,

¹ Åsberg's dance piece *Organon* had its premiere at Kulturhuset in Stockholm 1982.



through the discussions we had, that my way of thinking and reflecting on the work had relevance because it had a validity for me. I experienced it in depth, and I remember the feeling of elation. This event has influenced me in my career, and I keep returning to it. Even if a movement can look quite the same, almost identical, when performed by several dancers each dancer's description and experience of it can be completely different. The difference in the experience of first seeing a movement, then studying it in order to finally perform it is what I am, and have been, busy with in my research. What is happening beyond the motive and method of each dancer, in the body-to-come?

How does the professional dancer work in the process where the dance emerges and takes shape? How does the understanding of a movement material shift through the actual doing? In this text I want to share my perspective and my description of these phenomena, which will be limited to my own experience. My hope is that the layers and levels of reflection that my co-researchers contribute with can create a wider context to these thoughts, making these observations more interesting.

Our research has been connected to the dance piece *NOW SHE KNOWS* by Ina Christel Johannessen in which I participated as a dancer and my co-researchers periodically observed.² My research is based on the dancer's perspective from inside the process with the movement material³ and the choreographer's idea, but also on my own experience of the process as a whole. I have also had an external perspective on the working process through the discussions with my co-researchers. These internal and external perspectives have, as a result, been shifting constantly between a pre-reflective and a reflective kind of action. My writing from inside the process involved in *NOW SHE KNOWS* requires something different compared to writing about a process in general from an external point of view. Initially, what is required is that I am really part of the artistic process, but that I am then also able to step out of the process to have a dialogue with my co-researchers about

² Johannessen is a Norwegian choreographer, based in Oslo. She runs her own company, *zero visibility*, but she has also done dance pieces for institutions such as the Royal Swedish Ballet, Scottish Dance Theatre, Ballet de Monte Carlo, CCDC in Hong Kong and Cullbergbaletten. Her dance piece *NOW SHE KNOWS* had its first performance at Norrlandsoperan in Umeå 2010 and has since then toured in Norway, Denmark, Germany and Mexico.

³ See Chrysa Parkinson's remarks on this notion on p. [?].

what they observed in relation to what I experienced. What we wanted to develop was a discourse where the dancer sets her own limits and limitations and thus conceptualizes her process.

Method

Our research methods have grown out of the process; they are both inspired by and based on the work with the dance piece. Our belief has been that the methodological tools must be taken from practice in order to be fruitful; my work with *NOW SHE KNOWS* has given the opportunity for that. From the beginning of the process (when my rehearsals could not be observed), we started each seminar with discussions about a text that one of us had chosen. Pretty soon we – or I, especially – discovered that there was a dimension missing in our seminars: that of physical practice. We decided to start each workshop with a warm up, where I also taught my co-researchers shorter movement sequences from *NOW SHE KNOWS*. We danced and discussed details of the movements and different ways of interpreting them, for example, the dynamics, directions and the tempo, on the basis of one's own experience. My co-researchers then began to formulate their own perspectives on the process, which in turn led me to spot things I had forgotten or had not yet discovered in my practice. Of course, there was a difference between how we described the process; through my experience as a dancer I had more possibilities to develop the movement material, which gave me another space to act in. Nevertheless, it was interesting to me that the others came close to a process-based movement analysis. They had an experience that they could explore physically and verbally; this in turn helped me to describe my experience more clearly. As Katarina Elam put it at one of our seminars:

The dancer develops a special ability to know and to control her own body movements, to have an idea of how the movement should feel and look like, and from there also an idea of how it should be performed. She interprets what she sees (unveils) and simultaneously makes (dances) her own interpretation (produces). Unveiling and producing are made simultaneously, or rather it is perhaps the case that the interpretation gets multiple dimensions and meanings.⁴

⁴ Seminar at DOCH 22 March 2011.

Of course, you can talk from an outside perspective about what happens between first seeing a movement material, studying it and finally doing it. But it is quite another thing to be a part of it yourself. The transition between these different kinds of understandings, or experiences, has been my focus in this research.

After a while, our physical training encountered something else, a positive side effect as it were, namely that our bodies, acting as a point of departure, helped us stay consciously aware in a different way, which became significant for the way we conversed in the following text seminars. Suddenly there were not only words but also a shared physical experience that facilitated communication. For me personally, the new situation allowed me to be more open and to see other possible readings of the discussed texts. Generally speaking, my relationship to the written word became more flexible, comparable to the sensation of a movement. Moreover, this in turn led me to find new ways to approach and process movement material in the studio.

During the whole process with *NOW SHE KNOWS*, I continuously wrote down reflections on my experience with the movement material (this happened both during the rehearsal period and during the performance period). As I read my notebook now, my process actually continues. Now I am able to catch sight of the ambivalence, uncertainty and desire involved in the deepening relationship to the movement that I developed by dancing *NOW SHE KNOWS*.

2 July 2012

My personal research method has been a practice-based process analysis, where movement constitutes the material and the dancer's process constitutes the topic. The developed and deepened understanding of this process has occurred through reflection on and relation and dialogue with the movement material, creating a constant shift in my understanding and my awareness of it. In rehearsal, just when I thought I got hold of a movement, it slipped away, like the whole process itself. The material, the dance, is there, but it always changes depending on the chosen method. The methods have been developed from a need to understand and examine the topic, i.e. the dancer's process and the material that opens up for new understandings of the process. The topic emerges through methods that change depending on the questions that I use to approach the material, or depending on the questions posed to me by the same material. The dancer's process emerges in the work with the



material, the movement; the material can only be interesting if the dancer's process remains essential.

The Dancer

[The body as] simultaneously visible and virtual, a cluster of forces, a transformer of space and time, both emitter of signs and trans-semiotic, endowed by an organic interior ready to be dissolved as soon as it reaches the surface. A body inhabited by – and inhabiting – other bodies and other minds, a body existing at the same time at the opening toward the world provided by language and sensorial contact, and in the seclusion of its singularity through silence and non-inscription. A body that opens and shuts, that endlessly connects with other bodies and elements, a body that can be deserted, emptied, stolen from its soul, as well as traversed by the most exuberant fluxes of life. A human body because it can become animal, become mineral, plant, become atmosphere, hole, ocean, become pure movement. That is, a *paradoxical body*.⁵

Pee in a bucket or directly on the floor, taped in a chair smeared in mustard, vomit green coloured yogurt, masturbate then dive into shallow water, buried alive, feet smeared in mayonnaise licked up by a dog, slipping in dog poop that you empty from a bag, wrapped in salami and plastic film on Karl Johans gate in Oslo, naked with Nutella between the buttocks, lying in the bathtub filled with syrup and then slowly stand up, sing intensively in a language you do not understand, do any movement you can with your elbow, walk as slowly as you can through a room, roll goat poop standing on a serving tray in a bird mask behind Rauschenberg's goat at the Museum of Modern art in Stockholm, diving repeatedly into gasoline drums filled with water wearing a straitjacket, put as many plastic bags as you can in your mouth, and come on ladies let's see some pussy.

This may not be the answer you would get if you asked the woman on the street what she thinks a dancer does when she works. But these are some examples of the responses I got from professional dancers, both company members and freelancers, when I asked the question: What is the strangest thing you've done as a dancer? I neither can nor want to

⁵ José Gil, "Paradoxical body", transl. André Lepecki, *The Drama Review* 50:4, 2006 (21–35), p. 28.



define what dance is, and I can, therefore, not determine who can call themselves dancers. Dance can be explained as a communicative art form since the moving material, or the signs, it shows is derived from a cultural context that, in most cases, is recognizable to the audience. It is a peculiar art form because of its incarnate nature, what you see is what is. Many times, I experience vastly more dancing as a person standing still than as one who dances around wildly. And there may be more dancing in a person who is completely untrained than one that has undergone all possible education. At a seminar at the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts in 1992, choreographer Birgit Åkesson was asked: "What is dance?" And she replied: "Dance is dance is dance."

Generally, one can say that the dancer of today works experimentally and in a transdisciplinary manner. Unlike when I started working as a dancer, and regardless of genres and workplace, dancers see the testing and the experimentation as a natural part of the work. That is not just something that is expected of her, but it is above all what she expects and wants. This, together with a number of other factors, contributes to today's dancers, to a much greater extent than before, working independently and in a reflective dialogue with the choreographer. The situation in the freelance world when a dance piece is created is such that employment contracts longer than four, and to a maximum of eight, weeks barely exist, and full-time contracts are the exceptions. Freelance choreographers do not have the budget to provide longer contracts. That makes it difficult for dancers and choreographers to have a common continuity that extends over time. Freelance dancers are jumping between commitments. For a choreographer it could mean that if they bring up an old piece it needs to be worked on since the dancers who were originally involved are occupied by other commitments. It may be one of the reasons why there is hardly any extant repertoire, in the traditional sense, in the freelance world, while it still exists in the institutions. Freelance dancers that I speak with are also generally not that interested in going in and replacing someone in an existing work, the interest lies in the process and becoming. Therefore the choreography is often elaborated with, and adjusted to, the dancer that is doing the replacing, which for many dancers is a prerequisite to even want to do that kind of job. It raises questions again about what is original, and if originality even exists, how do you relate it to interpretation and authorship. I have chosen not to discuss any of this

in this text.

For the dancer in the freelance context, the interest seems to be in the process and the becoming, anything that arises with no existing original to relate to. I wonder if this is due to an inability to or lack of knowledge of how to deepen the analysis, process and refinement of a movement material, or if it's a kind of restlessness, which is essential for our time, for our common movement forward in time. That we now, more than ever, are dancing in our present time and should be understood so. But I don't think that kind of refinement stand in contradiction to development, rather the opposite.

In the late 1900s, the term "dance interpretation" was established in the art of dance in Sweden. The term is interpreted widely depending on genre. Where there exists a repertoire as in for example classical ballet, musical, folk and modern dance, it is more common to speak of interpretation than in contemporary dance. In dance repertoire, the term is directly related to the choreography or movement. There, the choreography is fixed, e.g., in the ballet *Swan Lake*⁶ or the musical *Cats*,⁷ you speak of the individual dancer as an interpreter. There is then usually a noted model (e.g., Benesh Notation or Labanotation⁸) as a base. The notation is interpreted by a choreologist and with the help of a rehearsal director the dancer learns the choreography. When the notated movement material is presented to the dancer, it has, to some extent, already been interpreted by another body. In this way the dancer's work on repertoire differs from the musician's, who can read notes and thereby has a direct contact with the object of her interpretation.

Both in music and drama the opportunity is given to the practitioners to make a musical or literary interpretation of what is recorded precisely because it is written down. The composer and the musician, the author and the actor can jointly consider, analyse and discuss what is seen in the score or the text. The relationship and working methods between a dancer and a choreographer are different since the ability to

⁶ The ballet *Swanlake* with choreography by Julius Reisinger had its premiere at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow 1877.

⁷ Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Cats* was first performed at New London Theatre in London 1981.

⁸ The two most accepted notation systems for dance are Labanotation (created by Rudolf Laban in the 1920s) and Benesh Notation (developed by Joan and Rudolf Benesh in the 1940s).

read dance notation is rare. In Sweden, only about 4–5 people can read dance notation, as opposed to a plain text file that everyone can read and musical scores that can be read by many. This means that traditionally rehearsal of the dance depends on a completely different type of study material, such as another physical body showing it or filmed documentation that you learn it from. When you have that as a base for learning then the material is to some extent already interpreted by someone else, it can never be as neutral as letters on a piece of paper or notes in a musical score.

The researcher and guitarist Anders Östersjö writes in his thesis *Shut up 'n' play!*⁹ that a music score really is a tool for structures and not for how it sounds afterwards. When notation is possible, the focus shifts to the structures and therefore different interpretations appears where the sound can be left out of account. The musician ends up in a sign-based and not an experience-based interpretation. The score may even destroys music as an art form. The composer Trevor Wishart says that this has created an interpretation where “the score and not the sound is the point of departure”.¹⁰ But, of course, it creates a freedom for the practitioner. The musician is interpreting the material and will in that process also be interpreted by it similar to the dialogue that appears between the dancer and the movement material.

I asked Chrichan Larson, Swedish cellist and composer, if he would listen to previous interpretations before he starts to learn a musical score, and he replied: “Never, not until I got my own relationship to the material by studying the score.” I note that it is different for a dancer but I would not add any value in it.

What happens in the meeting between the dancer and choreographer is essential to the process and the preservation of the piece. Today the movement material more often grows out of a dialogue or through improvisation based on an idea that the choreographer has. The dancer becomes more frequently an interpreter of an idea rather than a choreography. The movement is a result of that interpretation; the dancer articulates the idea through movement. In contemporary choreographic practice the term interpretation is a working method constantly shifting rather than a system of codes and rules.

⁹ Stefan Östersjö, *Shut Up 'n' Play!: Negotiating the Musical Work*, Malmö: Malmö Academy of Music, 2008.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

Process

What does a dancer do during the working process with a movement material, and how can it be described?

2 February 2010

Can I discuss the process separately from the movement? If I claim to write from the process do I need to let the thought be separated from the movement? Can I even think process? Maybe I can just do process? What usually tends to be in the same space of thought, the thought and the movement, between them arose first a curtain, then a sliding door and now a significantly closed door. I'm much more interested in seeing the movement as part of the thought and the thought part of the movement. Writing from the process can be like letting the text be the movement and vice versa. The separation between them adds nothing but the combination provides a complexity that is interesting to develop. Thought is also a practice; the closed door that I'm talking about here may as well be a "tool" for analysing the process.

A dancer learns, through the doing, to ask questions of the movement and the ideas that are necessary in the process. She listens, reads and senses. It takes time and there is no shortcut. The process is, of course, dependent on the piece she is going to dance, the kind of movement material that is involved, whether the material is written or improvised, how the music sounds, how many dancers that are involved and who they are, if there is a set design and where it's placed. The information she gets varies, making each work on a performance unique, the dancer is challenged creatively, time and time again, to combine her experience and expertise. It is entirely possible to generally outline a dancer's process with a movement material, but when you come to the individual level it requires a detailed analysis because in each process a dynamic and subjective relationship is developed between each individual dancer and the movement/idea. I want to clarify that my continuing argument will be based on a situation consisting of a choreographer and a dancer. It affects my discussion because the situation would be described differently if the choreographer and the dancer were the same person.

In the process, the dancer is not a passive recipient: she is driven, proactive and co-creating. She reflects constantly on the action, on the dancing and she is in dialogue with both the choreographer and the movement material. Theory and practice go hand in hand. She is

practicing theory and theorizing practice. From a reflection on, and in dialogue with, the movement material, she formulates her theory and method, rooted in practice. The situation speaks directly to her in the actual moment of doing the movement. Through a reflective practice, she is deeply familiar with the movement material, but the movements are elusive in the way that you never have them. Just when she thought she had them or could do them, they slip away. Because of that, the dancer is required to always, in every second, explore the material again. It does not matter how many times she has made the movement, the experience of it is new each time.

Through her practice the dancer develops her vision, perception and ability to concentrate. The dancer's gaze gets a directedness and through that every detail emerges and can be analysed. Our consciousness is never neutral, seeing starts from the experience that we already have, and gaze provides a way to shape this experience. We interpret what we see through our experiences, which are in themselves not static since we are constantly experiencing new situations that transform the way we perceive. In a sense, we could say that we are showing the meeting between our past and our present through movement.

Intentionality is a term in phenomenological philosophy describing the essential characteristic of consciousness, namely its directedness. Maurice Merleau-Ponty says that before the conscious mental acts there is an original intentionality: our motricity that is a bodily relationship with the objects.¹¹ I'm thinking of intentionality as the external perspective and the original intentionality as the inner perspective in the dancer's work. The external perspective has a visible and readable directedness that becomes active when the dancer knows what she looks for in the movement material. However, it may take time to understand what it is she should look for, and the core of the material also varies in the process, making the external perspective dynamic. The inner perspective can recognize, or recognize something about, a movement material. This does not mean that it will stop at that; the analysis, which directs one's attention, starts immediately. I usually say that a movement changes when you do it. The primary goal in working with the movement is not to change it, but as you get to know it, after repeating it many times, your experience of it changes and thereby the

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Donald A. Landes, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 139 ff.



movement changes. An ongoing shift between the experience of the movement and the movement itself takes place.

What, then, is a dancer actually doing in the process? As I wrote earlier, there isn't one way to describe it, as the approach is individual. The starting point of my discussion is the movement material, and here are some examples of how it can be worked out:

- It is improvised by the dancer from a task that the choreographer provides.
- It emerges in dialogue with the choreographer, the choreographer has a movement material that is tested and explored between dancer and choreographer.
- It is written and presented in its entirety by the choreographer to the dancer who learns it.
- It is made for and performed by another person, and the dancer learns it (repertoire).
- It is a written material that the dancer learns and in the performance situation she improvises around it out from specific set frames.

During the process the dancer explores all possibilities in the material, trying to adjust and adapt the material to herself and her experience, or vice versa. She lets these perspectives merge and her process includes, for example:

- To feel the movement and through repetition, or by trying it in many different ways, getting to know it.
- To recognize and know, for sure, when she gets it right.
- To have full pitch for her own body's way of doing it.
- To experience it without having to do it. Be able to see and feel in her body when others do not get it right. And then, in her own body, know what may be lacking.
- To articulate the movement from what the eye has perceived and through the body understand the shape.
- To drive and deepen the understanding of the movement constantly.
- To be totally absorbed in it or stand in relation to it.



Here I am talking about creating, feeling, recognizing, learning, driving, deepening, absorbing or relating to. A motion may be recognizable; our memories live in us, in our bodies. Therefore, we must also relate to oblivion, as unforeseen memories can appear when doing a movement. It can bring the memory of a smell or a touch, someone who made you happy or hurt you. The memory of a specific situation, comic or tragic, when someone was moving just as you are supposed to can suddenly appear.

The choreographer may in some situations provide images and metaphors that are not possible to create associations around; it does not give anything to the process or works for one dancer but not for another. Then the dancer is, of course, free to create her own starting point; the choreographer has nothing to do with the dancer's thoughts. As long as the result is in line with the choreographer's idea, the dancer can botanize freely.

Just as the movement affects the thought, so the thought affects the movement. On a muscular "surface" level, a dancer begins after a while to know and recognize the movement. But initially she has no control over what happens inside of this sensation. It affects, whether she wants it to or not. But it is extremely important to relate to that and let it come to the surface, otherwise it may express itself against her will in the energy and dynamic that she puts into the movement. The movement must be authentic for the dancer. Not necessarily on a psychological or organic level, but on a dynamic level. She must be aware and razor sharp in the choice of dynamics, even if the objective of the movement is that it should not be articulated.

In order to make instant choices, the dancer needs to explore all the possibilities in the movement such as dynamic and phrasing. These are like tracks that run parallel but at different speeds. Sometimes they are intertwined, tangling, only to be cleared up and once again run alongside each other. There, the dancer can choose to see and listen to all possibilities at the same time or be involved in stretching out each detail. This creates a presence where details are unveiled; it peels off rather than adds. The presence is guided by the process towards a particular kind of attention; a kind of expanded state of consciousness in which the experience of, rather than how, something looks is in focus.

In a studio at Dansens hus with Swedish choreographer Per Jonsson, in



1992, we are rehearsing Unknown dance.¹² Per is not happy with the way we're doing a movement, he shows time and time again and says, "Look at my feeling." He wants to give us another input to the movement, beyond how it looks; that what he experiences as the sense of the movement should be a tool for us. That we should not only see the shape of the movement but pay attention to his inner experience of it. Not just look with the eyes but also experience the resonance of the movement throughout the body to be able to kinaesthetically understand the complexity of the movement and thereby deepen the experience of it.

There are, as I said, several perspectives and approaches, both internal and external, that the dancer may choose to have on and to a movement material. What she feels when she looks at it and what she feels when she does it. Between these two perspectives, and they are both intuitive and conscious, she commutes. The movement between these creates a gap, a space or a fold in time in which the perspectives intertwine or run parallel. It is a moment consisting of possible articulations. As a kind of intermediate position, an in-between, it is in constant deviation where a continuous exploration of the possibilities in each movement is pursued. Here, an approach to the movement is suggested, tested, formulated and articulated only to be reconsidered.

In the process, the dancer makes the choices that are the basis for a continuous elaboration, development, interpretation and reinterpretation of the task or movement. She is memorizing, organizing to then reevaluate. She is outside of the movement or works through the movement. Noting and regarding it as she does it, a duality is created where the distance she can choose to take sometimes determines the possibility of the movement. These perspectives are not in opposition to each other but relate to each other in dialogue. The will and the intention is based on the experience of asking the questions of the material she needs to have answered in order to be able to dance it. Her full attention is directed, seeking and exploring.

In the process, the dancer becomes familiar with the movement material, details emerge and there is no definitive interpretation. The possibilities are endless. She's constantly trying to articulate more clearly what she physically experiences when she does the movement.

¹² Jonsson's piece *Unknown Dance* had its premiere in 1991 at Dansens hus, the international scene for contemporary dance in Stockholm.



It may be something that at first was not obvious in the movement but that she felt when she did it. By going deeper into articulating that sensation, further details emerge. The most striking difference in going from seeing a movement to learning it and then doing it is that you understand how many details you missed when you first saw it.

For me, reflection, relationship and dialogue are important steps in the dancer's process with a movement material. *Reflection* is a prerequisite for one's own work with the material where opportunities may arise out of thinking, seeing and listening. Through the thinking awakening the seeing and the listening, and vice versa. To see and hear. *Relation* slowly emerges and occurs repeatedly in the meeting with the movement or task, from a kind of transformation, an activity, an event. *Dialogue* is when it takes life out of movement and stillness, speaks out, communicates and again transforms. The movement is always more than what it was: the potential increases with each repetition. The dancer is outside alternatively through the movement. A duality where she through dialogue oscillates between distance and proximity.

Experiences

The Finland-Swedish actress Stina Ekblad has said:

I'm very fond of practical knowledge. There are so many fuzzy warnings in my profession. I like what is durable, robust. The longer I work in the profession, the more joy I find in my technique and the nerdy detail work.¹³

For me working with a movement material is very concrete. To be able to describe what I mean by that I will give examples of some situations that I've been in as a dancer and as a rehearsal director. I find it very hard to verbalize what is happening in a dancer's working process in a satisfactory way without concrete examples.

In the studio with choreographer Margaretha Åsberg, in 1983, we are rehearsing Rörelseinstallationer (Installations of Movement) for a premiere at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm and she prepares a longer se-

¹³ Ann Persson, "Stina Ekblad spränger kvinnobojan" (Stina Ekblad bursts the bonds of femininity), interview with Ekblad in *Dagens Nyheter*, 23 January 2012.



quence in dialogue with us dancers.¹⁴ She suggests, we add or delete, it's a continuous exchange of ideas. The room is filled with mumbling; disjointed phrases and single words appear. Suggestions are made that are immediately tried out. I am new as a dancer and not used to being a co-creator. Constellations of dancers form, trying together to analyse each detail in every movement. The starting point in the sequence is a standing, straight up and down, arms hanging, feet parallel and facing forward at hip width. The first movement is a powerful, yet airy rotation of the lower body to the left. The legs are stretched and the body weight is on the left foot. The upper body remains relaxed and still, arms open low to the sides, the head turns to the right and the focus is directed to the floor about a meter away. In a moment the body becomes separated and loaded with three different kinds of dynamics and directions. The rotation of the body is slightly faster than the movement of the head, which is more like a reverb.

It becomes clear in this example not only how we worked with the separation between the body parts but also what happened in the break points, i.e., between the head and torso, and between the upper and lower body. To enable the clear difference in dynamics and direction, as Margaretha stressed, the actual content of the movement became the central spine. There was the actual torque. The movement started from the bottom lumbar and ended with the head movement. On top of the spine are muscles, ligaments and layers of tissue. The force we used decided the speed of the movement. Here we worked from the body's core and outwards, through all layers. Time and time again we repeated the movement just to tune up with each other and become harmonized in both the start and end points. The sensation of the movement was highly physical and tangible.

The dancer learns to vary the tone between and across all layers of the muscle tissue. I once heard the choreographer Rasmus Öhme urge the students during a lesson at DOCH in 2012 to “release inside the structure of the body”, and they all seemed to understand. Choreographer Per Jonsson associated to the “inside” of the dancer differently in 1985. This next example, and the language used there, says a lot about its time and illustrates the differences in prevailing ideals and body image between then and now.

¹⁴ Åsberg's *Rörelseinstallationer* had its premiere at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm 1983.



In the studio with Per Jonsson in 1985, we repeat The Smiling Dog and more specifically a part that we called the "Lighthouse".¹⁵ We gradually fall forward step by step heavily and in unison. Per desires a strong frontal light on us, and the light designer assembles all the lights she has. But Per does not think it's enough and he screams desperately to us, "Light from within, shine from within!" So we lit from within and projected all the light we had within us forward in the direction of the motion.

Per was fully convinced that it was possible to direct the energy in that way. We thought so as well; we simply became convinced by doing it. This time the solution was not on an individual, physical or spatial level, rather it was about a joint approach to the idea of the particular movement. "Light from within" was also strongly associative: we found each other through it. A setting became an insight and thereby made a difference. It's important to remember that we all associate on the basis of our own experiences so if one uses a word as a starting point or inspiration it can be inspiring for someone else but probably not for everybody.

In the studio with choreographer Björn Elisson in 1996, we repeat Ojanima.¹⁶ I'm moving sideways, with rounded back and hands parallel in front of the body. The palms are facing the audience and the fingertips are like lances or spears that cut through the air. Björn wants me to make sharp direction changes in a sort of serpentine motion but I cannot make it. There is a gap created in each turn. He's trying to make me dive into each direction, but I stumble and become unstable and lose both the shape and direction of the movement.

In the program for the performance, I was named as the "biswimmer" (inspired by the swimmer in Carl Jonas Love Almqvist's world of poetry) and I tried it as a starting point for finding the dynamic of the movement. But for me the word was not useful for associating around. I needed to use a powerful energy to find dives and turns, and "biswimmer" did not give me that. Instead, I imagined the air as thick, dense and impenetrable, the serpentine motion that I would make followed narrow walkways, which meant I had to compress the body and the

¹⁵ Jonsson's *The Smiling Dog* was performed for the first time at Kulturhuset in Stockholm 1985.

¹⁶ *Ojanima* with choreography by Elisson had its premiere at MDT in Stockholm 1994.



energy within. I needed to push myself forward and through the space. I put all my focus outside the body to find the dynamics in the body. The spatial metaphor opened up for another kind of understanding of the movement, and I took a detour through it, a kind of positive manipulation. It is similar to the following situation where it also became clear that I found the motif for the movement outside myself. That the movement answered, and started from, something else.

We are rehearsing Brott (Fracture) by the choreographer Björn Elisson at Dansens hus main stage in September 2000.¹⁷ I stand in the middle of the stage in front of a moving double projection of artist Erik Pauser. It is filmed from a moving car, so the audience's experience is that they move into the picture. The idea is that I should stand absolutely still for six minutes. Then the movie disappears, I take a few steps forward towards the audience and then I start a physical "stuttering", grinding up and down from the floor at a frantic pace, backing diagonally backwards and out of the room. I have to energetically go from zero to a hundred in a second. From a standstill to maximum movement without take-off. I am looking for physical motif for the movement, where does it start?

No matter what I do, I do not get to an explosive start until I put my focus into the room and more clearly towards the audience. As long as the film is running behind me everyone's energy in the room is facing that point. The moment when the movie finishes their concentration is liberated and spread throughout the room. Then I had to get a handle on it to let it start me, like a match igniting a sparkler. It was about a hundredth of a second, if I dropped the moment it was gone. It required timing as sensitive as a comedian's when she drops the punch line. A room can have or be given different kinds of charge, not only due to the audience, but also, for example, due to its surfaces and materials, which in themselves can provide an input to the movement. I remember specifically one time.

Hörsalen at Kulturhuset in Stockholm 1992. We rehearse Rite of Spring choreographed by Susanne Jaresand.¹⁸ The movement composition is complex and therefore difficult to memorize. The music, composed by Stravinsky, is

¹⁷ The premiere of Elisson's piece *Brott* took place at Dansens hus in Stockholm 2000.

¹⁸ Jaresand's *Rite of Spring* had its premiere at Kulturhuset in Stockholm 1992.



in a way a narrative to me, I'm coloured by seeing staged versions of choreographers such as Pina Bausch, Maurice Béjart and others, in which a clear story is visualized. Susanne bases her choreography entirely on the music so it's important to me that I completely free myself from past experiences of the music. I am forced to abstract my thoughts and my thinking about the music through the movements.

I think of form and surface. The room has a steel structure, a sort of fan system, in one corner. A solid construction, old and dusty. On the opposite side windows run along the entire wall covered with black fabric, which is moved by the breeze when we dance by. Around these two, for me, contrasting points, I build up parts of the choreography.

I remember specifically a duet with the dancer Håkan Mayer where we spin and rotate through the room, and how I could feel the shape of the movement in relation to the steel structure in the corner; the difference between the circulating forms that we create through movement and the boxy object. What also occurs at that moment is that the room where the choreography emerges remains within, no matter which room you then do the choreography in. What you see when you learn the movement will always be part of the movement.

I work as a rehearsal director at the Royal Swedish Opera in August 2000. We are rehearsing In the Upper Room by Twyla Tharp in a studio called Målarsalen.¹⁹ It has a sort of balcony in one corner, a large door on the opposite side, a grand piano at the mirror and a video archive at the back of the room. When we then move the piece to the stage to repeat it we refer to the directions from Målarsalen: "Turn the movement against the grand piano when you are under the balcony and keep the arm towards the video archive." Similarly, at the performances that we do in Kiruna, six months later, the dancers share the experience of Målarsalen, wearing room proportions and objects within, which facilitates the process of placing the choreography on different stages.

Rooms can have different kinds of time within them, even though I have exactly the same distance to move my tempo can shift between different rooms. It can suddenly go much faster or slower despite the

¹⁹ Tharp's piece *In the Upper Room* was first performed in 1986.



distances being equally long because each individual dancer's experience of a room affects the way she handles the tempo of the movement through space.

In New York on St. Mark's Church with The Windwitches, 1985. We are performing Clouds Trails II, which we premiered in Stockholm in the Glass House earlier that year.²⁰ In one part I have to slowly walk towards another dancer, across the floor. We are moving towards one another at exactly the same speed and the surface is just as big as the Glass House, but we fail to meet at the intended spot. I arrive a lot faster than she does. Although we look at each other constantly we do not succeed, I think she is too slow, and she says that I'm taking longer steps than I usual do. We repeat and repeat and finally we have "tuned in" the room and each other.

This time the heat that our bodies radiated was also a way to feel each other. A force of warmth emerged between us. Like in a dark room when you can feel that you approach an object or a person because the heat of your body is reflected and absorbed by the other body. The skin as a border or fully transparent. The surface of the body feels what it's surrounded by. For example, when you're standing straight you can experience a pressure towards the soles of the feet because the body weight is pushing towards the floor. The inside of the upper arm is resting against the body which can create a moist heat, the air may feel cold in the neck, your back warm and your fingertips like they're dipped in ice. Pressure, humidity, cold, heat, ice.

In a studio at the Art Academy in Oslo, 2011. I am showing some movements from Rivers of Mercury by Per Jonsson to the students.²¹ The material is fast, razor sharp with a refined phrasing. Several rhythms parallel. I rotate, flip, rotate, and new patterns emerge. I feel like I am divided into many small pieces with multiple surfaces that continually create different patterns that the eye hardly has time to perceive. Several rhythms simultaneously, doing quick steps while an arm is slowly lifted, and the head moves in staccato. I am choosing in the moment what to emphasize. It's been a while since I did the material and I see myself, and the movement, as in a kaleidoscope.

²⁰ The dance piece *Clouds Trails II* with choreography by Eva Lundqvist had its premiere at Glashuset ("The Glass House") in Stockholm 1985.

²¹ Jonsson's dance piece *Rivers of Mercury* had its premiere at Kulturhuset in Stockholm 1998.



The dance gets more like an unpaved whole rather than a series of snapshots. That thought helps me to be more accurate and not to take the shortest route between the movements just to be able to be in time, instead articulating all angles. I can sense the body's surface, the forehead hot and my hand cold. In my fall towards the floor my body leaves an imprint, the floor is also making an imprint on my body, I feel a heat on these body parts.

How do I think about my body? Or how do I think with my body or through my body? What does the movement look like in my head? When I think of a movement, do I imagine it by remembering how I feel when I do it or how I think when I do it?

It is really quite different and certainly dependent on the movement involved. I can feel easy, slow, heavy, transparent, soft, firm, etc. The movement may feel edgy, round, complex, fast, sprawling, single. How it feels is also determined by sensations on the skin, for example, while moving I push the air, and it feels like a wind against my skin. Or the pressure created when a body part is pressed against another body part, alternatively another body. When I reflect upon of how I think when I did a movement, it can for example be related to the situation I was in when I did it, or the people who were there, which room I was in and how it looked, or how the movement travelled through it. Through my thought I can read the movement topographically, how it changes levels, which in itself creates contours or a kind of internal movement landscape. All the senses are involved and related in various ways depending on the movement at hand. When I discussed this with Anna Petronella Foulter, she gave me another perspective: "It is the body itself that explores the movement and I believe one could speak of a bodily reflection of sorts. Thinking is here only touching the movement, on the surface as it were."²²

October 2010

In a studio at Skeppsholmen in 2010, I am asked by choreographer Helena Franzén to follow rehearsals and give feedback for the premiere of the piece I'm Not Looking Back.²³ Suddenly everything stops and a movement detail is discussed. All dancers describe it in their own way, no description is

²² Cf. Foulter's article below, p. [?].

²³ The premiere of Franzén's *I'm Not Looking Back* took place at Dansens hus in Stockholm 2010.



like another even though the movement looks almost identical when Helena asks them to show it individually. The interesting thing is that when they show the movement they say, "I think like this" while doing it. The doing and thinking in one, the doing as a kind of thinking.

Dancing can be an articulation of an incomplete thought. The words can be complementary to the movement but never replace it. Dance stands for itself: dance is dance is dance.

NOW SHE KNOWS

I had my first rehearsal with the piece *NOW SHE KNOWS* in Oslo in January 2010. We were 20 Nordic dancers, rehearsing in each country in order to meet and put the dance piece together a few days before the premiere that would take place in Umeå May 2010. The choreographer Ina Christel Johannessen, dancer Cecilie Lindeman Steen and I travelled between the two countries during the rehearsal period to teach the dancers parts of the choreography and create movement material. It was easier than moving all 20 on each occasion. Ina's idea for the show was based on the questions: What produces a woman's identity, specifically in a Nordic context? Is there a liberated woman?

The movement material was in most cases developed through improvisation, which was then to be set before the premiere. Otherwise, we used the methods that I presented on page [?]. Before the premiere all the choreography was set and no parts improvised. In my description and my reflections on the work with *NOW SHE KNOWS*, I have chosen to limit myself to three different parts: First, a six minutes long sequence which we called "Broken Line", originally devised in dialogue between Ina and Cecilie. It was performed in unison by the whole group. The second part is a solo by me where Ina's idea was based on some of the artist Edvard Munch's paintings, including *Vampire and Madonna*. The third material is a solo by Katarina Eriksson that I replaced her in during a tour in 2011. These three dance sequences became interesting for me to base my research on, partly because they were worked out in different ways, but also because the conditions when rehearsing them differ. Moreover, they differ significantly in dynamics. It all adds up to a more varied picture of my work and my research than if my starting point was a single sequence.

Back to January 2010 and the first rehearsal day. Now everything



was about to start, not only my work with *NOW SHE KNOWS* but also my research project. I had not worked as a dancer for a couple of years so I was hugely excited. In addition, the work was essential for my research because I needed to be in an artistic process to examine what I wanted. The first day we started with “Broken Line”. I read in my notebook:

January 2010

First impression of doing it is like being in water and the movements are displacing the fluids in my body. The equilibrium does not exist, when I reach a position the fluids (by my will or of the earth's motion, gravity) move in a different direction, which means that I need to move on to seek equilibrium. Nothing is charged, or stretched, except for occasionally. Then it feels like something sticking out through a membrane that I have around me. A foetal feeling, strong internal movement. It also has a tentative feeling, like I'm testing my way, continually shifting, changing. Hint. To embody the thoughts that are drifting through my preconscious, which as soon as I have them are gone. Occasional clear markings, as if to punctuate the rhythm or stabilize the continuous movement. Or both. It also feels like I am opening a door inside where I hear a whole world; it goes on all the time but it is when I dance I can experience that world. It's mine.

Not addressed or directed outwards, everything feels, is experienced in the moment, not really formulated yet clear. Even if I look out, it's a gaze that goes inward. Negative space. Several rhythms simultaneously. Someone who knows the way. Gliding lines between each position, which are drawn in the air, successively. The attacks in the material. I have no feeling of front and back, I find myself, rather, in a spherical room. The body feels perforated.

I see in this text how I slide between a reflection, a backward-looking about how it felt, and a direct feeling in the moment of the material. There is both a now and a then in it. It is as close in time to the experience of the movement material as possible, the word does not replace the experience, but to some extent it can be described. But I still cannot discern the movement; the description of the process is a rejection since I cannot write while I move. This type of documentation is unstable and perhaps therefore somewhat truthful in relation to the process. If I had waited a while, I would probably have written in a different way. I want my writing to be, as much as possible, a portrayal of my process,

and it's anything but stable. What is clear to me is that when the letters are written on the paper, when the words are emerging, I am no longer in the process. And when I read what I have written, I am even further from the process.

The material for my solo was improvised, Ina was not even present when I was working with it, but she asked me to sketch a proposal from a number of ideas that she had. The first was the Munch paintings but she also talked about making hand movements, like signs that are impossible to understand but that would still look like a kind of language. The first time I improvised, I was alone in a studio in Bergen.

February 2010

Hands move around, pull and twist, open and close. A sound from the side, whoosh. Felt like someone was standing next to me, heat from something, but there was no one. Feet searching backwards, a stone under my foot. Hands in front, to the side does not work, then it feels like they are outside my sphere. Body bare. I repeat myself, suddenly a Per Jonsson hand and other movement residues from other choreographers. Trying to work intuitively and search for movement but get bored. How could I surprise myself? Unthreaded ... Too much will, nothing happens.

Ina wanted me to have my hair in front of my face and that I should work on how to change levels (bending and stretching the legs) and vary the dynamics of movement. The time I had to allocate was about two minutes and my starting point was at the front of the stage, off-center on the audience's right, and I would move backwards without turning my back to the audience. At my side was the dancer Line Tørmoen and between us a movement dialogue took place. Although we never looked at each other, we were with each other.

Gradually the material was coming together; I spent a few hours every day for about a week. At times, Ina looked and came up with various suggestions for changes and additions. I got a great deal of freedom in composing, but she was very firm over the end result.

I mentioned earlier in this text the concept of the dancer as an interpreter of an idea, where the movement is the result of and not the object of interpretation. Unlike the process of rehearsing "Broken Line", where I tried to find the idea of the movement through repetition of it, working with this solo was the opposite; namely, finding the move-

ment through the idea that Ina gave. These are two completely different inputs. In “Broken Line”, I tried to anchor the movement in my body and thereby find the idea around it. I do not mean that there necessarily needs to be a hidden thought or meaning in the movement, in this case it was itself enough. Either way, the work began from the material. Initially my solo was expected to be created in a way that Ina thought could work in the piece as a whole, so my process with the material came afterwards. In the beginning I was more concerned with how it looked. Katarina Eriksson’s solo, which is my third example, I learned, for practical reasons, by watching video. I read in my notebook:

June 2011

I cannot find the movements in my body, they are on the surface and I need to force myself into them. The problem is that I cannot see any articulated “movements”. They are small, more like hints whose starting points are hard to see on the video. The movement can be initiated from the back (which is not visible on the video because the solo is filmed from the front) and results in the right arm being raised. It feels really artificial when I try to dance it: the solo is Katarina. I try to see her in front of me as I try my way through the material; she has a power packed lightness in her dynamics. For me it’s either or, I cannot find the complexity of the dynamics that I experience when I see her dance. A sequence that contains lightning fast changes between large and small movements is particularly problematic. I do not understand it until I see another dancer trying it. Left arm grabs the right, which leads the movement in a new direction. I had missed that. I let the arm I grabbed be helpless and without clear direction. Strange that I could miss that.

For me to be able to dance Katarina’s solo, I needed to first understand where in my body the movements started. The next step was my own relationship to the material. I need to emphasize that there is no razor-sharp distinction between these different parts of the process: they overlap. Since Katarina was not physically present, I could not ask her or see her do the movements. I put my faith completely in the recorded documentation. I wondered whether I could call her if there was anything specific, but then she could not lead me through the material since she could not see how I was doing it. There is an expression in dance, “I need to make the movements my own”. That’s not what I mean here; I did not make the solo “mine”. I just needed to understand



what the solo was and explore the relationship between the movement and myself.

It was a different sensation to dancing “Broken Line”, which was more like a kind of state, a devotion that needed to be understood otherwise the quality of the material was lost. It was danced in unison, which required hours of negotiation between us dancers on movement details such as directions, angles, how stretched an arm should be, focus, etc. But even if the details were important, “Broken Line” was more inward, more low-key in its expression. My solo should be directed strongly outward, not with my eyes because my face was covered, but with my kinetic energy. Like I was talking a foreign language with the movements. Furthermore, with “Broken Line”:

May 2010

I felt a greater sense of abstraction yesterday, I had more analysis and pragmatism in how I went into it. Drier, my fluid description from before was completely gone; there were simply no liquids to displace. Maybe because I try to be in unison with the others, which makes me lose contact with the material. I end up outside of myself. I need to work alone for a while to see what happens in my experience then.

I also felt that it is easy to be simple in what I will eventually express because the sense of movement is a searching inward for balance in contrast to delivering an assumption outward. What you see is what is. Internal force that shows through. Very powerful but not expressed, one should keep the power inside. It has an impact on me with its floating through time and space. It feels like I'm telling thousands of years of history that everyone has already heard but cannot hear enough.

I travel inward; it feels familiar.

The lighting designer Kyrre Heldal Karlsen used a light on “Broken Line” that was slowly drifting back and forth across the stage. It continuously created new rooms or spaces depending on how our shadows fell. We were moving, as was the light, with the result that our shadows were also in motion, extending and shortening. It was like being carried through a moving landscape. Although the sequence was somehow inverted it became, because of the movement of shadows across the room, relational. This was different from the light in my solo that was fixed; there, I moved backwards in a light corridor and the room around



me was static, nothing moved except me. Initially the movement itself was central.

September 2010

It's more and more about remembering movements, building systems and checking similarities. I'm pulling apart their meanings. I feel a strong separation between mind and body; I think one thing and the body cannot keep up. Or total brain drain where I'm trying to remember. My body feels undynamic, it does not respond. Silent, without resonance. One-dimensional, both physically and mentally. Sometimes I feel the flow, when I'm past the memory stuttering. When I have been repeating the movements just to remember them, I can feel what is beyond. The strange thing is that I have such a resistance to this type of memory training, even though I know it will be and feel better later. An insurmountable obstacle! I am thinking that I can't learn this but suddenly after hours and hours of work it's there.

The solo was based on abrupt transitions, asymmetry and interruptions, which may explain why it was so hard to memorise. There were no longer sequences, just different themes. I wrote a kind of score or memo/instruction to aid memorization:

*Walk forward; pull the hair in front of face.
Start doing small signs with fingers and hands in front of chest.
Let your right arm cross over the left, pointing down with the right index finger and then pull the right index finger from the knee up to the groin.
Meanwhile small signs with left. Maybe some Per Jonsson movements, it's good to change the dynamics.
Left hand cuts from right to left at the waist and then pointing downwards along the left thigh, pivot left foot and squeeze your thigh to the audience.
Right hand shaped like a flower between the breasts and left hand makes a low Per-waving on left side.
Pull right hand at chest height, lotus fingers.
Left fingers balancing on line, shaking your head.
Right hand fold, with small trunk on the right thigh.
Left hand pointing at the audience shaking the head. Hit left fist in an air table two times.
Left hand makes wing movements down to right left arm, two fingers*



following sepsis down to the wrist. Hold your arm forward and show the audience.

Left hand puts right on the womb and then rest on the chest.

Right hand and elbow lifts the hair, peeking out.

When hair falls down wave away a fly in front of the stomach. Then push off a fat person standing in the way to finish with a rococo dress to left side and shake head. Hold Line. Pull fist against you, as if pulling someone to you.

Meanwhile drop right hand down and bring two index fingers to the forehead. Rotate half a turn, pulling along the middle of the skull and then lift up like a princess's crown. Left hand to three Graces pose.

Internal contraction.

Right hand draws a thought from right temple, throwing it against Line.

Left hand rotates around a ball in front of the solar plexus.

3 Graces or dancing disco with crawling and point at Line with left finger at hip height.

Worried uprisings, up and down, while the arms and hands makes arrhythmia.

Sink into parallel pose and open arms to the sides as if to speak up, shaking the head.

Right hand regurgitates stomach, left hand through waist with a closed fist. Angle up to 90 degrees and round out your index finger that becomes like an ice pick to the head.

Right hand moves forward as if to keep something away. Shake your head.

Circle hands in front of chest, swim like a cat, increase respiration in the chest.

Move your hands in front as if to poke away vegetation in the jungle, vary with Ina's hands.

Per's waving, disco inflections and taps. Varying levels.

Balancing act with poor balance on a very thin line.

This is probably an incomprehensible text to everyone except me. Before I learned the material I always had these notes in my pocket. As I could memorise longer and longer sequences, I identified themes, e.g., when I had stretched legs, crouched, when my hands touched my body, stillness, drives, attacks or when the signs I did with my hands could be clearly identified (pointing, waving, fist, etc.). It was like a kind of external perspective on the sequence, i.e., it described what it looked



like. Successively I learned the material and could start working with a more internal perspective. I manipulated myself with my thoughts and let go of my concentration, turning inwards to listen to the voices inside my body only to, in the next moment, turn my concentration outward again. I repeated that time and time again and used it as a method of surprising myself. It was like turning a mirror toward myself half-consciously and, in the next fraction of a second, turning it out with the utmost precision and presence. I needed to master time to find the arrhythmia, asymmetry and unpredictability of the movement. When I managed to crack the code of the phrasing of the material, immense possibilities opened up with the sequence. I had two parameters to relate to: a maximum of two minutes and that the movement material was set. But I could choose how I phrased the material as long as long as I kept to my two minutes. That way I could emphasize different parts, allowing them to take more or less time, and follow impulses that made the material more interesting to me. I discovered details in the movements, e.g., a movement that I thought only involved the right shoulder was suddenly found to involve the entire right side of the body. The first time I showed it to my co-researchers one of them said that it reminded her of a Japanese horror film. She said it was nasty because of the unpredictability, and it was not possible to follow the sequence because she experienced the material to be built on suddenness and interruptions.

In a way, it reminded me of the working process that I had while rehearsing Katarina's solo, although the road to realization of the significant phrasing was completely different. In my solo I dealt with memorizing, in Katarina's solo I worked with directions:

August 2011

First it was all about directions: how many times she turned in each direction and what she did with her arms. Now I find that phrasing is so crucial that if I do not sort it out, I cannot find the dynamics, attack and speed. I need to break through.

So I repeatedly studied a video of Katarina dancing the solo and sang, or rather sounded, my way through the sequence. I have no idea how long it took, maybe a couple of hours even though the sequence is not longer than about 90 seconds. In the end, it had become a kind of



wordless chant, which I knew by heart and that guided me in how to phrase the material. By making sounds, I found accents and syn-copations in the material, which in turn led me to the place in the body where the movement was initiated. Her solo was special since the movement rhythm built entirely on what one needed to do to make the movement work. As soon as I changed the rhythm or phrase, the movement didn't work. Once I heard William Forsythe talk about "the rhythm required by the action".

The water feeling that I described having the first time I repeated "Broken Line" is completely different from the feeling I have in Katarina's solo. In "Broken Line" almost nothing was accentuated, everything was articulated, but we glided, rather than using muscular force, between the different positions. I had to fend off the slides so as not to slide too far in a direction that would hamper the shift between movements. It could for example be that I had most of my weight on the left foot and then needed my body to be placed in a precise position to avoid jerking during the weight shift while shifting over to the right foot. Each dancer needed to find the position that worked for her because everyone is constructed differently so there is no position that works for everyone. Once you know how to travel between different modes it's preceded by lots of choices. Thoughts crisscross the head, making a choice has consequences in the next moment that need to be immediately compensated for. One part informs the next. It's exciting and it requires that you are completely alert. In "Broken Line", it was possible to consciously register all the choices I did just because it was relatively slow:

May 2011

Suddenly I recognize myself in the process, the idea revolves around the details, and the material is opening up to my eyes in endless variety. Every cell in the body, in every moment I need to make a choice. Or using every cell in my body I have to make a choice in every hundredth of a second. Sometimes it feels like unfolding, or folding, time and space.

The work with my solo was concrete. The movement material itself was not technically difficult, it was just the order that was hard to memorize. When I felt sure of the order and had begun to work with the character of the sequence (interruption, suddenness and unpredictabil-



ity as I described earlier), it was time for a run-through. This included a smaller audience, which caused problems for me:

May 2011

When someone looks on when I dance my solo, my ability to remember disappears; I forget details and consequences. The other's presence forces the present in me. Meanwhile, on another level, or from another perspective, I still have the opportunity to be here and now, to think about what I just did, and look ahead at what is to come. What the viewer or recipient actually sees is something that I do not know. When I repeat the movements to be able to remember, I can imagine the other that is beyond the mind. I relearn and memorize, organize all signs in the movement. I must go deeper into the movement, and it is only now that I can because I know the sequence.

I describe it as the memory changes. In retrospect, I am convinced that it depended on how I directed the movements. Ina really emphasized the communicative power that she wanted the signs that I made with my hands to have. Because I had my hair in front of my face, I saw nothing, I did not see those that I was supposed to communicate with, which meant I had to "place" my eyes in my hands. My hands looked, which helped me in my interpretation. But I also described something else here and that is how the moment widened. How I was both here and now while I thought about what I had just done and what was coming.

I have often experienced that time is extended or smudged when I dance. Time will be anything other than chronological. When I dance, I can experience a sequence of movements as parallel events and not as a chronology of movements. If there is a material that I have not done in a long time, I meet myself as I was when I last did it. I feel in my body what it felt like to do it the last time even though it's years in between. In addition, events from the specific occasion arise, e.g., people I met that day, or other things that have nothing to do with the actual movement. Time as parallel and not chronological.

In *NOW SHE KNOWS*, the youngest dancer is 30 years younger than me. One of Ina's key ideas was that we would be spread across ages and because of that I had a period of hesitancy about why I was there. If it was only for my age, what was expected of me? It improved for a while but returned again in the work with Katarina's solo. I'm reading:



August 2011

Ageing is not to be one with the force. The muscles are working completely disproportionately. No delicacy at all! Power beats me down. When I am doing each movement fully in every moment, which I like, I miss the next one. I have to do everything super slow to plough the furrows, or track the roads, that the impulses should take in my muscles. My research is not about age, but it becomes almost inevitable to take it into consideration. Yet age helps me somehow to see what being a dancer is about.

It might simply mean that I am not used to fine-tuning my instrument since I'm not dancing that much anymore, rather than having something to do with age. Contradiction. But the fine-tuning of the energy required for a specific moment is not working. My strength in certain stages fails me, and in other moments, I can't feel it. When I rehearse other dancers, I teach them all movements in a neutral way (if that is possible), i.e., without force. But in Katarina's solo, it is precisely this charge or power that is crucial if there is to be dancing at all.

The power was in the movement itself. You can also use an emotional trigger or, as I mentioned earlier, let spatial or musical factors start you off. Or everything at once. But in this case, where it was about a real physical power, I really felt unaccustomed, which could also have been age-related. This occupied me at the time and made me catch sight of the specificity of the dancer's ability to fine-tune, which I also call calibration of energy. Thus, the ability to adjust the energy intentionally again leads my thought back to "Broken Line":

August 2011

To dance "Broken Line" again is like being in the water. However, there is a danger going into the feeling of water too much, then the material can become too vague. I try to drop, slip and then catch up to the energy. It's precisely that interception of the energy that determines how interesting it will become for me as a dancer. There is an additional parameter, which is the agreed count of the movements in relation to the music. These two facts I relate to and in between them there is a widening of the moment. I can experience this moment as very big and abysmal, like a black hole to fall into, or soar through. The different choices I make in the present are like twigs, possible saviours, in the soaring and falling. The unison is both powerful and very fragile, feeling all as one body is absolutely fantastic. The entire room in



a tone that would last forever.

I wonder how I would feel to see it now, would it be as exciting as doing it? It is not complex, and it does not problematize. But still, it is as it has always been in my mind, and my eyes will never be neutral again. The experience of dancing “Broken Line” will always be in front of or embedded in what I see when I look at it. It is such a special pre-understanding that makes me not be able to “see” the movement. I would feel more than see; I can never really see it again.

My relationship with the solo is quite different. It also grew slowly but needed to re-emerge in a completely different way each time. Re-emerge from a kind of transformation, activity, event, and from the dialogue that took place in the meeting with the audience. From the movements and in between them, it communicates. During the dance and music festival “Movimento” in Ludwigsburg where we performed, I wrote:

May 2011

I went with some trepidation into the solo again. It's like entering a territory where you don't know what to expect. I immediately started making changes in timing and adding intervals. It is still possible to manipulate time between movements, there's a lot to extract from the solo. The attacks in the material, where every movement starts, and where it originates. I pulled on some things and attacked others, buckled, and then the entire energy dropped suddenly. I manipulated the dynamics, which created articulation of the movements. I usually experience the solo as long but it felt short even though I had plenty of time. Time became something else as I sent the idea in different directions. I still discover a lot of new things in how I can phrase and get a grip on the movement to then let go. In fact that release creates an amazing moment where I do not know where the movement should go or what to do. The movement cuts through the air, leaving signatures. I feel I can be super precise in every step and direction. Articulation versus flow. I am weightless and concrete.

In the research group's continuous discussions, running parallel with me performing in and touring with *NOW SHE KNOWS*, something new became apparent for me. It all started when I began to attend more carefully to the way my co-researchers studied the texts that we

had selected, and the way they discussed them. I could see that they created structures and patterns of reasoning. For me, it was like a new kind of choreography that I had never danced, a cluster of words pulled apart and pushed together. It became like a topography, a landscape of words, that gave me new ideas of how to approach a movement material. I wrote this when I last danced Katarina's solo, which was in Guanajuato, Mexico:

November 2011

When I dance Katarina's solo, I think in a new way. I can pull it apart, though I had not thought it would be possible. It affects my phrasing but also my focus, which can be both close and far away at the same moment. The relation to the room and to the other dancers changes repeatedly. It's an approach where I let my methods circulate around each other, circulating references and clusters. To relate in that way gives me a way of looking at the body as a room that creates a room within the room. Different realities simultaneously. I have felt alien to the material but now I can actually experience the movement. What happens is hard to describe: the body begins to almost roar inside. It makes a sound. If, so far, I have pushed the material before me, I now have it within me. It is possible to play with. I'm like a kite in the wind. Like stepping into a familiar skin, suddenly an atmosphere is created around what I do. The movement from inside gets a response from the outside, it does not float around uncertain. Something is there to relate to. Integrity. It swings.

Inner and Outer

For me, the progression of the research meant that my experience of the artistic process and hence my description of it changed. This was achieved through an interplay; partly, through dialogue with my co-researchers, but also by how I moved between being in, to then observing and reflecting upon my experience of the process. The most comprehensive changes for me are how I reason about the dancer's inner and outer gaze as a method, the dancer's relationship to time, and finally the words and thoughts relating to the movements. The original idea was to try to verbalize the artistic process from the example dance, but the research has, for me, come to deal with processes of change. The artistic process as a process of change.

The following example will clarify how I felt in the beginning of the research project:

At the Royal Opera in Stockholm, I work with rehearsing a solo from Mats Ek's dance piece Apartment.²⁴ I'm working with two dancers teaching them both a solo that they will alternate doing during the performance period. At one point during the solo the dancer is standing with her back to the audience to then quickly turn around. When rehearsing one dancer becomes focused on where the movement starts in the body, how the arms are moving, in which direction the feet are, if the upper body rotates as rapidly as the rest of the body, if she looks at eye level or downwards, etc. The other dancer only asks why she should turn; she wants a motive. Whether she is turning from something or to something.

The first dancer that I describe here is entirely occupied with how the body should move, how far she should turn and which body parts to be activated. She has her outer gaze on the movement. The other dancer was wondering why she should turn, she needs to understand and feel how the movement is related to her inner gaze. Of course the process doesn't stop with that, i.e., one is just busy with the way it looks and the other with the feeling, this describes only what happened initially in the process.

For me it has been important to describe the dancer as active, and that she makes conscious choices in the process with a movement material. Gaze has therefore been a more appropriate concept than, say, inner and outer presence, or inner and outer space, which I perceive as more passive. But through my research I have reformulated my thinking: I'm no longer talking about inner and outer gaze as the main method, now I talk about different perspectives, both inner and outer. One of these may be the gaze but it is one of numerous others. Everything that brings you further into the process is of importance, none are more effective than others; everything depends on the situation. Sometimes, the choices of method are conscious, sometimes they are made half unconsciously although one level is attentive. At a distance what happens, happens. There you can cheat, sneak and peek on yourself.

Some of the work involves letting loose, releasing control and in

²⁴ *Apartment* with choreography by Mats Ek had its premiere at Opéra National de Paris in 2000.



the next moment rigid control. Stop and reflect and then full speed, juggling between awareness and presence. What is interesting is that in the interplay between these modes, and when you become familiar with the material, you can somehow still return to experiencing the movement as if for the first time. With full control of every step but still completely omitted. This moves the presence to a physical or sensory level, e.g., to what I hear, what I see and what I feel against my skin. It increases the sensuous awareness by paying attention to it. It's like a movement back to the starting point. A loop where a movement is suggested-tested-formulated-articulated only to be reconsidered-suggested-tested-formulated-articulated, etc., ad infinitum.

I do not divide the perspectives into either intuitive or conscious; it is much more complex than that. It is an interaction that also involves intermediate states of mind, shortcuts and detours that offer new opportunities. Parallel lines in dialogue with each other. The intersection or gap in this dialogue, where those perspectives meet, is a zone of awareness and clarity. But it is still in a state of constant displacement due to the dancer's ability to be open to a dilated attention, which is directed at the situation, the body and the possibility in the movement.

Time

In my reasoning I returned to the dancer's ability to widen the present to be able to include what she does, what she has just done and what she will do. This constitutes an expansion and extension of time, parallel and not chronological, where the dancer develops her ability to be attentive. Where she directs her attention towards the movement, it gets its own sphere and, thus, is a kind of smearing in the experience of time. The movement gets more articulated and detailed as a result and a kind of topography of the inner experience of the movement emerges. In the process, the dancer shifts her attention to the body to enhance its sensitivity, its perception and its emotional landscape, which in itself opens to the complexity of the experience. The movement is in a constant transformation the moment before it is carried out: possibilities appear and the dancer makes choices. In that moment the unformulated intention (of which a certain part is preformulated) has a cumulative power, which is not yet calibrated in relation to a specific movement.

Everything, directions, levels and movements are possible in the state that is not just a state, but several states simultaneously. At that



moment there are traces of all past movements, all previous preformulated movements, which were never articulated but have left a kind of track in the dancer. These can be like indications or micro-perceptions that the dancer lets herself be flushed or perforated by. Therefore a movement can never be done or experienced in the same way as before because in every moment we experience new things, and the amount of possibilities and pre-formulated movements increases. This “before” position, before there has been a visible activity, can be a more active state than what is achieved when the movement is articulated, performed and thus becomes visible.

It is said that our attention system is largely independent of consciousness and that we automatically align our interests against the deviant and alien. What we think we know we don't pay heed to. I think that is precisely what the dancer becomes an expert at; namely, to ensure all movements as deviant. It is done consciously or unconsciously, which also, in the meeting with a new move, results in her discovering the unknown in the movements she thought she knew. Experience and memory are not just something we have but something we are. All the discoveries we have made lie in the past, just waiting to be seen again and, paradoxically, we must move on, meet new situations, to discover our previous experiences. In the encounter with the unknown, we meet the unfamiliar in what we already knew. In that perspective, both the memory and the presence are time and they presuppose each other. A now that, due to our interpretations of that now, separates us from each other but at the same time is a prerequisite for the proximity created by our common motion through time.

I have during the research period asked myself how I can reduce the time between intention and impulse, thought and action. Actually, it might not be about reducing time, but rather letting it be undetectable? That it is not time that is interesting, but what I do or do not do with it.

A special presence is created when I dance, a kind of moving current, in constant change. Where the memory, reflection, thought and action are in dialogue. The dancer counters intuitively, follows impulses or chooses directions. The intention and impulse meet, and that eliminates the boundary between thought and action. In a cluster of movement, thought, words, and time present, past and future meet.



Words and Thoughts in Motion

How does the professional dancer work in the process where the dance emerges and takes shape? How does the understanding of a movement material shift through the actual doing? What is it to understand a movement? The transition between these different kinds of understanding, or experience, has been what most interested me in our research. Therefore, I have occupied myself with questions about how the dancer perceives movement: from seeing them to then performing them, from whole to part and vice versa. I discussed the differences and similarities between vision and performance with my co-researchers and asked them to try to describe the difference they experienced between seeing and doing movement materials. We have had a kind of inner and outer perspective on the process where I was in the process, and they remained outside. During the research period, I felt that what I had previously termed as practice-based movement analysis was no longer appropriate to describe what it is that I do. Now I call it process-based movement analysis. The process is in focus and the practice makes it possible.

From my practice concepts emerge, a working language or terminology, which really only has value in its usability and its constant mutability. A language that springs from experience, and an experience that grows out of the language. A conceptualization that opens to a new vision, which in turn enables a new understanding of the movement. The language can be a way to visualize the sensation of the movement in words. Through chains and clusters of words such as:

*Influence – movements affect me – lead to a reflection where my intuition
gives me inspiration
– sprouts in me and seems to –
create a relationship to the material that leads to an impulse to
improvise –
takes place in me and I act – dialogue occurs and my intention appears
even for me*

But the linguistic performance of the process actually fails. It does not work. My reflection is always on a more physical level than the words can show. The body of the language and the language of the body, how can I transcribe the movement as a thought, in words? How can the



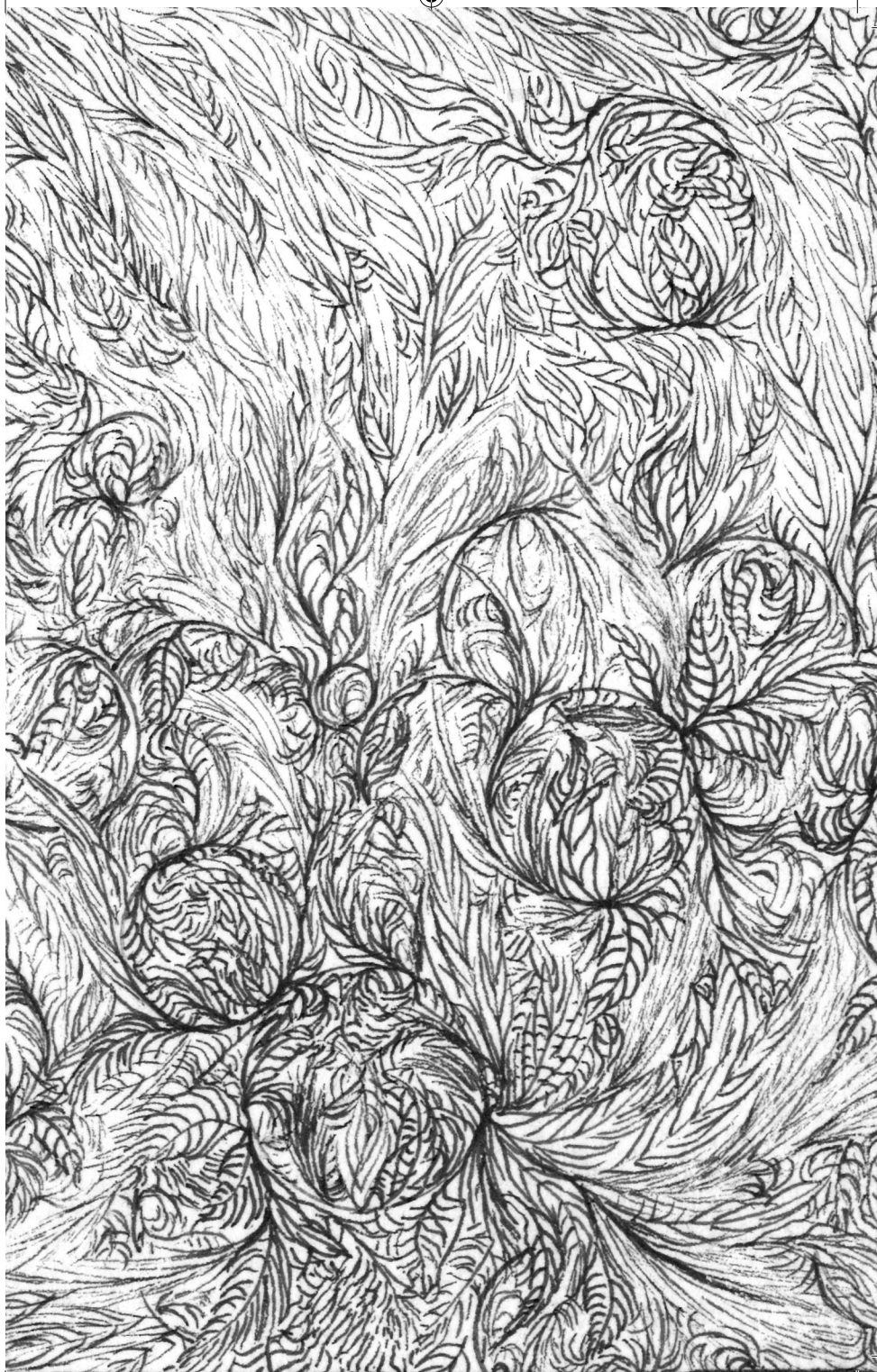


movement become text? I can write reflexively and describe the process, but it will always look different depending on which process I describe and when in relation to the actual action I write. The transition from my reflexive writing to a more, should I call it, theoretical-philosophical perspective is awkward. It is also a kind of internal and external perspective, but the gap or void that I wanted to describe remains.

Perhaps it is in that space that flexibility and linguistic displacement of meaning can fit? Distance as a prerequisite for articulation and mutability. Between the perceived and the verbally articulate, a space for the process is created, where it can become multilayered, ambiguous and subjective. There, the meaning of a word can change, which means that the words will not wear out and the associative paths don't get locked in certain clichés. I discussed it with my co-researcher Chrysa Parkinson at one of our seminars and she said something that, for now, can summarize my reasoning:

Language is very useful in physical processes for its ability to make distinctions between things. Movement is useful for its ability to humble and question those distinctions.







Towards a Phenomenological Account of the Dancing Body: Merleau-Ponty and the Corporeal Schema

Anna Petronella Foultier

In the philosophical tradition, the human body has rarely been considered on its own terms, as fundamental to perception and cognition, but more often than not as a supplement to the reasoning faculty of the soul; an appendix that, in addition, is held to constitute an obstacle to true knowledge. When it comes to the dancing body, philosophers are even more reticent: whereas the other art forms, from painting, literature and music to sculpture and architecture, have been examined in depth and even put at the centre of systematic aesthetic reflection (the most famous example being of course Hegel's philosophy of art), the art of dance seems only recently to have become a worthy object of theoretical consideration.

One obvious explanation for the neglect of dance in philosophy is the disregard of its agent, namely the living body. In feminist criticism of philosophy since Beauvoir this is related to the identification of the body with the female principle, so that the subjugation of woman in patriarchy is explained in terms of the rejection of the physical, vulnerable and mortal side of us.¹

The identification of the female with matter, darkness, ignorance and so on goes back at least to the Pythagoreans and their famous table of opposites,² whose influence on the philosophy of Plato and on the dualist tradition in general is indubitable.³ In a well-known paper, "Philosophers and the Dance",⁴ David Michael Levin relates the lack of philosophical writing on dance to the hostility towards the sen-

¹ Or what Simone de Beauvoir calls, in *The Second Sex*, "immanence", transl. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, London: Vintage Books, 2011/*Le deuxième sexe* I & II, Paris: Gallimard, 1949/1976.

² In this table, that Aristotle presents in *Metaphysics* 986a22, "male" falls into the same column as "right" and "good", whereas "female" is in that of "left" and "bad".

³ I discuss this tradition more extensively in my "Dansens filosofiska kropp: Merleau-Ponty och kroppen som konstverk", in *Ord i tankar och rörelse*, Cecilia Roos et al., Stockholm: DOCH, 2013.

⁴ "Philosophers and the Dance", *Ballet Review* 6:2, 1977–1978, reprinted in *What is Dance?*, eds. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983 (85–94).

suous body in the Western tradition. He understands this connection between the body and the female principle through the role of dance in society; whereas dance originally occurred “in a ritually consecrated space”,⁵ as part of fertility rites, it later developed into an art form, a spectacle, which for Levin means that “patriarchy won out”.⁶ Worship of the fecundity of Mother Earth was gradually replaced by celebration of reason and art for its own sake.

By contrast, one of the most renowned philosophers writing in the field of dance, Francis Sparshott,⁷ claims that theorizing upon dance has a much longer history than is commonly believed. Yet he confirms that it is not so easily integrated into the theory of art in general.⁸ He entirely dismisses Levin’s idea that dance was originally a manifestation of the female principle⁹ and contends that dance is not so much rejected as overlooked, “historically, prevailing and acceptable justifications available to other arts have not been available to the dance. The ideology has failed to fit”.¹⁰ One explanation that Sparshott brings up in his discussion of the absence of dance in aesthetic systems is the expressive character of the human body as such. In Hegel’s view, dance as “a means of expression” is “subhuman and pre-artistic”,¹¹ and is thus to be seen as merely a predecessor of art proper.

Although Merleau-Ponty has not written on dance other than in passing, I believe that his conception of the lived body, and his effort to overcome the dualistic metaphysics inherent in our tradition, can be useful for an understanding of dance and choreographic expression. For the French phenomenologist, the living body is expressive in itself and is thereby the origin of other forms of expression and language.¹² In or-

⁵ Levin, p. 86.

⁶ Ibid., p. 87. Levin acknowledges the speculative character of this hypothesis and does not give any precise references. However, the idea that dance was primordially a sacred practice is not controversial; see for example Paul Bourcier, “La première danse fut un acte sacré”, in his *Histoire de la Danse en Occident I–II*, Paris: Seuil, 1978/1994.

⁷ Through books such as *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988 and *A Measured Pace: Toward a Philosophical Understanding of the Arts of Dance*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

⁸ “Why Do Philosophers Neglect the Aesthetics of the Dance?”, *Dance Research Journal* 15:1, 1982 (5–30).

⁹ Sparshott’s argument is not very fair to Levin, as he attributes to him a rather simplistic empirical thesis of dance as a womanly practice. See *ibid.*, pp. 9 f.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Donald A. Landes, London: Rout-



der to call attention to the fact that meaning is incarnated in the body, he compares it to a work of art, and, just as in a painting or a poem, in the living body “expression cannot be distinguished from what is expressed”.¹³ Rather signification “radiates” from the body, or in other words, the body is a “knot of living significations”.¹⁴

Now, this should not be taken to mean that the human body is “naturally” expressive and that meaning on the level of the body would be inherent in some biological sense (although Merleau-Ponty’s theory has indeed been interpreted that way). If conceptual meaning is formed by “drawing [*prélèvement*] from” a gestural meaning,¹⁵ the latter is still contingent upon the body as a biological entity. At the heart of our bodily existence we are historical and cultural beings, “Man is a historical idea and not a natural species”.¹⁶

There are several questions to be posed here. First, if significations are not inborn, how are they inscribed in the body, and how are they expressed? Second, if the human body is in itself compared to a work of art, in what way is dance as an art form distinct from what the everyday body does? And third, does not verbal, conceptual language differ from artistic expression, and can it really be seen as emanating from what is going on in gestures and movement?

I will mainly deal with the two first questions in this paper, and only briefly with the third, in order to find out whether an outline of a phenomenology of dance can be extracted from Merleau-Ponty’s thought.

The Living Body and Its World

Merleau-Ponty’s work is rooted in the phenomenological tradition, where the basis of knowledge and experience is neither reason, as an instance separate from and opposed to the physical world, nor sensual

ledge, 2012 (the translation has occasionally been altered), p. 147/*Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard, 1945, p. 171: “notre corps [...] est l’origine de tous les autres [espaces expressifs], le mouvement même d’expression”.

¹³ [Ref.]

¹⁴ Phenomenology, pp. 152, 153/pp. 176, 177: “C’est en ce sens que notre corps est comparable à l’œuvre d’art. Il est un nœud de significations vivantes et non pas la loi d’un certain nombre de termes covariants.”

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 184/p. 209. Merleau-Ponty’s terminology is varying, but in Phenomenology he frequently uses the terms conceptual or notional signification/meaning on the one hand, and gestural or emotional signification/meaning on the other.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 174/p. 199: “L’homme est une idée historique et non pas une espèce naturelle.”



experience or behaviour, seen as part of matter and explainable in causal terms. Rather, conscious and experiential life is characterized by *intentionality* – a directedness towards objects in a wide sense – and can, as a consequence, not be captured in the naturalistic language of the exact sciences. For Edmund Husserl, the “father of phenomenology”, intentionality was above all a property of consciousness, whereas Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the more primordial form of intentionality that is tied to the body in movement. Merleau-Ponty calls it functioning or operative intentionality, after Husserl’s “fungierende Intentionalität”, or sometimes “motor intentionality” or simply “existence”.¹⁷

The basic aim of phenomenology is to give a pure, unprejudiced description of our experience, of the world’s givenness and of the way we are directed towards it. All our preconceived ideas and theories about the world, ourselves as well as our relation to it must be suspended, put within brackets, in order for us to get access to the how of the objects’ appearing. At the level of phenomenological description, it turns out that the living body – that Husserl calls *Leib* – differs in an essential way from the body in a pure corporeal sense, the *Körper*.¹⁸

In the Cartesian tradition, the human body was precisely a *Körper*, or in Descartes’ words, “all this machinery of members that appears in a corpse”.¹⁹ In order to tell the difference between a moving corpse and a living body – the machinery of members united with a soul – the intellect had to make the *judgement*, based on clues given by the senses, that, for example, those men hidden by their hats and coats that I see through my window are human beings rather than mechanical dolls.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 523/p. 161: “l’intentionnalité motrice”; p. 520/p. 141: “existence”. The notion of functioning intentionality is mentioned on p. lxxii/p. xiii, and was introduced by Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, transl. David Carr, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, § 59/*Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. Walter Biemel, *Husserliana*, vol. VI, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969.

¹⁸ See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, transl. Dorion Cairns, The Hague: Nijhoff/Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1973, §§ 43 f./*Cartesianische Meditationen: Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie*, in *Husserliana* I, The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950/1963.

¹⁹ René Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques. Objections et réponses suivies de quatre lettres*, Paris: Flammarion, 1979, p. 81/AT 20.

²⁰ Descartes, *ibid.*, p. 93/AT 25: “cependant que vois-je de cette fenêtre, sinon des chapeaux et des manteaux, qui peuvent couvrir des spectres ou des hommes feints qui ne se remuent que par ressorts?” (“yet what do I see through the window, except hats and coats which may cover ghosts or dummies worked by springs?”). Merleau-Ponty discusses this passage in



Merleau-Ponty points out that the living body is, on the contrary, immediately given to us as such in our experience. Whereas a mechanical doll or a *Körper* can be explained in mechanistic terms, this is not the case with the living body, *Leib*; it is itself an *experience* of the world, not merely a part of it.

In fact, in Merleau-Ponty's view, it is only as bodily beings, moving around in the world, that we can have experience: perception and movement presuppose one another. When a cat runs by, we see it because we move our eyes and our head, and if we want to touch it we need to stretch out our hands. We bend forward to smell a flower, and put a fruit in our mouth to taste it. Our movements are always related to the sensual world we are surrounded by and to the activity we are engaged in; I move differently in darkness than in daylight, or in a well-known environment compared to unknown surroundings. For this reason, it is not, Merleau-Ponty contends, the body in an objective sense that moves, the *Körper*, but what he sometimes terms the phenomenal body.²¹

The phenomenal body is the body that I am; it is not a body I am attached to, that I need to be united with – like the Cartesian body whose union with the soul must be *sui generis*, impossible as it is to determine how they come together.²² The living body is not a pure thought amalgamated somehow with a pure extension, but incarnated meaning; it presents, writes Merleau-Ponty, “the mystery of a whole [*ensemble*] that, without leaving behind its haecceity and its particularity, emits beyond itself significations capable of offering a framework for an entire series of thoughts and experiences”.²³

Thus, the movements of the living body are not merely certain pathways traced by the body in Euclidian space, whose parts are all exchangeable with one another, but charged with meaning. They have a direction that is determined by my occupation and my motives. In contrast with objects, which simply have a position in space, the liv-

Phenomenology, p. 35/p. 41.

²¹ See *Phenomenology*, p. 108/p. 123.

²² See Descartes' letter to princess Elisabeth of 28 June 1643, René Descartes, *Correspondance avec Élisabeth et autres lettres*, Paris: Flammarion, 1989.

²³ *Phenomenology*, p. 128/p. 147: “Les sens et en général le corps propre offrent le mystère d'un ensemble qui, sans quitter son ecclésié et sa particularité, émet au delà de lui-même des significations capables de fournir leur armature à toute une série de pensées et d'expériences.”



ing body has a *situation* in space.²⁴ It is devoted to something, if only to sleeping or daydreaming. For this reason, a living body is not just positioned beside a chair, for instance, in the way that a chair is placed beside another chair. I am related to the chair: I can sit on it, I can lean against it, I can climb upon it, ask someone else to sit on it, repaint it or throw it out. In order to further characterize the spatiality of the lived body with its internal relations, Merleau-Ponty says that their parts are “enveloped” in one another, in contrast with objective spatiality where things are simply beside one another.²⁵

Whereas the parts of Euclidian space are indifferent towards one another, things have meaning for the living body and other living bodies mean something other for it than things. When my body moves in space, it does not simply travel through it, it *inhabits* space, writes Merleau-Ponty, in order to express this particular meaningful relation.²⁶ It is not simply in space and time, but assumes space and time; it belongs to them, “I am not in space and in time, I do not think space and time; I am at home in space and time, my body gives itself over to them and embraces them”.²⁷

According to Merleau-Ponty, then, it is essential for the living body to have a situation in space, to relate to space as lived, and to constitute an organic whole whose parts are internally connected with one another. Moreover, it is fundamental that it is someone’s *own* body, a body-*proper* (“corps propre”): it has its own spatial and temporal perspective on the world, which can only to some extent be occupied by someone else. Another person can go to the place where I am, but she cannot go back in time, and in her perspective will be included a whole range of other situational characteristics: her height, the distinctive features of her sensory organs – she may hear better than I do, or be colour blind, near sighted, etc. – as well as her personal history and background, which all inform her perception of the world. The own-ness in itself, that this body is mine, or rather that I am my body, as my particular

²⁴ Or, to be more precise, it has a situational spatiality, not a positional spatiality as the external objects. Ibid., p. 102/p. 116: “sa spatialité n’est pas comme celle des objets extérieurs [...] une spatialité de position, mais une spatialité de situation” (emphasis in original).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 100/p. 114: “[Les parties de mon corps] ne sont pas déployées les unes à côté des autres, mais enveloppées les unes dans les autres.” See also the chapter “Space”.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 140/p. 162: “[notre corps] habite l’espace et le temps” (emphasis in original).

²⁷ Ibid., p. 141/p. 164: “je ne suis pas dans l’espace et dans le temps, je ne pense pas l’espace et le temps; je suis à l’espace et au temps, mon corps s’applique à eux et les embrasse”.

destiny, brings these features together.

Thus, the body-proper is not a summative entity, composed of different organs and functions, moving in a geometrical space as a ball in a pinball game. Space in itself is not, as we have seen, an empty vessel, a measurable extension whose parts are all external in relation to one another, *partes extra partes*. Rather, the space we perceive has directions: we always experience the world from a perspective, and thus the direction an object is located in is not indifferent to me. As the Gestalt theorists said, perceived space is anisotropic, whereas objective space is isotropic: its properties are identical in all directions.²⁸ In other words, phenomenal space is a meaningful space: *sens* in French signifies both direction and meaning.

Now, the point is that this phenomenal spatiality is not a subjective, distorted manifestation of space in itself, whose parts would in reality be entirely equivalent to one another and exhaustible by measurement. The cube that I see before me is not “in itself” a geometrical cube with six equal faces, a completed and translucent object, “shot through from all sides by an infinity of present gazes, intersecting in its depth and leaving nothing there hidden”.²⁹ This is the traditional philosophical and scientific conception; due to our orientation and to the constitution of our senses the world appears to us as charged with significations, whereas the real world would be describable in mathematical terms. Just as Husserl before him,³⁰ Merleau-Ponty maintains that this is to turn things upside down: rather than the objective space described by science underlying phenomenal space, it is the latter, experiential, oriented space that is the basis of the objectivistic model. This model is a construction having its purpose in certain contexts, but becoming problematic if we understand it as a representation of the world in itself. A die is to be explored through its different aspects, and this is what the die is as such, “The cube with six equal sides is not merely invisible, but is even inconceivable; this is the cube as it would be for itself; but the cube is not for itself, since it is an object.”³¹

²⁸ See e.g. Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935, pp. 275 f.

²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 71/83: “L’objet achevé est translucide, il est pénétré de tous côtés par une infinité actuelle de regards qui se recoupent dans sa profondeur et n’y laissent rien de caché.”

³⁰ In *Crisis*.

³¹ *Phenomenology*, p. 210/p. 236: “Le cube à six faces égales est non seulement invisible, mais

This tendency of science and philosophy to disregard lived experience and their ambition to take a God's eye view of the world, to consider it as a huge object, exhaustible through mathematical theories and without hiding-places, Merleau-Ponty calls "objective thought", and later "la pensée de survol", "the flying-over thought":³² the form of thinking that aims to dissociate itself from the world in order to completely embrace it. Yet, the very movement of thinking can never enter into this picture, and this was why Descartes in the end had to admit that the union between body and soul could not be thought, but only lived.³³

Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, wants to *think* this union, or rather, think the particular kind of being that Descartes characterized as a union of body and soul, and that the philosophers and scientists of his time designated as an assembly of functions or conditioned reflexes. To this end, in order to "think what most philosophies have considered as refuse [*produit de rebut*]",³⁴ a new form of thought is needed, with fresh, recast categories.

The Habitual Body and the Corporeal Schema

One such new category that Merleau-Ponty has recourse to is that of the corporeal schema, "le schéma corporel": an "ambiguous [notion], as are all concepts that appear at turning points in science".³⁵ It is related to a distinction introduced by Merleau-Ponty in order to explicate the phenomenon of phantom pain, namely that between the *habitual* and the *actual* body. The body-proper is at a fundamental level a habitual body, he writes: it integrates in itself habits that become part of the body's very structure. Due to the habitual body, I do not need have recourse to reflexion once I have learned to walk or cycle, and even the

encore impensable; c'est le cube tel qu'il serait pour lui-même; mais le cube n'est pas pour lui-même, puisqu'il est un objet."

³² This term occurs particularly in "Eye and Mind", transl. Michael B. Smith, in ed. Galen A. Johnson, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, pp. 122, 134/L'Œil et l'Esprit, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, pp. 12, 48.

³³ Descartes, *Correspondance*, op. cit.

³⁴ Merleau-Ponty, "Être et Avoir", *Parcours*. 1935–1951, Lagrasse: Verdier, 1997, p. 39: "Il s'agit ici de penser ce que la plupart des philosophies ont tenu pour produit de rebut."

³⁵ *Phenomenology*, p. 100/p. 114. This notion was first developed by neurologist Henry Head, *Studies in Neurology*, vol. II, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920 and psychiatrist Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche*, London: Routledge, 1935/1999/*Das Körperschema: Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom Bewusstsein des eigenen Körpers*, Berlin: J. Springer, 1923.



bicycle I use every day becomes incorporated in this structure. When I learn a new movement, it is largely the body itself that understands, that “catches” the movement:³⁶

For example, to acquire the habit of a dance, do we not find the formula of the movement through analysis and then recompose it, taking this ideal outline as a guide and drawing upon already acquired movements, such as walking and running? But in order for the new dance to integrate particular elements of general motricity, it must first have received, so to speak, a motor consecration.³⁷

The actual body, on the other hand, is the body here and now, which overlaps but does not coincide with the former. In the case of the phantom limb,³⁸ for example, there are gestures that have disappeared from the actual body, but that are still integrated at the habitual level, and this is the reason for the “ambivalent presence” of the phantom limb. With the habitual body we go beyond the actual, present body and experience the objects or tasks at hand as manageable – not just by me, but in themselves. In other words, the habitual level of the body implies a certain generality and impersonality.³⁹

Merleau-Ponty also uses the metaphor of “intentional threads” to characterize the connection of the body-proper to its environment, threads that remain hidden in the natural attitude but are distended through phenomenological reduction and in this way appear for what they are.⁴⁰ When I sit down at my desk, I do not need to find the keyboard or the light switch: my hands already know what gestures to perform, and the rest of the body immediately adapts to the working position. It is this network of intimate ties to the environment that I

³⁶ *Phenomenology*, p. 144/p. 167: “C’est le corps [...] qui ‘attrape’ (*kapiert*) et qui ‘comprend’ le mouvement.”

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144/p. 167: “Par exemple, acquérir l’habitude d’une danse, n’est-ce pas trouver par analyse la formule du mouvement et le recomposer, en se guidant sur ce tracé idéal, à l’aide des mouvements déjà acquis, ceux de la marche et de la course? Mais, pour que la formule de la danse nouvelle s’intègre certains éléments de la motricité générale, il faut d’abord qu’elle ait reçu comme une consécration motrice.”

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83/p. 96: “Le bras fantôme n’est pas une représentation du bras, mais la présence ambivalente d’un bras.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85/p. 98.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. lxxvii, 74, 108, 132/pp. viii, 86, 123, 151.



have “in my hands” or “in my legs” that Merleau-Ponty calls intentional threads.⁴¹

A more elaborate example that Merleau-Ponty gives is that of the musician, or more precisely the organist, relying here upon a study made by Jacques Chevalier on habit.⁴² The experienced organist needs only an hour of practice in order to get used to an unfamiliar organ, even though it has more or less keyboards and the stops are differently arranged. “He does not learn positions in objective space for each stop and each pedal”, but rather “he sizes up the instrument with his body, he incorporates its directions and dimensions, and he settles into the organ as one settles into a house”.⁴³

As we saw, my body is not something that I *have*, like an instrument. Rather, the instruments and other objects that I handle regularly are incorporated into the structure of my body. The blind woman does not draw the conclusion that there is an object at the tip of her cane, neither does she feel the object with its help; rather, she feels the object *at* its tip: “the cane’s furthest point is transformed into a sensitive zone [...], it has become the analogue of a gaze”.⁴⁴ The cane has become an extension of her body, like a supplementary limb. In a similar way, a pianist playing on his instrument can appear to constitute a unity with it to the extent that one does not really know who is playing whom, whether it is not rather the piano that is playing him.

It is through experience, practice, habit that the habitual body is constituted; I once learned to walk and am now someone who walks, who doesn’t need to prepare myself or think about it in a normal situation. The capacity disappears from focus and becomes something that one simply does. Of course, if that situation changes, if I need to walk very far or in difficult conditions – under a burning sun, on icy ground,

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 131–132/p. 151: “Mon appartement [...] ne demeure autour de moi comme domaine familier que si j’en ai encore ‘dans les mains’, ou ‘dans les jambes’ les distances et les directions principales et si de mon corps partent vers lui un multitude de fils intentionnels.”

⁴² Ibid., pp. 146 f./pp. 169 f.; Chevalier, *L’Habitue. Essai de métaphysique scientifique*, Poitiers: Société française d’imprimerie, 1929.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 146/p. 170: “Pour chaque jeu et pour chaque pédale, ce ne sont pas des positions dans l’espace objectif qu’il apprend”; “il prend mesure de l’instrument avec son corps, il s’incorpore les directions et les dimensions, il s’installe dans l’orgue comme on s’installe dans une maison”.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 144/p. 167: “son extrémité s’est transformée en zone sensible [...], il est devenu l’analogue d’un regard”.

for example – then the activity is not entirely familiar anymore. If I get hurt or fall ill, I can temporarily experience an ambivalence between a practice that *one* – other people in general – can perform but not I. Thus, these notions are dynamic. The habitual body is a living unity; it is not given once and for all. The concept of the corporeal schema is of course related to that of the habitual body: it is the body schema that gives the body-proper its spatiotemporal, inter-sensorial and sensorimotor⁴⁵ unity. Just as I cannot perceive anything without moving the body in some way, and the “movements of the body-proper are naturally invested with a certain perceptual signification”,⁴⁶ the different senses presuppose one another. Due to the corporeal schema, I know the position of my limbs, although not in a static sense but related to certain (actual or possible) tasks.⁴⁷

The American philosopher Shaun Gallagher has clarified this analysis of the corporeal schema, emphasizing that it must be separated from the notion of the body *image*.⁴⁸ Whereas the body image is an intentional object, or in other words something we are immediately conscious of and can conceptualize, the body schema is more accurately what precedes and structures our experience; it is, says Gallagher, “preintentional” and “prenoetic”.⁴⁹ It implies an appropriation of motor habits – postures and movements – that are integrated in the body at a “non-conscious” level, and constitutes a presupposition for new movements, for bodily expression, but also for cognitive processes in general: experience, perception, thinking and language. Gallagher calls it “a system of sensory-motor processes that constantly regulate posture and movement”.⁵⁰ It gives a holistic apprehension of the body, in contrast with the body image that always presents a certain perspective of the body. The body image, in its turn, does not only include our perception

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 102/p. 115.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 49/p. 59: “Les mouvements du corps propre sont naturellement investis d’une certaine signification perceptive”.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 102/p. 116: “mon corps m’apparaît comme posture en vue d’une certaine tâche actuelle ou possible”.

⁴⁸ Gallagher, “Body Image and Body Schema: A Conceptual Clarification”, *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 7:4, 1986 (541–554); “Body Schema and Intentionality”, in eds. José Luis Bermúdez, Anthony Marcel and Naomi Eilan, *The Body and the Self*, Cambridge, Mass./London: The MIT Press, 1995.

⁴⁹ Gallagher “Body Schema”, pp. 226, 229, 235, 237; *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 32, 138–40.

⁵⁰ Gallagher, *How the Body*, p. 37.

of the body, but also our conceptual understanding and affective relation to it, in Gallagher's interpretation.

Since the bodily schema functions as a system of transposition, it explains how movements can be learned systematically and not as circumscribed units, as in the case of the organist mentioned earlier. It also makes us understand how the stick of the blind person, the musician's instrument, or a hat or a car for that matter, can become integrated into the structure of the body as "voluminous powers, the requirement of a certain free space".⁵¹ In fact, the structure of the corporeal schema corresponds to the structure of the world: the thing that I perceive is also "a system of equivalences that is [...] grounded upon [...] the apprehension [*épreuve*] of a bodily presence".⁵²

Furthermore, owing to the corporeal schema, a newborn baby,⁵³ for example, is capable of translating a facial expression it sees on another's face into movements in its own face, and hence of imitating it.⁵⁴ There is, in other words, a transposition of sorts taking place not only between my bodily posture, my different senses and my motor tasks in the world, but also between my perception of the other person's movements and gestures and my own experience, due to this schema.⁵⁵

In this way, the other person's movements – even those kinds that I have not seen earlier and that I am myself incapable of performing – can have meaning for us. Some researchers believe that the corporeal schema could therefore be used to explain phantom experience in apraxia, that is, how people with a congenital absence of a limb can have phantom pain: the idea is that they transfer the perception of other people's bodies to their own corporeal schema.⁵⁶

The Reflection of the Living Body

It seems that the learning or elaboration of a new style of movement, such as takes place in dance practice, may be described in terms of

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, p. 144/p. 167: "Ils sont devenus des puissances volumineuses, l'exigence d'un certain espace libre".

⁵² Ibid., p. 191/p. 216: "la cheminée est un système d'équivalences qui [...] se fonde [...] sur l'épreuve d'une présence corporelle".

⁵³ And not just a baby, as already Merleau-Ponty knew, see *Phenomenology*, p. 368/p. 404.

⁵⁴ This was shown in a famous experiment by Andrew N. Meltzoff and Keith Moore from the beginning of the 80s (see Gallagher, *How the Body*, pp. 69 f.). Merleau-Ponty discusses this form of transposition in a 15-month year old baby, see *Phenomenology*, p. 368/p. 404.

⁵⁵ *Phenomenology*, p. 172/p. 196.

⁵⁶ See Gallagher, *How the Body*, pp. 86 f.

a passage from bodily image to corporeal schema. The dancer repeats the movements, often according to another person's instructions; she focuses upon certain limbs or parts of limbs, or on her general posture, and in some dance techniques, particularly in ballet, she also uses a mirror to correct her movements. When she has come to understand how these movements are to be performed, and repeated them a sufficient amount of times, many of them become, to a large extent, incorporated in her body, and either become a starting point for the learning of yet other movements, or, as in repeating a particular choreography, it leaves room for concentrating on more difficult parts, on small details and expressive nuances. As dancer Chrysa Parkinson puts it, "Patterns become part of the infrastructure of our bodies, and they integrate themselves into how we see, hear and feel".⁵⁷

Often language is used here, together with other people's movements, as when a teacher or rehearser explains and shows a part of a choreography. In many cases, movements that we learn assisted by words, or develop with the help of our intellect, will eventually be integrated in the body and become part of it. For this reason, thought cannot be separated from the body but must be incarnated in existence, as Merleau-Ponty contends. Sometimes, then, the reflection at work involves focusing on a body part, sometimes we reflect literally, through a mirror. In both these cases, and in the case where we look at someone else performing the movement and try to imitate it, we employ the capacity to transpose between the senses that is tied to the bodily schema. Even if thought and language are used, fundamentally it is the body who explores the movement and tries to find its way, and here it would seem plausible to speak of a bodily reflection of sorts. It seems that thinking here is, as it were, on the surface; it brushes against the movement, is perhaps not immediately directed towards it or arrives just afterwards.

In Descartes, reflection was always a kind of objectifying thought, whereas the foundation of this form of reflection is in Merleau-Ponty the living body's own power to re-*fect*, in the sense of our capacity to see our own body, and to touch it.⁵⁸ There is, as Jacques Taminiaux formulates it, "a reflective capacity at the very core of perception",⁵⁹ and,

⁵⁷ [ref.]

⁵⁸ See Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", p. 125/p. 20.

⁵⁹ Taminiaux, "The Thinker and the Painter", transl. Michael Gendre, in *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, ed. Martin C. Dillon, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 200.

once we have seen that the moving body is the heart of perception, it is no longer so surprising that there can be a bodily form of reflection. In general, phenomenological reflection is described by Merleau-Ponty not as the thought of perceiving, but rather a re-actualisation, reenacting (“ré-effectuation”) of perception.⁶⁰

To some extent, the movement style “disappears” from our experiential field when it is incorporated as a habit. The flamenco dancer and the ballet dancer, for example, have different basic upright postures – the ballet dancer slightly more tilted forwards – but this is learned at a very early stage and becomes, as it were, a “natural” part of the dancer’s body that is taken for granted. Merleau-Ponty writes that bodily spatiality – strongly connected to motor intentionality and the corporeal schema – is “the darkness in the theatre needed for the clarity of the performance, the background of sleep or the vague reserve of power against which the gesture and its goal stand out”.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the characterisation of the corporeal schema as non-conscious, preconscious or prenoetic should not, I believe, be taken to mean that it is not accessible to experience.⁶² It is, precisely, a holistic apprehension of the body, to use Gallagher’s term, and Merleau-Ponty himself depicts the experience involved here as “prelogical”, “implicit”, “latent”,⁶³ and so on. It is not directly given to our consciousness but structures our experience and hence has a transcendental character.⁶⁴ Yet, it can be made accessible to reflection, not tothetic consciousness and analytical reflection, but to that other form of reflection that Merleau-Ponty sometimes calls “radical”, which is said to capture things in the state of their appearance.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See e.g. *Phenomenology*, p. 367/p. 404.

⁶¹ *Phenomenology*, p. 103/p. 117: “L’espace corporel [...] est l’obscurité de la salle nécessaire à la clarté du spectacle, le fond de sommeil ou la réserve de puissance vague sur lesquels se détachent le geste et son but”.

⁶² This seems to be implied for example by Eric C. Mullis, when he writes, “the body schema functions below the surface of consciousness and, unlike the body image, does not include perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs about the body and is consequently not subject to cultural influence”, “The Image of the Performing Body”, *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 42:4, 2008 (62–77), p. 63.

⁶³ *Phenomenology*, pp. 205, 241/pp. 231, 269.

⁶⁴ In *Le monde sensible et le monde de l’expression*, eds. Emmanuel de Saint Aubert and Stefan Kristensen, Genève: MetisPresses, 2011, Merleau-Ponty describes it among other things as “a thought given to itself”, “an implicit intellection”, p. 133: “une pensée donnée à elle-même”, “une intellection implicite”.

⁶⁵ For example *Phenomenology*, pp. 122, 250–251, 302/pp. 140, 278–279, 334–335.



Neither Merleau-Ponty nor Gallagher is very explicit on this point, but clearly the schema can never be given in full to our consciousness; rather, certain aspects of it can come to our awareness. One particularly obvious situation when this happens is when a dancer shifts between different dance techniques, as when, for example, the ballet dancer needs to take the posture of a flamenco dancer. In the contrast between the two techniques, the body schema appears. I imagine that the contemporary dancer, who according to Susan Leigh Foster has “a body for hire”,⁶⁶ must have a particularly plastic corporeal schema.⁶⁷

In contrast with non-dancers, a dancer is constantly working on the development of her habitual body, integrating new significations, and therewith a number of new possibilities of expression. Her body becomes, as dancer Cecilia Roos formulates it, more “finely tuned”,⁶⁸ and I believe that the persistent work on the interchange between bodily images and corporeal schemata, an essential part of the dancer’s activity, gives her a particular mindfulness as regards this process itself.⁶⁹

Bodily Signification and the Work of Art

The notion of the corporeal schema can make us understand how significations are inscribed in the body, as a precondition for the expression of new significations, but also for the apprehension of the signification expressed by other people’s bodies, as when we watch dance. Merleau-Ponty writes, “We say that the body has understood and the habit has been acquired when it has allowed itself to be permeated by a new signification, when it has assimilated a new significant core”.⁷⁰ When we assimilate new habits, new “significant cores”, the bodily schema is

⁶⁶ Foster, “Dancing Bodies”, in *Incorporations*, eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, New York: Zone Books, 1992, p. 494.

⁶⁷ In distinction from that of the more traditional specialized dance techniques, such as ballet, Duncan technique, Graham technique, and so on, which all, according to Foster, “[construct] a specialized and specific body”, *ibid.*, p. 485.

⁶⁸ [ref.]

⁶⁹ This might explain why a former professional dancer is needed in order to call a certain theoretical dogma into question, according to which bodily awareness tends to hamper skilful movement: see Barbara Montero, “Does Bodily Awareness Interfere with Highly Skilled Movement?”, *Inquiry* 53:2, 2010 (105–122) and “A Dancer Reflects”, in *Mind, Reason, and Being-in-the-World: The McDowell–Dreyfus Debate*, ed. Joseph K. Schear, Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2013.

⁷⁰ *Phenomenology*, p. 148/p. 171: “On dit que le corps a compris et l’habitude est acquise lorsqu’il s’est laissé pénétrer par une signification nouvelle, lorsqu’il s’est assimilé un nouveau noyau significatif.”



transformed. The living body, says Merleau-Ponty further, is a “power of natural expression” that “secretes” a meaning or sense.⁷¹

In other words, the corporeal schema endows our body with a systematics; connections are established not only within the body itself in relation to the world, but also between different living bodies and their experiences. This gives us a clue to what corporeal meaning is, and how there can be something such as an expression in dance or a choreographic language. The habitual body is a carrier of cultural significations, and, just as with other forms of signification, they must be taken up in new contexts in order to express something. The very divergence between different corporeal schemata, between a movement style and a present movement pattern, seems, as we have seen, to have an important part to play here.⁷²

Of course, the “language” of the body differs from verbal language in that its grammar is hard, if at all possible, to formulate explicitly, and there is no set vocabulary as with spoken language – except in the quite rare cases of fixed bodily expressions or of mime. However, if we assume that the same comparison can be made between language and the art of dance as Merleau-Ponty makes between language and painting, then dance would belong to these tacit forms of language that differ from verbal forms of language mainly, it would seem, in terms of degree.⁷³ Verbal, spoken language lays claim to a kind of independence with regard to its material concretisation to which other forms of expression – such as painting or choreography – could never aspire, and this is the reason why there are dictionaries in the former case but not

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 187/p. 211: “[le corps] est un pouvoir d’expression naturelle”; p. 203/p. 230: “nous le voyons sécréter en lui-même un ‘sens’”.

⁷² This intuition is corroborated by Chrysa Parkinson when she writes, “It is exactly through this paradoxical process of accumulating patterns and reforming them that we can arrive at new ways of making sense.” [ref.]

⁷³ Merleau-Ponty is not entirely clear on this point, but at least there is the hypothesis in “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” that the “transparency of spoken language” might “simply [be] the highest point of a tacit and implicit accumulation of the same sort as that of painting”, translation Michael B. Smith, in Johnson, *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics*, pp. 112–113/*Signes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, pp. 94–95: “La transparence du langage parlé, [...] ne [serait-elle] que le plus haut point d’une accumulation tacite et implicite du genre de celle de la peinture?” And “Indirect Language”, p. 84, “It might be that the meaning of language has a decisive privilege, but it is in trying out the parallel that we will perceive what perhaps in the end makes it impossible.”/pp. 58–59: “Il se peut que le sens du langage ait un privilège décisif, mais c’est en essayant le parallèle que nous apercevrons ce qui le rend peut-être impossible à la fin.”



in the latter.

At the same time, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that all signification is at its root incarnated, all meaning is born out of matter (although this term is not to be understood in the realist sense) and rises above it to different degrees: a novel can be translated into another language, whereas one can speak of a translation from a picture to words only metaphorically. Nonetheless, the translatability of a novel is dependent on both its own style and the competence and creativity of the translator; poetry often needs a poet-translator to be rendered in a foreign tongue, and all those aspects of meaning that are related to musicality, rhythm, allusions, ambiguities, puns, etc., run the risk of being lost in the target language. In fact, Merleau-Ponty contends that even scientific theories and geometrical theorems, which seem wholly independent upon the idiom they are formulated in, what typeface they are set in, and so on, are ultimately anchored in matter: if all copies of Euclid's *Elements* burned or mouldered away, together with the people who mastered them, the theorems and proofs would disappear as well – they would not rest in a Platonic heaven, and it is possible that no one would be able to formulate them again.⁷⁴

For Merleau-Ponty, meaning is not primarily to be understood as a relation between a sign and a concept independent of that sign.⁷⁵ Rather, meaning is fundamentally a form of direction, like a path that is indicated, and this was, as we saw, illustrated by the multiple meanings of the French word *sens*: meaning, direction, sense. We also noted that Merleau-Ponty characterizes lived, perceived space precisely through its directedness: one part of the perceptual field, for example, the church tower that emerges when I look out on the landscape, points out directions in this field; we see its shadow on the yard, the roof of the parsonage, the village behind and the meadows between it and us. The church indicates the epoch – or several – when it was constructed; it has its own history, and partakes in a larger history of architecture, of the church, of religion, and so on. In a similar way, one part of a painting points out directions in the picture, in other words, different levels

⁷⁴ See e.g. *Phenomenology*, p. 410/pp. 447 f.

⁷⁵ What can be termed, with Ferdinand de Saussure, the “nomenclatural” conception of language; cf. *Cours de linguistique générale* (eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, 1916), critical edition Tullio De Mauro, Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1972, p. 97. For Merleau-Ponty's relation to Saussure's linguistics, see my “Merleau-Ponty's Encounter with Saussure's Linguistics: Misreading, Reinterpretation or Prolongation?”, *Chiasmi international* 15, 2013.



of meaning; the painting itself alludes to other paintings, to a painterly tradition, a style, a culture.

We have seen that the body-proper is not given once and for all, as the sum of a range of organs attached to one another and animated, but is instead a meaningful unity, whose significations are dependent on a natural, cultural as well as personal situation. Similarly, meaning – whether perceptual, aesthetic or linguistic – is not lying around as an entity we are to receive as it is, completed, through our senses or our understanding. Rather, it must be taken up by us again in a new act of perception – if it is a perceptual meaning – that can be compared to a communion,⁷⁶ or in an act of expression that assumes already constituted expressions and gives them new life. For this reason Merleau-Ponty makes a fundamental distinction between two aspects of expression or language use:⁷⁷ on the one hand primordial, authentic expression, where meaning is “in the state of its appearance”⁷⁸ as a gestural, emotional signification, on the other hand secondary, constituted expression that presupposes acquired, sedimented significations.⁷⁹ In later texts, he speaks of the latter form as an empirical use of ready-made language, the already established signs, whereas the former is a creative, transcendental use that empirical language is an outcome of. These aspects are not diametrically opposed, but rather dialectically related, in that they both resist and are dependent upon one another: creative expression does not occur in an empty space, but always in the context of an acquired tradition that it takes up and transforms. On the other hand, expression is never wholly constituted; it must be appropriated in a new act of expression in order to have meaning.

Sometimes this distinction is put in terms of the incarnation mentioned earlier, that is, the degree of dependency on a material realization. Whereas a painting can only be reproduced at the cost of an important loss of meaning, a novel is written in view of being duplicated. A choreography is something in between: for the most part it is repeated several times in a number of performances – by the same or

⁷⁶ *Phenomenology*, p. 219/p. 246: “la sensation est à la lettre une communion”.

⁷⁷ In *Phenomenology* as well as in his later writings on language and expression.

⁷⁸ This expression, characterising what phenomenological reflection ought to do, occurs repeatedly in *Phenomenology* and contemporary texts. See e.g. *Phenomenology*, p. 122/p. 140: “[la pensée] qui prend son objet à l'état naissant”.

⁷⁹ I discuss these distinctions in more detail in my “Cézanne and ‘The First Man Speaking’: Expression as the Task of Phenomenology in Merleau-Ponty” (draft).



different dancers – but of course, even when the dancer is the same, the reproduction is never an exact copy as with the novel. This possibility of reproduction inherent in the production of texts, gives us the illusion that linguistic meaning can stand by itself, entirely detached from its sensible incarnation.

For Merleau-Ponty, however, the signification, which is to the highest degree independent in this sense, is that which shows forth in stock phrases; it is the “direct meaning” of empirical language, “the opportune recollection of a preestablished sign”,⁸⁰ whereas true expression, language in the primary, signifying sense of the word, is constituted of indirect, lateral significations. It “frees the meaning captive in the thing” and – as Merleau-Ponty writes, quoting Mallarmé – “finally renders the ‘absent of all bouquets’ present”, where the absent – “l’absente”, in the feminine – is the flower as idea.⁸¹

Now, if the living body is the very origin of expression and comparable to a work of art, in what way is the particular aesthetic expressiveness that we encounter in dance to be understood? How is the difference between the ordinary man walking down the street and a dancer performing a piece of Forsythe to be characterized, given that the body of the former is already an artwork?

The Spatiality of Dance

One clue is given in one of the few remarks that Merleau-Ponty makes about dance. In *Phenomenology of Perception* he writes:

It could be shown that dance unfolds in a space without goals or directions, that it is a suspension of our history, that in the dance the subject and its world are no longer opposed, are no longer detached from each other, that consequently the parts of the body are no longer accentuated in the dance as they are in natural experience [...]⁸²

⁸⁰ “Indirect Language”, p. 82/p. 56: “le rappel opportun d’un signe préétabli”.

⁸¹ Ibid./ibid: “la parole vraie, celle qui signifie, qui rend enfin présente l’absente de tous bouquets’ et délivre le sens captif dans la chose”.

⁸² *Phenomenology*, p. 546/p. 333: “On pourrait montrer [...] que la danse se déroule dans un espace sans buts et sans directions, qu’elle est une suspension de notre histoire, que le sujet et son monde dans la danse ne s’opposent plus, ne se détachent plus l’un sur l’autre, qu’en conséquence les parties du corps n’y sont plus accentuées comme dans l’expérience naturelle [...]”



Thus, what would distinguish dance from movement in general is a particular form of spatiality, opened up within concrete space, in a similar way that a painting as a work of art dwells in a different space than that which it inhabits as a physical object. The animals painted on the walls of the Lascaux caves “are not there in the same way as are the fissures and limestone formations”,⁸³ he claims in “Eye and Mind”; “Nor are they *elsewhere*”.⁸⁴ They are, although supported by the rock, of another, imaginary order.

By the same token, dance creates a new space, parallel to that of natural experience, whilst being “moored” in the moving body-proper.⁸⁵ We saw that this body is defined not so much by its actual properties and its relation to the concrete world as by its capacities; it is a “system of possible actions”.⁸⁶ Likewise, its position in space in the phenomenal sense, its place (“lieu”), is determined by its tasks, “My body is wherever it has something to do”.⁸⁷

In fact, it appears that phenomenal space is for Merleau-Ponty not merely, as for the Gestalt psychologists, anisotropic, in contrast with the isotropic, objective space; it is also, to employ a term he makes use of later, a “polymorphous space”.⁸⁸ In this multidimensional realm, various spatialities are enfolded in one another, and new ones may unfold. There are different spatialities created by the senses against the background of a common, synaesthetic space,⁸⁹ there are also the diverse anthropological spaces: the space of dreams⁹⁰ and of myths,⁹¹ the pathological spaces of the maniac,⁹² of the schizophrenic,⁹³ and of course the spatialities opened by aesthetic perception and expression, those of music, theatre, poetry, painting. Merleau-Ponty writes:

⁸³ “Eye and Mind”, p. 126/p. 22.

⁸⁴ Ibid.: “Ils ne sont pas davantage *ailleurs*.” (Emphasis in text.)

⁸⁵ Cf. *ibid.*/p. 23.

⁸⁶ *Phenomenology*, p. 260/p. 289.

⁸⁷ Ibid.: “[...] mon corps comme système d’actions possibles, un corps virtuel dont le ‘lieu’ phénoménal est défini par sa tâche et par sa situation. Mon corps est là où il a quelque chose à faire.”

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, ed. Dominique Ségald, transl. Robert Vallier, Evanston: Northwestern, 2003, pp. 105, 111/*La Nature. Notes. Cours du Collège de France*, Paris: Seuil, 1995, pp. 144, 151: “L’espace perceptif est polymorphe”.

⁸⁹ *Phenomenology*, p. 230/p. 256.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 297/p. 328.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 298/p. 330.

⁹² Ibid., p. 299/pp. 330f.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 299 f./pp. 331 f.



Music insinuates a new dimension across visible space where it unfurls just as, for persons suffering from hallucinations, the clear space of perceived things is mysteriously doubled with a 'dark space' where other presences are possible.⁹⁴

In a similar fashion, the dancer installs a new dimension, a space that, I would say, is not so much "without goals or directions", as Merleau-Ponty writes in the passage quoted earlier, as entailing *other* goals and directions than ordinary space, and with another history than the suspended one – that of dance.⁹⁵ A new world is established that corresponds to the expressive unity of the dancing body, whose significations are comparable to the directions of the painting: the different parts of a choreographic piece point to one another, to the music, to the scenography. The "infrastructure" (to use Parkinson's term) of the dancer's body has meaning in relation to that of the other dancers on stage, to dancers trained in other techniques, to ordinary people, etc., and the choreography refers to, contrasts with or breaks with other choreographic styles.

It goes without saying that this analysis would have to be explored in more detail and exemplified if we are to give an adequate account of the dancing body, yet this goes beyond the scope of the present article. For the time being, it should be observed that the anthropological and other spatialities that Merleau-Ponty describes are not mere metaphors, but rather an elaboration of certain findings of the Gestalt psychologists. For example, Merleau-Ponty discusses an experiment related by Max Wertheimer, where the subject is put in front of a mirror that reflects the room he is in at a 45° angle.⁹⁶ The subject sees the walls, the door, a man walking around there, a piece of cardboard falling, and this happens in an oblique, peculiar space that the subject does not inhabit. However, after a few minutes, this spectacle is as it were dislodged: the

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 231/pp. 256–257: "[La musique] insinue à travers l'espace visible une nouvelle dimension où elle déferle, comme, chez les hallucinés, l'espace clair des choses perçues se redouble mystérieusement d'un espace noir où d'autres présences sont possibles."

⁹⁵ Cf. Cecilia Roos's description above of the different spatialities that the dancing body can carry within itself, p. [ref.]

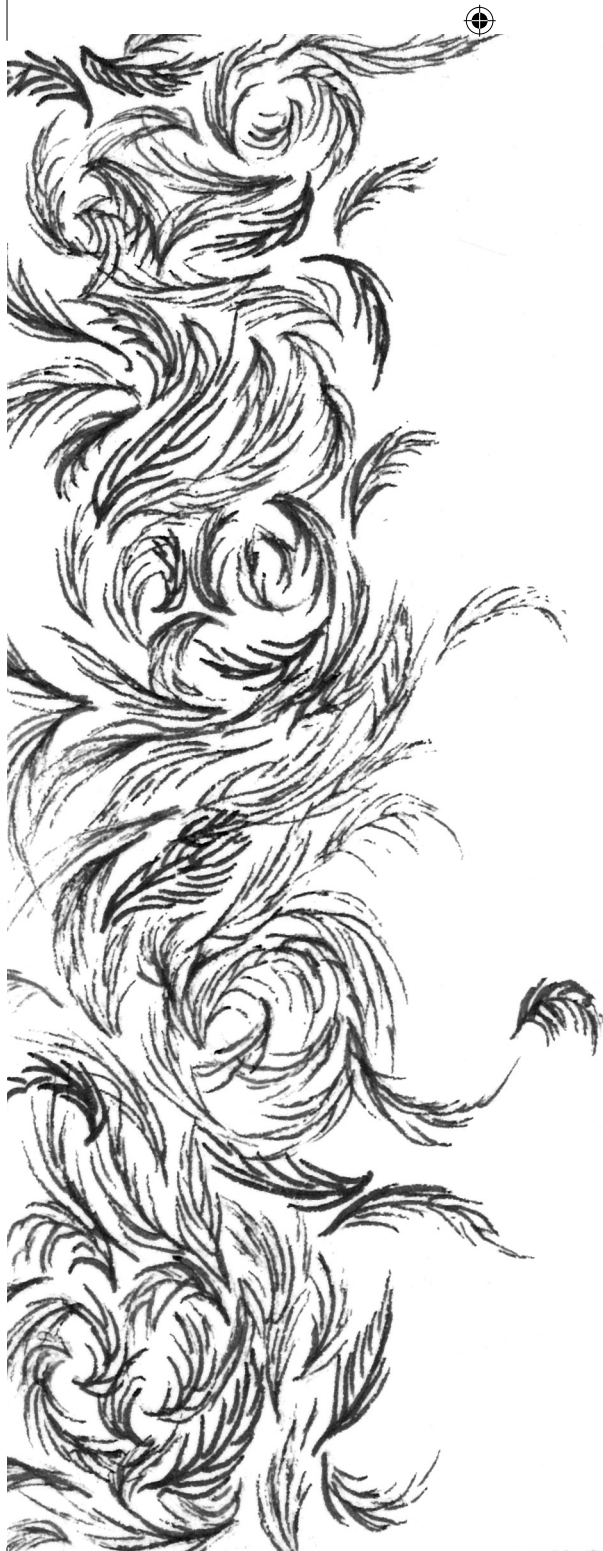
⁹⁶ The experimental subject can only see the room he is in through the mirror. *Phenomenology*, pp. 259 f./pp. 287 f. This experiment is described in Wertheimer, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Gestalttheorie*, Erlangen: Verlag der philosophischen Akademie, 1925, pp. 99 f.



directions are no longer oblique but vertical. The objects in the reflected room have become new anchorage points that re-establish an inhabitable space for the spectator, “the miracle occurs that the reflected room conjures up a subject capable of living in it”.⁹⁷

This gives us an idea of what is going on when aesthetic expression opens up spatialities that were formerly unknown. The dancing body, carrying forward the significations sedimented in its corporeal schema, evokes imaginary worlds where our self can put down roots.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 261/p. 289: “cette merveille se produit que la chambre reflétée évoque un sujet capable d’y vivre”.







“Authoring Experience”: A Dialogue on the Dancer’s Practice

Chrysa Parkinson and Cecilia Roos

In the spring of 2011, I posed a few questions to Chrysa Parkinson, upon reading some of her earlier writings. The discussion between us developed into an email conversation that was revised with the help of Anna Petronella Foulter, resulting in the following text.

Cecilia Roos

Seeing and Being Seen: The Visual Field in Choreography

Chrysa: What I see as I’m learning a phrase becomes part of the movement. There’s a movie I’m making as I dance that particular phrase. The movie changes if I do the phrase in another space, but the visual field is essentially the same. What I see is not something I could anticipate from looking at someone doing the movement or even seeing myself do the movement on video (if I’m learning something back from an improvisation). This visual field is more or less rigidly part of the phrase depending on the way I am directed or the choreography.

In Deborah Hay’s choreography, the eyes have a lot of interpretive tasks.¹ Deborah includes what the performer sees in her choreographic indications: “sing the space” or “travel without moving from here to there”. She is asking the performer to read the room the way a musician reads a musical score: proximity to the objects or people in the room change as you move through it causing the score to change while you are in action. These scores make it necessary to define for myself what “the space” is and constantly redefine where “here” or “there” is located perceptually. I’m asked to use my vision as articulately as I would use a limb – to point, reach, enfold, push away, drag or grasp what I see.

When I dance Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker’s work in Rosas,² I find myself engaged very specifically with my visual field: repeating

¹ Deborah Hay is an American choreographer. Chrysa performed her works *The Match* in 2004, Dancespace NY, *If I Sing To You*, in 2009, Baryshnikov Arts Center, NY.

² De Keersmaeker is a Belgian choreographer; Rosas is the name of her company. Chrysa has participated in Rosas’ creations from 1998 to 2013 as an outside eye and teacher. Chrysa performed *En Attendant* in 2010, Cloître des Célestins, Avignon, and *Cesena* in 2011, Palais des Papes, Avignon.



relationships, making semi-permanent choices, being given directions by her about where to look. Although there's no discussion of what the performer sees or how this effects the audience's perception, there are preferences for affects that are created by the position of the eyes. Looking downward or forward is designed, not because of what I see as a performer, but because of how the audience might interpret my look.

If I compare Deborah Hay and Rosas, Anne Teresa choreographs what the audience sees, leaving my field of vision to be an internal material like the taste in my mouth – up to me to handle. Deborah, however, uses my visual field as choreographic material, empty and ready to be filled. When she gives me the indication of how to look, she cannot know what I will be seeing. When she gives the choreographic indication to “turn your f***ing head”, she expects the performers to deliberately change their visual fields. She's not choreographing the position of the head in relation to the audience or what the performer sees, but she's choreographing a change in the visual field. Both of these choreographers are using perception as the material of performance, but from different sources and points of view. In my experience, and I think in that of other performers who have worked with both of these artists, the conflict between their approaches is reconcilable in performance, but the processes around creating and learning scores or phrases is very different.

When you taught me a bit of the choreographic material from Ina Christel Johannessen's *Now She Knows*, I felt that the focus was clearly designed. When the direction of the eyes was mentioned, it was a specific geometrically or anatomically based trajectory: “your eyes move at the same rate as the hand, in the opposite direction from your hand”. When I worked with Zoo/Thomas Hauert we used the eyes as the movement demanded.³ They were completely functional, and we needed to use a lot of peripheral vision in order to maintain spatial connection. This created a particular affect of abstraction – vertical bodies rarely facing each other or turning to look but coordinating their proximity and direction precisely – the attentive but non-invasive gaze of people moving quickly through city crowds. I suppose, in this case, there was no real need to discuss the use of the visual field. If we

³ Hauert is a Swiss choreographer working in Belgium and Zoo is the name of his company. Chrysa performed with Zoo from 2001 to 2011.



couldn't see each other peripherally, we couldn't do the score, and then the audience wouldn't see the spatial pattern we were trying to create because it would not be there.

The spatial patterns of Zoo's pieces were created with video and with a strong sense of outside perspective. Learning and creating them was very different from doing them, which was different again from seeing them. In learning, you had to turn down your individual musicality, logic and preferred relationship in order to produce the image. Once you knew the pattern fairly well, a new momentum and sense of musicality and relationship to the other dancers emerged. Watching from outside, the pattern overwhelmed the details, absorbed them into a unified flash of colour and direction unfolding in time.

The 4th Wall

Chrysa: When I worked with Tere O'Connor, there was a great deal of discussion about affect, character and a very strong sense of the 4th wall.⁴ The audience could see us, but we purposefully ignored the fact that we could see them. The artificiality of our affect was a conscious reference to theatricality as it is framed by proscenium arch stages. This was in stark contrast to most of the intimate, adapted New York theatres we performed in. As a dancer in these works I felt more influence from drag shows and the stylistic eclecticism of post-modern architecture and pop-music than from post-modern naturalism in dance, theatre or literature. In later pieces Tere began to soften the divide between the audience and the performers, but there remained, during the time I worked with him, an interest in presenting a hyper-stylized self with ragged edges and a passionate resistance to definitions of reality. Naturalism, anatomical or otherwise, was not a concern. I remember asking Tere in the early 90s, at the beginning of a new process, what he felt about maybe breaking down the 4th wall this time, and he said "not now".

I never felt critical of Tere's choice to proceed this way, but I did feel the need to stop working that way myself. Tere was dealing with the visual field as specifically as Deborah in that he was using the 4th wall to create choreographic content. At the time (about 10 years ago) I felt that my natural shyness (and vanity) was being acted out under

⁴ O'Connor is an American choreographer. Chrysa performed with Tere O'Connor Dance from 1987 to 2005.



the gaze of the audience and that I risked limiting my gestural palette by remaining within this particular theatricalization of perceptual exchange. I felt the need to work in more direct contact with motion itself, with the audience and with accidents of perception. The distinction between the realities of the watcher and the performer created a break in shared reality that kept the watcher in the position of subject/author and the performer in the position of object. Even when the pieces were critical of these roles, the roles were implemented, and we embodied them. My experience with Tere, not because of his choice to use the visual field in the way he did but because of his choice to define it at all, is currently relevant in my approach to watching and dancing. I look at how people are using their eyes to understand what they are doing.

Anne Teresa doesn't keep the 4th wall in place, but she does give greater importance to the audience's perceptual field than to the performer's. I don't have a conflict with this in and of itself. Dance is, after all, a visual art form in most of the contexts that it's performed in. At 48 years old, the image other people have of me is less interesting to me than it was. I am more interested in how the world looks from here. The image I create is something between what the audience sees and what I see.

Live Material

Chrysa: The difference between not-yet-knowing a movement material and knowing it well is softened when the visual field changes from-day to day, studio to studio and theatre to theatre.⁵ This puts you in a

⁵ Movement material is movement that can be articulated, repeated, communicated and manipulated clearly enough that it can become choreographic content. It can include qualitative states that produce recognizably consistent movement, phrases of movement (several movements put together), or single movements (steps). In contemporary dance, it is often the dancers who create the movement material, and the choreographer uses these materials to construct a piece. Often movement material is itself the result of a procedure suggested by the choreographer or dancer. Procedures to create movement material vary wildly but examples are: translating musical scores into movement sequences, transposing quotidian actions (i.e., walking, running, sitting, standing), interpreting text metaphorically through movement, choosing movement principles and finding movement that embodies them (i.e., push, pull, press, pluck, float). Often these procedures contain several elements that depend on both the principles on which the piece is being built (i.e. intuitive, conceptual, musical, narrative or some combination of the above) and the participants' (often unspoken) methodologies. Once a basic movement material has been created it can also be put through new procedures (i.e., loop, retrograde, decelerate, dis-coordinate, google, cut-up, de-humanize, smash). There is a lot of room for invention in the development of procedures both



constant negotiation with the choreography, the other performers and the space – similar to when you first learn something and are subject to many influences you cannot control or recognize. When the visual field is a latent or internal aspect of the performance, or when it's a specifically choreographed hallucination (like the 4th wall), knowing the material is more recognizably distinct from not-yet-knowing the material.

When you see a movement differently, when it deviates from your original understanding of it, it's alive. Working with the visual field as an inconstant, mutable choreographic material leaves the movement alive. Taking responsibility for this built-in shift of experience between an objectively repeatable material and the subjective experience of change that working with the visual field offers, I find myself delicately caught in an unstable balance between subjective and objective experience, between watching and being watched, truth and fiction, here and there, control and its weird cousin, the opposite.

Seeing and Doing

Cecilia: When I go between seeing and doing a material, I experience many different things; for me, it's not an immediate shift but rather a transfer that goes back and forth, sometimes over the whole rehearsal and performance period. What first strikes me in that shift of experience is the change in my perception of time. The movement changes time: it either compresses it or dilates it. Or it is transformed into many parallel "times", because if I recognize a movement, if it's familiar, I meet myself as I was then. I can hear sounds and remember the rooms, smells, people that were involved in that situation, or other things that happened that day. This means that I have to deal with my memories because they affect me, and thus how I approach the movement material. And that could be either good or bad, but it always leads me somewhere unexpected. Sometimes I can feel that time dilates: in one single moment I can experience what I just did, what I am doing, and

for creating movement material and manipulating it. Contemporary dance doesn't have rules about how you do this. Although many procedures are common knowledge passed on through classes and shared experience, there are also many un-articulated procedures – staying beneath the material's surface but containing the individual's approach to movement, metaphor, group interaction, style, texture, space, being seen, etc. Basically, the word "material" relates to the concept of fabric as a starting point for fabrication/making.



think of what's coming next.

At the outset, I always detest the profusion of details that I need to negotiate with to be able to expand the possibilities and thereby deepen my knowledge about the material. Yet this is necessary; otherwise I know that I'll get bored. In that first moment, I think because I know how much struggle and exploration that must be done, I'm so lazy. Then I start to unfold, or fold, the material and problematize each angle, rhythm, direction and relation to space; I deal with things that weren't obvious initially. Maybe they didn't even exist, maybe I create them through the relation that I build to the material.

I always go through points of recognition in the material, in order to familiarize and fool myself away from the laziness that otherwise dominates me. The movements that I recognize become like gatekeepers that I know I have to "throw out" or "reformulate" sooner or later to refresh my thinking about the material. They become like conventions in my gaze, a membrane that makes it quite hard for me to approach the movement in different ways. When I've managed to approach it in a different way, it was often because I'd watched someone else working on it.

Directions are also very important in the shift between seeing and doing. I experience the room in a new way when I start to move in it, and at that point, I can't recognize the material from when I first looked at it. I consciously construct different feelings or thoughts for different directions, discovering diagonals, curves, etc., that travel through my body and expand into the space around me. I feel directions rather than see things. I'm very busy with directions, and I find it challenging to explore all the different paths that my body takes in just one movement.

In performing the movements I sing my own "song", or maybe it's more like a rap. But it's always silent. It's an inner song that only resonates inside me. This sound was not there when I first looked at the movements: it is created when I perform them. This soundscape becomes my world; I'm the only one who can hear it, and it often sounds differently from one day to another. This song can also exist when I'm moving to music or to a sound landscape. Then my inner song becomes a harmony or a disharmony in relation to that.

Language and Learning

Cecilia: I usually name movements, mostly for practical reasons: either



to be able to remember their order or to communicate with others. It's a kind of "linguistic relativism"; sometimes we just assume that we mean the same thing when we call something, for example, "the butler". If we analysed it, we would probably have very different articulations of and associations to a butler. When I'm rehearsing, I mostly use words as "help-concepts" for myself. If I rehearse other dancers, I'm really careful and pay a lot of attention to the language I use. I don't want to push my reading of a movement on someone else; here it will also be a question of "help-concepts", as a way to positively manipulate myself and open up for trigger-points or associations.

Chrysa: I experience that material begins complex, becomes simpler and then complexifies again if I have to teach it to someone else. Communication makes things complex because you have to change the material's subjectivity/objectivity ratio, and in the case of teaching my own material spoken language complicates movement irrevocably.

Yesterday I was speaking with Mark Lorimer about dance as a craft and we got into this question about "raw material".⁶ What's the raw material of a phrase of movement? We thought it was maybe the person making it. When you see it coming, the amount of detail that implies is overwhelming.

Movement and Memory

Chrysa: What you point out – that Proustian aspect of movement – reminds me of the idea that memories are embedded in our bodies, that in fact our minds are embedded in our bodies, and that our minds might be embedded in movement itself – that it's not only the positions or body parts involved in reproducing a movement that make time dilate and events slip across years but actually the movement of the body: motion itself relocates sensory relationships in time. For a while, *tendus* at the barre often brought on a very strong memory of the smell of a building I lived in as a three year old.

I like when points of recognition begin to emerge in learning music or any kind of memorization. And I really like it in movement when the "gatekeepers" eventually fade, as you described it earlier, or get thrown out, or meld.

⁶ Lorimer is a British dancer and choreographer with whom Chrysa danced from 2001 to 2013. Chrysa performed in his work *Nylon Solution* in 2005, Kaaitheater, Brussels.





Movement and Gaze

Cecilia: Through my years of experience it has become clear how much of the movement material is understood through a conscious way of using the gaze. I need to really take notice of what I'm looking at when gazing is a parallel action to the processing of the material. The more I perform the movements, the more I can look and by that see. And the more I see, the more I understand of the movement. I go from looking at the movement, to looking through it, to looking in it. These actions are intertwined, but when I reflect upon them they appear as different undertakings, or parallel lines that I oscillate between as a more or less conscious method in the process.

The gaze can be both internal and external, and that is a choice I make in every moment. I may also choose not to think about what I'm looking at, in order to be able to intuitively interact with the present or, as you say, to come in more direct contact with the "accidents of perception". Both as a dancer and as a rehearser I have found that most choreographers' use of the visual field, or how they talk about it (if they do), often embraces the idea of the performance that we're working on.

When I'm working as a dancer, I experience throughout the rehearsal period that my body becomes more and more transparent or more sensitive and open to different directions, actions, dynamics or other possibilities that show up in the moment. Not knowing or not-yet-knowing is then a nice state to be in.

Principles of Transformation

Cecilia: I find it interesting to explore what kind of principles guide the transformation between the seeing and the doing, and how one can relate to it in different ways. When you're exposed to new movements you get a fresh understanding of the ones you thought you already knew. In order to experience new movements you need earlier experiences, and to be able to get these insights about the movements you thought you already knew, you need to experience new movements. It's like a loop of circulating references that constantly invade you in life.

Perhaps you can state the following principles: Transformation is only possible through practice. Deviation demands skill. Variation and consistency are always in dialogue.

It's really important to keep track of how one movement informs the next. We talked about the expanded moment and how I can experi-





ence parallel times in dancing: present, past and future existing alongside or in dialogue with one another. Then you said: "I'm redefining what I'm doing instead of thinking what I just did." That was interesting. Like being ahead but at the same time referring back, since the redefining has its starting point in what you did.

Chrysa: Practice flows into skill flows into dialogue flows into practice ... Maybe that's the process you and I are trying to form?

Dance and Craft⁷

Like open-source Linux programmers, contemporary dancers are craftsmen whose relationship to problem finding and solving means that they must constantly adapt their tools to new uses. Unlike the traditional image of skill-based communities, these communities have a specific mandate to change. As solutions emerge, new problems branch out. When an open-source programmer posts his code, he expects it to be modified. He deliberately opens his process to challenge his methodology and find new problems to work with. For contemporary dancers, the ability to be flexible in relation to methodology is essential. They can transfer skills from one process to the next, but the application is unpredictable because experimentation with form and content is part of their work. They become skilled in adapting to new demands: transforming what they know, dropping it and learning something new are all part of their training and work. This skill of adaptation is in direct contrast to the deep etching of physical know-how into the body.

Repetition is essential in a dancer's work process; it is protective and inevitable due to the limitations of any one body. Patterns become part of the infrastructure of our bodies, and they integrate themselves into how we see, hear and feel. These are forms of micro-grammar. They affect our taste and even our ethics. We can't deny these patterns, but we can detail them, elaborate them, diminish or expand them. It is exactly through this paradoxical process of accumulating patterns and reforming them that we can arrive at new ways of making sense. The craft of adaptation is plastic: a practice of both giving and taking form.

Dancers are artisans. They work with material realities. Although craft is often placed below concept in the hierarchies of contemporary

⁷ From "Grammar and Craft", an essay by Chrysa Parkinson for Mark Lorimer's project Dancesmith.



art because of the tendency of craft to become loaded down by tradition, and because of the blind adherence to rules that may or may not be ethically sound, these artisans' craft is inextricably bound with both formal innovation and the ethics of performance. Dancers cannot escape the responsibilities of what they represent on stage because they are themselves onstage. The moral implications of what they do are not abstractions, they are visibly present public realities felt on a personal level. Thinking through what they do is also part of their craft. They must be able to literally stand for it.

As Richard Sennett puts it in his book *The Craftsman*:

[T]hinking and feeling are contained within the process of making [...] Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding [...] There is nothing inevitable about becoming skilled, just as there is nothing mindlessly mechanical about technique itself. Western civilization has had a deep-rooted trouble in making connections between head and hand [...]⁸

Cecilia: I find it very interesting what you say about patterns becoming a part of the infrastructure of our bodies. In addition to that, I would like to refer to Susan Sontag⁹ who has said that our gaze is based on our previous experience as a framework of interpretation for our understanding of the world. She points out that it's not static, since we constantly experience new situations that of course change our gaze. For this reason, I think that we are relentlessly renegotiating our interpretational patterns.

To put this in the context of the dancer's practice, it makes me think of the three perspectives that I use both as a dancer and as a rehearsal director: reflection, relation and dialogue.¹⁰ Reflection is needed to explore all possibilities in the movement material and thus a relation is created to the material through this process. Once there's a relationship, there's a dialogue, where a kind of negotiation between the move-

⁸ Sennett, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

⁹ Stefan Jonsson, "Hon brottades med sin samtid" (She Struggled with her Time), obituary on Sontag, *Dagens Nyheter* 30 December 2004.

¹⁰ See Roos, p. [?].

ments and me takes place. Through this dialogue, my relationship to the movements deviates, and as a result, I can access and reflect upon them again. Looping reflection–relation–dialogue.

Subject of and Subjected to Experience

Cecilia: You once said, “I ask my students to consider their own perception as the material of performance – to engage actively with their subjective experience.” Is this a method you use in order to enter into a choreographic landscape that is not “your own”?

Chrysa: Through the training I’ve had in “release techniques” – based on identifying habitual perceptual patterns that inhibit change and on instilling patterns that allow change – I’ve become familiar with alternating between using intuition as a learning-base and questioning it. When you become skilled in identifying habits and in being able to modify or change them, you begin to be able to make choices about how you employ your intuition, what you use it for and when you use it. The goal is to be the author of your own experience. Your experience is embedded within the actions you participate in. There is sometimes a gap between the image you are representing and the experience you are having. How you look can be different from how you feel. This is both a choreographic problem and an interpretive problem. You cannot necessarily author your image onstage as a dancer, but you can author your experience. That type of experiential authorship colours the image but doesn’t define it.

I make a distinction between being the subject of your experience and being subjected to it – being the subject of the story, not the subject of a king. The results of considering yourself the author of your experience are not located in any one performance, but in the whole of your trajectory as a performer. You contain the results and carry them through all of your experience, creating a longer story in which you are the main character, although you may not be the main character of any one piece you perform. As a performer I produce roles and relationships, not pieces.

Cecilia: To be able to work with someone else you need to practice how to work with yourself, and this is how you, as you say, become “the author of your own experience”. When I work with students or other

dancers, my main focus is that they create their own methods from their needs in relation to the situation. Their own experiences should be the starting point for this chain of actions and method making. I'm more like an outside eye in that process. Several times during my years as a rehearsal director with different dance companies, I have noticed how seriously other rehearsal directors were taking the role of being the author of the dancer's experience instead of leaving this to her. This is for me a misuse of power. I once worked at an institution where this tradition was very strong: as soon as the dancers came off stage after the first performance they asked me, "How was I?" They were so used to being judged immediately afterwards that when I answered, "Well, what do you think?", it was like a revolution. We started to have long reflective conversations on the pieces we worked on, and they became more interesting for all of us.

Chrysa: Using subjective experience as objectively as possible leads to objectifying subjective material. Emancipated object-hood? If perception is the material of performance, you're engaged in an objectification of your perception. As a performer you consider your experience both as your realm of authorship and as an object that you place within the context of a performance. You adjust and work with your perceptions to produce the material that supports, goes with, and adds to this specific event. German filmmaker Hito Steyerl writes:

Traditionally, emancipatory practice has been tied to a desire to become a subject. [...] Though the position of the subject suggests a degree of control, its reality is rather one of being subjected to power relations. Nevertheless, generations of feminists – including myself – have strived to get rid of patriarchal objectification in order to become subjects. [...]

But as the struggle to become a subject became mired in its own contradictions, a different possibility emerged. How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why not be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things?¹¹

¹¹ Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me", *e-flux journal* 15, 2010.



Transmitting Knowledge?

Chrysa: This past month in your and my discussions, the question has come up about whether we should include our teaching work in these discussions. I realize it's very hard for me to separate my teaching practice from my artistic practice. I am most comfortable in peer-based processes for learning and for making work. As I get older it's part of my job to set that atmosphere up because it's not necessarily evident to every 20 year old that they're going to be treated as a peer by someone over 40. This way of working isn't necessarily the best way to transmit knowledge. A lot of concrete physical skills are more easily passed on through drilling, repetition, overseeing and other authority-based hierarchical learning relationships. But the peer-based context is a good one for creating methods and discovering what drives, inspires and interests you.

Cecilia: As far as I am concerned, I cannot transmit knowledge if I start from the presupposition that I know more than the students. But I can do it from the perspective of knowing other things than they do. If you work in an atmosphere where you and the students are peers, the ideas that merge create new methods for approaching the movement material or the task. Each individual becomes, again, an author of her experience. But it also creates a language for that process which wouldn't have been possible without the dialogue. This way of method-making produces knowledge, or maybe one should say that it emerges and is exchanged.

I believe that a constant endeavour to create methods based on my experience, and on a dialogue with others, makes new knowledge appear in my practice: it is what happens *in between*. Knowledge appears by shifting, dislocating and questioning ideas and ideologies, as a way of revealing underlying or overarching thoughts and agendas.

A couple of years ago, I was occupied with the body and the soul in light of the Cartesian tradition where they are defined as two different substances. The Finnish researcher Jaana Parviainen discusses this issue in her book *Bodies Moving and Moved*, in relation to Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body as the primary self.¹² The body is not something that

¹² Parviainen, *Bodies Moving and Moved: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Dancing Subject and the Cognitive and Ethical Values of Dance Art*, Vammala: Tampere University Press, 1998.



you have, but something that you are; it is temporal and spatial, and we are our memories and experiences in a bodily way, which of course has an effect on how we move.

She also mentions David Michael Levin, who talks about the abstraction of the senses as a natural part of our perception, where the senses are seen as separate from one another, “atomic, discrete, isolated” and free from all contextual disturbances.¹³

As a dancer, I’ve often chosen the method of working with my body as an object and to objectify my subjective experience, without senses as it were, as well as taking an outer perspective on myself. It can be very restful in that it helps me not to judge myself. Maybe this is an emancipatory object-hood? The opposite is an inner, subjective perspective: a realm that I move inside of. I can shift between using my perception as the material of performance and being inside the material, experiencing it subjectively.

Since I don’t work as a dancer that much anymore, I have to bring in my experience as teacher and rehearsal. My teaching has made me start thinking of how and why I do what I do and I learn so much in the dialogue with the students and in the situation where I work with professional performers. I feel that I know less and less and therefore dare to try more and more and that pushes me.

Subjecthood – objecthood

Chrysa: When I talk about choosing object-hood as a method, I would include all of my potential as a human in this object-hood: all the senses, all the capacities for self-reflection, relationship and ethical choice. I’m interested in giving up the identity that is produced, not giving up the senses. The inner perspective is essential to this way of working. I think that as a performer I do “produce” identities/personas, and of course, if I’m on stage, there I am – there’s no escaping the fact that it’s me. But I like to work on performing something other than myself, and the idea that identities are objects, temporary by-products, helps me do this. When you say, “without senses as it were, and taking an outer perspective on myself” and describe the “restfulness” of that way of working I recognize what you mean, I think, but it’s not exactly what I’m talking about. In order to work with your experience objectively, or as an object, you would have to accept the whole complexity of being

¹³ Ibid., p. 38.

a human.

If I think of *objectivity* as meaning the state or quality of being true even outside of the subject's individual feelings, imaginings, or interpretations – or in an everyday meaning as the ability to judge fairly, without bias or external influence – then I don't have the capacity for objectivity. But I do feel a responsibility to employ my personal perspective rigorously enough that it's challenged. I also need the perspective of other people in order to approach an objective perspective. Still, I don't really believe that I will ever free myself from my "individual feelings, imaginings or interpretations". It's a strong procedure with a weak outcome, meaning it's right to make an effort towards objectivity, to honour the results of that effort but to be sceptical of the feeling that objectivity has been achieved.

I do not want my self to be instrumentalized, denied autonomy, owned by another, fungible, violable or denied its subjectivity (as philosopher Martha Nussbaum has defined objectification¹⁴). But I don't mind if the identities I produce are treated in these ways, *as long as I'm negotiating the contract*. I very much like the concept of *reification* – that I can treat my perceptions as concrete things.

Still, I need the world in order to perceive it. I am not separate from my environment. My senses themselves are products of what I sense, and I am therefore bound in an exchange between the perceptual objects I create and the world that offers me that opportunity. I would like to create perceptual objects from my interaction with the world as a form of respect for that exchange. For example, I don't consider myself the author of the movement I create in other people's work because that movement is so deeply dependent on and intertwined in the environment I create it in. My authorship lies in my experience of the movement, not in the movement itself or even the role I have in the piece.

If *subjectivity* is taken to refer to the subject's perspective, feelings, beliefs and desires, it is a great resource, especially for humour, mistakes and metaphors. It's also an inescapable material, and I don't want to waste it. In teaching, it always seems very important to me to expose my own subjectivity. One of the very beautiful traditions in dance is daily class – a group situation led by an author(ity) within which the

¹⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24:4, 1995 (249–291).

dancer grows, bit by bit, over many years. The teacher/author is put in the position of being a source of objectivity. It's quite a big responsibility, and it's also dependent on the group because how a teacher's corrections or point of view affects the other dancers is a factor in how you accept that teacher's authority. When you've studied every day with the same person for a year, the consistency can create a forum where the teacher could potentially see you objectively, fairly, without bias. It's also true that familiarity is not necessarily a source of objectivity. So it can go either way. I expose my subjectivity to my students so that they can contextualize my information and extract the relative truth, or usefulness, of how I see them.

I am interested in perceiving *subjectification*, in the sense of the construction of the individual subject¹⁵ – I want to notice what the influences are on the creation of my subjectivity, and how I can respond to these influences. My ability to respond to my own subjectification is a product of my objective (as objective as possible) consideration of my subjective experience. My responsibility is to accept or deny, pass on or drop these influences according to the work at hand.

Cecilia: The starting point for me is sometimes me and not the “me-object”, and the working process with the movement material or the task is then hopefully a consequence of my own subjectivity in relation to that material (if subjecthood is what I have chosen to use as a method). This allows for the existence of all kinds of identities to be negotiated with. And then, what is a “me” in this? A response to an invitation for action?

Techniques, Tools and Methods

Chrysa: My method – the general principle I apply to dancing (and teaching and writing) – is to consider my subjective experience as objectively as possible. That has many technical applications ... I know there's something inherently uncomfortable about the idea of objectifying oneself – becoming an object has a history of violence and disrespect to it, and I understand the desire to avoid that connotation. But objectifying my experience is not the same thing as becoming an object, nor is it the same as objectifying myself. I'm interested in subjective

¹⁵ This notion (in French *subjectivation*) was coined by Michel Foucault and elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.



experience as an aspect of my authorship as a performer.

When I work on a project as a dancer, I try to develop technical approaches that apply specifically to the situation, the topic we're working on, and the kind of material we need to produce.

For example, in working with transforming loops (short repetitive movement sequences that transform almost imperceptibly) with Mette Ingvarsten for *Giant City*, she proposed the image that the space was moving me, rather than my body moving through space.¹⁶ I decided to use the image as a technical approach. It helped me be more precise about my visual relationship to the other people and about the rate of change of the loops. This became a shared technique in the group, and eventually became part of the topic of the piece. In this way it became a choreographic method for Mette. She made decisions based on what should happen next if the space was moving the bodies. So that's an example of objectifying subjective experience – an image creates a sensation that becomes a technical tool and eventually a choreographic method.

In Rosas when Anne Teresa gave us the task of creating phrases using the 9 directions of the Nine Star Ki, my colleague pointed out that the experience of movement was greater in the changes of direction than in the facings themselves. I used this subjective experience as a tool to make the phrase. Direction change was never explicitly part of the meaning-base of the piece, even though the phrase did become a thematic part of it (*En Attendant*). So that's an example of my method (objectifying subjective experience) producing a technical tool that remained an embedded material (or content), never rising to the foreground as a topic, but remaining “inside” the material.

Cecilia: If I take the perspective of a dancer, technique in dance is for me, nowadays, something very personal and not “measurable”: it's what you see in a person who is really integrated in her body/mind work. I believe that you can only reach that level through practice where you also create your own methods. The more knowledge or skill you have in your field, the more advanced methods you create. However, technique and method need to go hand in hand even though you sometimes must “give up” your technique to be able to find new ways and methods for

¹⁶ Ingvarsten is a Danish choreographer. Chrysa performed in her work *Giant City* in 2009, Steirischer Herbst Festival, Graz.





approaching a movement. But your methods could also be too dominant and not allow you to use your technique. So a dialogue, or an intertwined balanced relationship between technique and method, is necessary.

There has been a movement in the dance community with the motto “it’s a skill to have no skill”, where a refusal of dance technique as such has emerged; the idea was to develop other kinds of methods for creating movement material. Then again, this form of method making can become a skill in itself. Today, the idea of “no skill” has become a dead end; people are tired of it because the lack of specific techniques limits the possibilities for further development.

The important thing is, again, that technique and method go hand in hand: you never separate them when you work. One might say that technique is the theory of what you do and method is your practice. Your method making is possible because you have the technique; method is the practice of technique.

Chrysa: I agree that you could call a method a practice. But maybe not all methods are practices because they’re not all sustainable and flexible enough to have a general application as a filter, or frame, for experience. I think techniques produce tools. You employ different technical approaches to deal with different problems.

Maybe as a dancer, technique is what you develop under specific demands and method is what helps you develop those technical approaches, or tools. In general, I think the word technique applies to concrete, physical problems and the word method applies to more general principles of creative process. But, as you point out, these things do become blurred.

They get very blurry in education when specific vocabularies are the vehicle for teaching because each choreographic vocabulary makes specific demands on the body. Those demands necessarily exclude, narrow and define the student’s approach to movement.

But maybe I’ll stick to speaking about what I’ve noticed in working on pieces. Working with Jonathan Burrows, for example, I’m very aware that his choreographic method is to apply rhythmic structure to meaning and then see what happens.¹⁷ Jonathan puts recognizable

¹⁷ Burrows is a British choreographer. Chrysa performed in his works *Schreibstuck* in 2007, Kaaithheater, Brussels, and *Dogheart* in 2010, Kaaistudio’s, Brussels





words and gestures into numerically-based sequences. He composes a rhythmic structure with embedded signifiers that float to the surface, accumulate, subside, swerve and re-surface during the course of his pieces. This makes technical demands of me as a dancer. I have to be able to visualize, memorize and “ride” a rhythm. As a dancer I have to prioritize rhythm over meaning. When I watch Jonathan’s pieces, the rhythm bends and shapes my relation to meaning, but meaning remains equally present in my perception of the piece.

Maybe if I performed his pieces as much as I’ve performed Rosas’ works, this would change, and meaning would emerge more concretely as a technical tool for extending my perception of the material into a guide for how to perform the material. Then the meaning would become a tool for me as well as the rhythm.

And still I’m trying to make a distinction here between what a performer might use as a method, a technique or a tool ...

As a dancer I have some perceptual tools (noticing where the weight is resting in another body by looking at it, noticing where tension is, feeling the difference between weight and pressure in my own or another body through touch). I learned techniques (like Contact Improvisation, ballet, Mahler/Klein), all of which could be used to focus on the distribution of weight and tension in a body. I developed a way of applying those tools to other forms of movement (a choreography, Yoga, Body Mind Centering, moving furniture). That “way of applying tools” is my method.

At this point in my life, my practice is performance. The combination of tools, techniques and a practice results in specific methods for specific situations. Those methods themselves can, in turn, sometimes produce tools, techniques or even practices ...

Some dancers can stay within one form all their working lives – their relationship to the tools they were taught to use in ballet class as a child remain consistent with their adult lives and work. They can use ballet as a practice, as well as using it as a technique that provides them with tools. Their method is mixed in and maybe inseparable from their technique, tools and practice.

For contemporary dancers this is generally not the case. Because contemporary dance has an imperative to innovate, the artists’ tools have to be mutable beyond the boundaries of the technique they were originally part of. It becomes necessary to develop a flexible hierarchy



of perception, a way of ordering and disordering sensation, opinion, taste, and history that allows the artist to adapt to unfamiliar, evolving or simply unstable aesthetic forms.

Cecilia: Maybe the task decides whether you use (or label) it as a method or a technique. The technique provides the tools that you need to be able to create your methods, but you can start the other way around: by analysing your methods your tools become visible. I encounter that a lot when I'm working with dancers in helping them to develop methods for processing movement material. We very seldom start with their technique; we start with how they approach a problem. It could for example be a transition, a shift of weight or a rhythmic structure that we analyse in detail. We try different perspectives, for example, from the dancer's own subjective experience or by adopting a distance to that experience (which for me is different from objectifying subjective experience). This highlights patterns that stand in the way of the working process, and it's easier for the dancer to articulate and develop other tools, techniques and methods.

For me there's no hierarchy between, or chronological order in, how and when you use your technique, your tools or your methods. The question is what the situation requires from you or vice versa, but in the best of processes there's a dialogue between you and the situation where you constantly challenge one another.

Between What and How

Cecilia: Is there a difference for you between what you dance and how you dance? I think a lot of interesting reflections could be brought out from that "gap" between what and how.

Chrysa: Maybe this question is a question about the difference between topic and content?

Topic being "what it's about to other people", and content being "what it's about to me"?

In performance, I can include the viewer, but I cannot control the viewer. My focus is on the content of what I'm doing, the relationships it produces, and the role it takes in the structure of a piece. I don't need to concern myself with the image created, unless there is a problem.

How I dance is a by-product of my various trainings, my physicality



and my cultural background. What I dance is a formal contract that I enter when I accept the role of dancer in a piece. I do whatever it takes to dance whatever is proposed for me to dance – to the best of my abilities. My method for getting that done is personal, authored by me; in service of the action I’m taking in my role as a performer. I don’t like representing *how* I dance. It makes me nervous. I dance *how* I dance because that’s my only choice so far. It may represent things to other people, but to me it’s just how I get around. I’m not designing my approach. I’m doing the best I can for that moment.

Sometimes the material itself necessitates a choice on my part – I have to use this or that corner of my background, instead of another one. But I still see it as my doing the *what* as well as I can, not focusing on the *how*.

In teaching, technical training expands our choices of how to dance. When I work with students we discuss the differences between how and what you dance because we are in a learning, training mode – different from making a piece (being in process) or being onstage. I work with students to help them understand their existing skills and develop new ones from there – hoping to expand and enrich the way they approach their work.

Cecilia: From a performance perspective, there is of course a difference for me between what I dance and how I dance. *What* has more to do with style or classification, the “outside” definition. *How* is my way of solving the task. I am lucky in that I have never been forced to do a job that I didn’t really want to do. I have never been in a company and have mostly done creations. Maybe that’s why I find method making so interesting: I think that working with repertoire requires something really different from you as a dancer.

From a teaching perspective, I find a difference in how the students perceive working with material that I suggest in contrast with material suggested by the students. In the former case they are, to start with, occupied with how to be able to “adjust”, and, when we work with their own material, their questions become visible because of the choices they make. *What* I teach, then, decides *how* I teach. But what always guides me in my teaching are the questions from the students, and they grow either from the students’ needs independently of the material or through the material.



What I see in relation to how I see is different between the teaching situation and when I am performing myself.

Chrysa: In relation to the question of what to work on and how to work on it, I've gotten interested lately in the roles played by style, material, method, topic and content in an artistic practice. We have relationships to each of these categories, and they have relationships to each other.

If you focus on *style*, style could be leading you, or inspiring you, or be nurtured by you. You might be working on style either as a referent (to existing, known styles) or as a signature (style as a recognizable but idiosyncratic aspect of the image you produce as a performer – similar to “voice” in writing). A focus on style often brings up an easy humour and connection between people and has a kind of lightness to it because it's often recognizably referential.

If you are working in a group, you might have a specific role in relation to *material* – you generate material, you work on the execution of the material in order to figure out what the piece is about, you teach material or edit it. There's a sense of purity, clarity, humility and craft that comes from focusing on “just doing it”.

You could have a specific relation to topic: you research the areas of interest the project is involved in; you write about it or read about it and bring that into the process. In some pieces the relationships between performers become the topic, in others the stylistic approach can be what the piece becomes about, in other processes the arrangement of the material (choreography) becomes the topic (both of negotiation for the people working it out and of design for the watchers).

I'm thinking of *content* as the meanings or characterizations you work with as a performer that may or may not be explicitly present in the performance of the piece. Often a movement means something specific to the performer that informs how she executes the movement, but that meaning is not extracted and made a topic of the piece. Sometimes a performer's content can be in conflict with the topic of the piece – for example, if you are approaching the material from an anatomical point of view and the piece is based in a narrative vocabulary. In some cases that works well, creating a specific sub-textual friction, while in other cases the contrast between the performer's content and the external topics of the piece might cause a slackness or distraction between the vocabulary and its perception/reception by the viewer.



Sometimes the performer's content is very closely coordinated with the topics of the piece, but even in the most tightly shared reality there are glitches, areas of personal experience that inform the performer personally and are often non-linguistic sensory images. The perception of this level of content is part of a performer's work – the perception colours their performance. This type of content changes in the course of performing something many times; the images, sensations, or memories of previous contents get submerged, replaced and then may bob to the surface again sometime later.

If *method* is a particular form of procedure for accomplishing or approaching something, then this could entail developing methods for creating materials, or methods for speaking about the topic, or methods for editing, or structuring the piece or process. There are stylistic implications in any methodology – references as well as ethical and aesthetic allegiances.

The interest in identifying our roles in relation to work is not so much to stick to a particular role, but more to understand how you are working, how you work in different situations, what your comfort level is in different roles and what skills you are actually building by the aspects of work you're focusing on. I'm proposing that these relationships to style, material, topic, content and method are identifying aspects of a practice. I understand *practice* as the actual application or use of an idea, belief or method as opposed to theories about its application or use.

For some artists topics arise out of methodologies, for others out of materials, for others style is itself a topic, while yet other artists choose a topic and find a methodology for representing it. But very often during a process the initial topic becomes a material, or a method might rise to the surface and become a topic, or one dancer's content-based approach might begin to define the way material is generated. So although it feels useful to me to separate these categories out and look at my relationship to each of them, I know that the reality of working is more like riding a swirling, catalytic weather-event than it is like climbing up and down well-labelled stairs.

Cecilia: Just one thing about what you write about content: I'm always telling the students that thought is free, and whatever kind of narratives, images, feelings they create as subtextual frictions when they're processing a movement material is ok, as long as it doesn't create a dis-



course that is too remote from the actual piece they're working on.

In April 2012, you asked me how method, material and topic are evolving during the process of my research project. And I answered, through reflection, relation and dialogue that create constant loops of deviation, dislocation and disruption. You continued: What is your method and what material does it create? How does it relate to your topic? I answered that my method is practice-based process analysis; the material is there already, but it's shifting together with the method. The material is the base for the investigation (the topic) and the method develops out from a need to understand and investigate the topic. Is your material creating a new topic? was your next query. Not really, but it opens up for new understandings or articulations of the topic. Then you said: What are you going to do with that new topic and is it explicit or implicit in your method? I replied: Allow my methods to develop; the topic is shifting in-between, depending on what kind of questions I ask or the material asks. This deviating topic is a condition for the material to continue to be interesting. Without the topic there is no performance.

Logic and Technology

Cecilia: If I would use the word logic in my teaching it would be in conceptualizing the pragmatic way of working with a task or solving a problem in a movement material. It's always good when your experience, and the logic that you perhaps formulate on its basis, is questioned through methods that others use. You get to see them in a new way and maybe understand them as counterproductive.

I never make things up; everything is like a chain of loops where I constantly realize the importance (or waste) of the skill/action of something or someone I met years ago (or the day before). I am constantly re-interpreting my experience. In my teaching, I have two different attitudes: listening and pragmatic "doing". These attitudes work perfectly together, parallel or intertwined.

In my understanding of technology and of logic, the difference between them is that the former is a way of explaining/understanding while logic is what I use; it is more "hands on". It's interesting to see how one can open up for different possibilities by focusing on, for example, the direction, the dynamics or the phrasing. The logic is developed by the technology of teaching and it's all based on your experience.



Chrysa: The sensory images, characterizations and organic shapings that get developed and discarded over the course of working in different choreographic contexts feel like logic – elaborately patterned skins that form in relation to the situation and then eventually fade, change or get shed. I like the difference you point out between what’s a perceivable technology and what actually gets used “hands on”. Maybe I’d say ideas or practices remain a technology if I don’t use them and transform into a logic if I do. I don’t think I’ve ever made anything up – it’s all appropriation, exchange, (mis)interpretation, and the more “hands on” my relationship becomes to something I’ve learned the farther it wanders from its source. I like to tell students where I learned something, but I try to make it clear that if they went to the source it would probably feel quite different from what I’m teaching. Like a chameleon’s skin, logic adapts to its environment, reflecting the outside and containing the inside: protective and absorptive, sensitive and transforming.

Perception, Presence and Performance

Cecilia: You have said that “performance is the underlying principle of my classes”. What is the relation between perception, presence and performance? Is perception the tool, presence the state and performance the action?

Chrysa: I like the way you put it, tool, state and action, but I don’t do that, so far. Perception is an action. If you are perceiving, you are performing an action. If you are performing an action, you are perceiving.

I use performance as my guide to define my role as a teacher. I could use perception, but I am less capable in it – too scientific. I could use action, but I’m less capable in it – too sporty. Performance is what I have had the most actual experience in, and it interests me because it’s about relationships and the paradoxes, rifts and continuities between being and doing.

Cecilia: But isn’t being doing and doing being? How do you separate them? You discussed performance as a guide to defining your role as teacher. Is it through that definition that you can separate being and doing?

When I describe perception as the tool, presence as the state and



performance as the action, I'm thinking of the situation in class. Perception might as well be a state I put myself into, performance the tool I use and presence the action I do. It depends on the message I need to get through in the dialogue. If I think of my role as a teacher, it has become harder and harder to push forward my understanding of a movement when I meet with a student or a professional dancer. It's much more interesting to see what they will suggest, and then it's very difficult to tell them that the way they interpret the task is "wrong"; it's more stimulating to have a dialogue about different ways of solving a movement task. There are no truths, only interpretations.

This is especially true in the interpretation classes; maybe it would have been easier in technique classes, but I haven't taught technique for ten years. I stopped because I don't like to "warm up" people. It is so much easier when you work with professionals since they know what they need to get warm enough to be able to work. In that case, the warm up is closely related to and overlapping with the notion of "work".

If I try to define my role as a teacher and what methods I use, I end up with, as I said earlier: reflection, relation and dialogue. It could result in an exposition or a performance if I pose or propose a thought, or an action. Or maybe both, since it's hard to separate thought and action, especially if you're the one posing or proposing. Then the thought is the action and the action is the thought. But for the viewer it's an action that can become a thought.

Chrysa: I would like to feel that there is no difference between being and doing in performance, but I think the closest I come to experiencing no difference between them is feeling that my being is in unison with my doing. That unison takes a lot of attention and a lot of focus (a recognition of what not to pay attention to). Awareness of falling in and out of this unison between being and doing is a tool. It's an awkward tool, but I can't avoid it so I have to learn to use it.

Where I am in space gives me a strong sense of presence, as does touch. Time is a less clear material for me. I would like to work with my perception of time more concretely, but it's such a slippery material. I notice when I study with experienced teachers that it's often their sense of time that distinguishes them from inexperienced teachers; the way they pace information allows me to follow and engage with the way



thoughts move through actions and progress into other actions, other thoughts. And that's true of performances too.

Neutrality and Presence

Cecilia: If neutrality is to open up in order to be able to perceive and absorb, then it is a myth, but in many cases it's used as a method for that. If you're asked to be "neutral" when doing a movement, it usually ends up with your getting stiff. The same goes for the concept "charisma" if you're asked to expose it. I don't think that either neutrality or charisma can be produced; it could maybe be an experience in the eyes of the beholder.

Maybe a prerequisite for presence is to have a flexible concretion towards what one refers to in the moment. One is dislocating the mind by looking for places that are uncomfortable (or perhaps unknown). And maybe it's not about looking but allowing. High and low thoughts become mixed in the "now".

Chrysa: I think the word "neutral" has been used to describe an open, absorptive, perceptive affect, and also a non-metaphorical, emotionally undefined affect. I resist the word because the way it's used implies that neutrality is an objective state, and I think it's not. I think neutrality is an affect, like any other.

A flexible, concrete presence should be able to move through highly specific and even metaphorical representations, and also drop quickly into dealing with every day realities. This is also very useful in terms of executing movement. But I don't think it's neutral. It demands a lot of emotional and physical presence, humour and desire. The person who is feeling emotional and physically present with a sense of humour and passion may not be expressing those affects explicitly, but she is certainly expressing them implicitly when she learns, makes proposals, listens, plays, pushes herself to repeat something over and over, resists doing something she thinks is wrong, questions, keeps quiet, suspends her insecurities, etc.

For me your last statement relates back to the idea of an improvisatory approach to movement and performance. If you are in a state of "availability" to the present-time you are present. I have stayed away from trying to define "presence" as it seems very tricky to me ... I think the way you talked in the beginning of these conversations about time



– its dilation and compression, and your sense of moving within and through it – articulates something new to me in my experience of presence, although as I said before, space and touch are easier materials for me to grasp.

Language: Precise, Simple and Flexible

Chrysa: I just taught for three days in Lyon in French. I had some friends in the class and they were helpful – translating for me when I got stuck. I realized that having to speak in a language that I don't know so well was helping me keep my language very simple, very active and precise. The most difficult thing was to get the right grammar for time sequences, and making references clear. There's also a difference between written and spoken language. I think that quote is about spoken language in class. But the same is true for writing, as you point out. In spoken language you can get away with some vagueness because you have the tone of voice to fall back on.

Cecilia: One of the main issues that I have wanted to explore in my research is if it's possible to find, as you say, a precise, simple and flexible language in writing about the process that is involved in working with a movement material. It's easy in the concrete situation, but when you put the words on paper you lose the lived context and therefore sometimes the dynamics. Of course, I find it even more challenging when I'm writing in English, because it's difficult for me to find the nuances in a language that is not my mother tongue. I've seen many research reports where artists struggle with showing the research process through their writing, using a creative layout. Sometimes it really works, but sometimes you just perceive it as stupid. It's very difficult, interesting and challenging to try to find the proper words here. There's always a possibility to renegotiate a movement next time you do it, but when you print a text it's there ...

Chrysa: Lately one of my students remarked that he doesn't use questions to think. I experience thought without questions a lot. But then I question the thought, and that's often what creates the need to clear it up and makes me want to write it down. The necessity to see what's around the thought, where it's living, where it's headed ...

One of the differences between physically based processes and



language or image based processes is that the reason you're starting with in a physical process (the "I want to do this because ...") is likely to change. Physical experience is not stable the way language is. The traces that actions and sensations leave are not easily named, labelled and codified. They're also less easily edited out. Physical processes have more to do with synthesis, transformation and coordination, while images and language deal more with the selective representations of ideas. Language is very useful in physical processes for its ability to make distinctions between things. Movement is useful for its ability to humble and question those distinctions.

When I'm working on a piece with someone I often find myself creating by-products, and lately these are often drawings. These days I'm working with Andros Zins-Browne and also with Rosas.¹⁸ The works are very different, but I find myself drawing feathers, and it felt to me that there was a direct relationship between drawing feathers and working on the dancing of these two pieces, but I couldn't figure out what it was.

I told my mother I was drawing feathers. She's a painter. She said, "That's interesting. For so long people used feathers to draw. It's kind of like being hoisted by your own petard. Or maybe it's a baffle."

My mother is 86 and uses Elizabethan English so this takes some translation. It turns out "hoisted by your own petard" means "injuring yourself with your own weapon", and she is using the old meaning of baffle: "to cheat or deceive".

I think drawing feathers is a good metaphor for talking or writing about dancing – a delicately dangerous material that betrays its own meaning.

Oscar Wilde said he used metaphor as an expression of desire, not truth. That seems right to me about movement: language is always a metaphor in relation to dance and always loaded with desire.

¹⁸ Zins-Browne is an American choreographer working in Belgium. Chrysa performed in his work *The Lac of Signs* in 2013, MDT, Stockholm.









Becoming a Spectator of Dance through Increased Kinaesthetic Awareness and the Intensive Reading of Theoretical Texts

Katarina Elam

In any event, we might say that in the same way that it behooves the dancer to develop a heightened philosophical awareness, so it behooves the philosopher who would enrich the world of dance to enter quite literally into the world of dance.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone¹

Warming up at Stora scenen at Dansens Hus.² All the dancers move to their own schemata.

I am sitting in the dark: my aim is to study whether I can feel the dance physically by watching. Will it work simply because I have decided to do it? Are certain kinds of “pictures” more tactile/kinaesthetic than others?

Now, all these talking, laughing and completely relaxed women could be the subject of a painting.

The room. Some kind of order is discussed but I can’t hear anything. Some of them are changing places.

“Broken Line” seems to be the name of one of the scenes. Distances and in-betweens. At this time, all the dancers obviously understand what all means, but for me it is impossible to grasp. Walk around, wave, change place.

¹ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, “Phenomenology as a Way of Illuminating Dance”, in *Illuminating Dance: Philosophical Explorations*, ed. M. Sheets-Johnstone, London: Bucknell University Press, 1984, p. 128.

² Repetition of the choreography that has been the point of departure for the project: *NOW SHE KNOWS*, choreographer Ina Christel Johannessen, opening night in Umeå, May 2010. (The following description is an attempt to capture my difficulties as a spectator of dance at this time. Obviously, it should not be seen as a judgment of the choreography.)

The stage: Four textile columns with something on the floor behind them (I later realized that it was shoes).

So far the whole situation looks quite messy, but everybody seems to be taking it easy. The music starts and the dancers begin to move. The music reminds me of a film where someone is sitting on a train, looking out through a rainy window. Outside a grey landscape whizzes by. Why this particular music? This is followed by unpleasant sounds accompanied by jerky, unattractive and tensed movements.

No, I am not succeeding in experiencing an embodied understanding or feeling when the whole group is moving in different ways over the floor. Then, suddenly, they are more harmoniously gathered. Beautiful Baroque music accompanied by a female vocalist. Sitting down, a pregnant dancer performs a solo, which runs a bit too long ... “he is gone ... lalla la ...”

Now, two women are dancing in harmony and the performance is all of a sudden dynamic, in sync and physically available. They make guttural sounds and noisily create a racket. These sounds and movements certainly elicit a feeling/physical response.

And then the whole group, synchronized and in high heels, moves across the stage. They are walking ... but now I have lost my concentration, yawning, disappearing ...

End.

Point of Departure

In this article I will try to formulate the complex process of someone becoming a spectator of dance, learning to watch and appreciate dance. For some reason, I have always tried to reveal alternative readings of contemporary dance, which the artist has certainly not purposefully explored. And as my own dance references have been rather vague I have not been able to construct something substantial. But now – after reading a lot of philosophical and theoretical dance articles, after discussions with choreographers and dancers, and above all after the physical training and discussions with the project group – the situation



looks quite different. I now realize that the less I look for meaning in contemporary dance, the more I will find. This means that the meaning I am talking about is not a narrative or conceptual meaning in a traditional sense but rather something felt and embodied. Still, as I will try to show, it's a meaning that is completely intertwined with language and context.

My work is part of a larger project in artistic research on the dancer's creative process led by dancer Cecilia Roos. The other main members of the project are, like myself, theoreticians from the philosophical and aesthetical field, Anna Petronella Foulter and Cecilia Sjöholm. When we decided to perform physical training every time we met,³ it was clear to me at once that this would doubtless have a certain impact on both my way of watching as well as researching dance. My own bodily process turned out to become part of the way that my research questions were formulated.

The main questions that my research addresses are: What does the spectator's bodily engagement look like? How can it be described? What might the connection between language and sense experience be? How will my perceptions of a particular dance work change when I learn to dance parts of it myself? In what sense can imagination be discussed as bodily grounded? Will my consciousness – as an embodied activity – change as a result of the training and thus create a more complex experience of other forms of art as well?

Although corporeality has formerly been the basis of my research on aesthetic experience, the physical training contributes with a new dimension. It gives for me as a researcher in the humanities new perspectives on the research object and opens new questions concerning it. The research group meets regularly every third week. The session consists of fitness, flexibility and balance training. Most important, though, is the fact that we as theoreticians have the opportunity to learn short parts of the choreography of the work, which constitutes, in our project, the dancer's concrete material. In the beginning the training did not mean much to me, but after a while it became groundbreaking.

If I presuppose that I as a spectator am sensuously, bodily involved, then it should follow that my own dance practice and increased bodily awareness certainly will have impact on my perception. Thus, it is an explicit aim of my research project that I go through a process of aes-

³ Cf. Cecilia Roos article above, p. [?].



thetic learning.

Suddenly, my own undeveloped behaviour in relation to dance is a resource for my research, not to say a precondition, rather than a problem. The fact that my interest in watching dance has been quite moderate for a long time makes the problem more clear and easy to grasp. If I had a high level of interest in and knowledge of dance from the start, it would still be a question of experience but not as clear a process as it is now. The writing must be done from two perspectives simultaneously: the spectators' and the perspective of those who with great effort try to perform the same movements they had previously been watching.

Perception, practice and reflection turn into a loop; a widening movement towards a more complex experience. An experience entailing understanding and performance separately as well as a simultaneous understanding through performance. And without dancing I would probably never have recognized the embodied, sensuous kind of meaning that is a significant part of the aesthetic experience of dance. For me, the whole process of becoming a spectator of dance is a mixture of dancing and moving, discussions with my research colleagues, and reading a lot of theoretical texts written on dance and movement. In that sense it is almost impossible to judge what the different inputs are doing. But without the reading, I would probably never have reached an understanding concerning how movement must be considered the most natural condition of the human body, and how body and movement in some sense is the same thing.

On Method

In the Humanities the question of method is seldom particularly prominent. The researcher reads a lot of texts and then simply writes a new text. Often the method is even formulated as some kind of reconstruction. As I am attempting to become a spectator this time, however, it seems that the question of method is unavoidable. Through physical training, among other things, I want to see whether, and in that case how, my way of watching will change, primarily concerning dance and movement. An explicit goal with my research is that I myself will go through a learning process. Although I do not claim to be doing artistic research, my method this time has to be problematized and discussed. Partly because I am convinced that the method in itself will have influence on the questions and direction for the research, and partly because



the method probably also will have some impact on the result. In this case, perhaps, the method can be thought of as performative, or as a way of uncovering and simultaneously producing/creating something.⁴

Also my way of writing has deviated from the way I used to write. From the beginning, I have made short notes in a document that has slowly grown into a legion of more or less usable fragments. When the time came to straighten up the process, all the notes were classified under subtitles and the final text developed from there. But the existence in the text of an “I” that continuously describes her altering modes of attention is probably what most of all distinguishes this research project from anything I have ever made before.

To perform a phenomenological study changes the way the world and the particular phenomenon appears to me. To focus on something special, to direct yourself to a small section of the existence, means that you in some sense also become part of the object. This is formulated by Kenneth Joel Shapiro as follows:

The most successful phenomenological study changes me and my view of the world by locating aspects of my experience formerly disembodied or dim or misconstrued. I subsequently “see” that phenomenon in my experience as if for the first time, or I am more affected by it, or I see it differently. The structure of my world as I live it changed.⁵

The method that Shapiro develops aims at becoming more bodily aware of the object of your research; that is, the researcher should make herself more sensitive to what is bodily relevant. He writes:

Through it I can focus on the bodily felt residues of the textures

⁴The concept performative research is described by Brad Haseman, Professor at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, as a specific mode of research beside quantitative and qualitative research. Whereas the quantitative is represented in numbers and tables (measurable) and the qualitative in words (non-measurable), the performative will be expressed, rather, through completely different forms of sign systems/systems of signification. These could concern dancing, pictures, music, etc. The specific aspect of this kind of research, according to Haseman, is that it not only presents/depicts/delivers a research result, but that it itself becomes the subject of its research. “A Manifesto for Performative Research”, *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy* 118, 2006 (98–106).

⁵ Kenneth Joel Shapiro, *Bodily Reflective Modes: A Phenomenological Method for Psychology*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1985.



and structures of these instances. Becoming sensitive to the way I was affected yields the bodily correlate of the target's phenomenon's texture, posited now as a certain impact on my body. Focusing on this impact provides a guide to a description of that texture.⁶

But trying out what you are studying is not as controversial as one would imagine. For example, in American pragmatism, William James was continuously experimenting concretely and bodily. He mostly tries out the different body therapies he discusses in his philosophical papers for himself. Weightlifting, different kinds of water cures, climbing mountains, methodical chewing, and hypnosis are some examples of practices that he tested. Also Richard Shusterman, a contemporary pragmatist and aesthete, who, with his proposal for a new discipline called Somaesthetics, has contributed to make body and embodiment concretely present in an academic context. Besides being a discipline for theoretical and philosophical study, the researchers and students should also take time for physical training.⁷

A Bodily Mode of Awareness

Still, the research method that is of most relevance in this context is the mode of cultural phenomenology that has been formulated by the anthropologist Thomas J. Csordas. He wants to completely avoid talking about "the body" as something separate from context and interplay with others. If before, for example in traditional anthropology, the researcher has looked at the human body as a thing among other things, in Csordas' research it appears, instead, as a subject. My body is at once my anchor in the world *and* the medium through which the world appears for me. Thus, Csordas sees our embodiment as the obvious starting point for researching cultural occurrences, phenomenon and differences.⁸

Csordas' text makes me at once associate the body with some kind of light source, where you imagine how it illuminates and makes visible the surrounding world. Otherwise this world would not be accessible to me. Body, context and culture thus become concepts that are complete-

⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

⁷ Shusterman first presented Somaesthetics in the article "Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57:3, 1999 (299–313).

⁸ Csordas, "Somatic Modes of Attention", *Cultural Anthropology* 8:2, 1993 (135–156).



ly twined together. We are body-subjects in the world and this world is coded in a cultural way, as culture is the social context that we inhabit. While culture creates rules and borders for bodies, our embodiment is what supplies the foundation for culture. Culture and history appear in this way of thinking as bodily phenomena as well as being the products of ideas, symbols and material conditions.

By the “somatic mode of attention” concept Csordas means cultural modes of attention of and with one’s body in a context that also includes the bodily presence of others. That is, to be aware of a bodily feeling is not to be aware of the body as an isolated object but rather to be aware of one’s bodily situation in the world.⁹ The feeling engages something in the world because the body is already in the world. Awareness of bodily feelings can be a mode of awareness of the actual intersubjective atmosphere. Thus one is also bodily aware, that is, *with* one’s own body.

Accordingly, being aware of one’s own body may inform us about the world and the people around us. And as we are not isolated subjectivities captured in our bodies it means that awareness of and with one’s own body will also include awareness of the other’s bodies. The thing that Csordas wants to get at is the culturally developed sensuous engagement, not a fixation on one’s own body as isolated phenomenon. For instance, awareness of another’s physical shape will among other things be done with one’s body; according to Csordas, the bodily movements of others will appear even more clearly when one is dancing, making love or playing in team competitions. In all of those kinds of situations there is a somatic mode of awareness regarding the other’s bodily positions and movements; a culturally developed awareness of and with the body in one’s immediate intersubjective environment.

So in what sense may this kind of somatic awareness be applied to dance? When I try to perform a certain movement I have to focus on how it looks when performed by Cecilia, and, at the same time, it must fit kinaesthetically; it must feel right. It must feel like it appears to feel when someone else is doing it. It often helps when Cecilia offers different words and metaphors to support us like “this pose is reminiscent of the Baroque style”, or “this gesture looks like an old and tired

⁹ In my Ph.D thesis on emotions as a mode of understanding I describe how emotions only can be grasped in the context or situation where they occur. Katarina Elam, *Emotions as a Mode of Understanding: An Essay in Philosophical Aesthetics*, Uppsala University, 2001.



butler”, or “this movement has an Isadora Duncan feel”. These metaphors and descriptions seem to be spontaneously delivered, but they are certainly bodily anchored and mostly fetched from the dance world. They strengthen my efforts and give me clues as to how to interpret the sequence. This is a linguistic and conceptual part of dance training, which is very interesting and, at the same time, rather unexplored.

At times, it primarily seems to function as descriptions that accompany the movements, verbalizing the most obvious. A kind of “showing-doing-telling” that supports memorization. This mixture of doing and telling is significant for aesthetic learning processes. Donald Schön describes, with something he calls “a language of designing”, a situation that is a clear parallel to the situation we have in our training sessions.¹⁰ Schön’s example is a teacher of architecture, who is talking and writing at the same time. But his speech does not simply describe what he is writing, Schön says, rather it is a part of it. And the same goes for our situation, I would say. An explanation of a movement is a kind of “doing-telling” where Cecilia moves and simultaneously describes technically how to perform the movement. But at the same time she also, through metaphors, and so forth, describes the way *it feels* for her to do it. According to Schön, the verbal and non-verbal dimensions are intertwined. And this is certainly true. The words become obscured when separated from what is practiced; the movements become more abstract and hard to catch without the words. This linguistic dimension definitely feels like an important observation concerning dance training and learning.

Language

Cecilia is dancing the “Broken-Line-sequence” and we others try to memorize the order and write down some keywords for ourselves. It fails immediately. Thinking about the fact that I will probably be dancing this part of the choreography rather soon makes me distracted. But after a while, I turn back to my role as a spectator. I see the waves returning, transmitting, rolling and coming back again. Actually, the movements are not that difficult after all, I think.

And suddenly we are supposed to dance ourselves.

¹⁰ Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996.

nod nod
collapse
bend left arm stretch ... 5 6 7
left leg behind
right arm round behind
vomit movement rest on hind leg
shift the weight
stretch the arms
walk on left arm
let go right down drop drop
kick backwards with right foot
swing
...

The words above are a mixture of Cecilia's keywords and the words I had in my mind when we practiced the sequence for the first time. In this first phase of learning, as we slowly repeat each movement, I see them as completely separated from each other; a line of stills put together. But later this picture will change. Dancing "Broken Line" after many repetitions is a totally different experience. Now I don't have to consciously remember the movements as they flow more or less naturally. Not to say that they are performed in a way that is acceptable, but that is a problem that I have not been able to think about until now.

What does it mean when dancers and choreographers claim that they are missing concepts? What do they want to say that is not possible to articulate, and how do they know that there really is something to say? Do they mean that they have some kind of conception – a feeling – but are still missing a designation? In that case one might perhaps say that there are certain concepts without verbal signs. How is one supposed to explore the foundations of the need for specific concepts? Is it a question of recognizing situations and phenomena that one would like to organize in certain categories? Perhaps then it would be a good idea to try to understand what kind of situations and phenomena that could be? And would it be possible to judge for whom a "new" concept could be valuable?

Cecilia is using the word "track" in our dance training without making a clear definition concerning the way it should be understood. Still, it's obvious that she means something other than simply "follow

my lead". The group has discussed whether track perhaps could be our first example of a dance specific concept. My interpretation is that the way Cecilia uses it is to express a certain activity in her training where a movement, or a series of movements, should be anchored in the body. One marks, creates a track, which later can be used every time when performing this certain movement.

I am focusing on the repetition. In what way are they talking to each other? What kinds of words dominate? Is this group of dancers using ordinary terminology or have they created concepts particularly for this dance? I am now aware that the solo that Cecilia is dancing is not supposed to mean anything special; neither the choreographer, nor the dancer admit that they say anything concrete. But, at the same time, they are using rather clear terms and concepts in order to remember the movements for themselves: "Pull out drawers and wriggle small wheels", "flower", "Linus-on-the-line", "push away a fat person", "Rococo skirt", "hitting an airtable", etc., are some examples of this. Although the movements are abstract, these words seem to be necessary in order to remember the sequences, at least in the beginning. Later on they return as key words when teaching someone else, not simply as an aid for memorizing but in the meaning mentioned earlier when bodily movement and linguistic metaphor become one.¹¹

Perhaps it is in this context more essential than otherwise to develop a common terminology? To create concepts for actions and processes that is specific for dance and dance practice. To carefully describe how the movement feels with a number of complex, aesthetic concepts, which in themselves can only be learned by someone pointing out the meaning. And rightly speaking, it must not be that peculiar. One can talk about how it feels, look at the other who performs and be aware of the way they describe what they are doing. From these actions a useful terminology will appear – a dance linguistic practice. The actual cultural context is limited to this particular dance company or to this class where the dancers are training together every day.

Barbara Montero formulates something similar:

¹¹ In his dissertation on the actor's practice, Kent Sjöström discusses repeatedly the strong relation between metaphors and embodied understanding as absolutely basic for the work on stage. Sjöström, *Skådespelaren i handling: Strategier för tanke och kropp*, Stockholm: Carlsons, 2007.



In fact, dancers with similar training and abilities often do agree on the proprioceptive qualities of certain movements, with some steps feeling awkward, others graceful, some dynamic, some dull, indicating that such aesthetic judgments not only command the sort of “subjective universality” that Kant thought was required of aesthetic judgments, but seem to possess it as well.¹²

To sum up, my discussion on method has partly treated the way I have tried to get closer to the question of becoming a spectator of dance, partly tried to grasp some basic principles in dance training, and particularly the kind of method for understanding/learning that has appeared. In both of these questions the main concern is to become more sensible, to develop a more complex awareness through a mixture of bodily training and linguistic focusing. Kinaesthesia, the feeling of one’s own body in motion, is a kind of sensibility that seems to be natural for dancers but is seldom spoken of by others. Thus, in the following part, I will try to narrow down the appropriate understanding of the concept of the kinaesthetic. As the aim of this study is to describe the spectator’s experience, I will also discuss haptic visuality, the connection between vision and touch.

Kinaesthetics, Perception and the Haptic

Along with the struggle with what for a long time has seemed to be impossible, that is, to verbalize and conceptualize dance and dance experience, the concept of kinaesthesia has become more apparent. But this is not limited to the development of dance and dance studies. Today, in aesthetic theory as a whole, there is an increased interest in embodiment, sensuousness and dance. This is simply one field of research among others exploring perception, sense experience and synaesthesia as objects for investigations. And of course, this is done from two perspectives simultaneously: the academic and the artistic.

Susan L. Foster, a researcher in dance studies, notes that the term “kinaesthesia” was coined in 1880 in connection with intense research on our nervous system.¹³ The researchers were looking for explanations

¹² Barbara Montero, “Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64:2, 2006 (231–242), p. 235.

¹³ Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, London: Routledge, 2011, p. 7.



concerning our awareness of our own bodily positions and movements. From there, the term has been loaded with different meanings and has sometimes almost disappeared completely. Rather close and sometimes overlapping is proprioception, a concept described by Foster as a more distinct system concerning how the body continuously corrects itself according to gravitation. Roughly, one might say that the latter concerns the body's relation to space, while the former concerns the feeling of one's own body in motion. Still, none of them should be understood as distinct and individual senses. Rather, they are overlapping perceptual systems.¹⁴ It's obvious that the terms are pretty often confused and it seems to me as if different disciplines prefer one or the other. "Proprioception" is more often used in a scientific discourse, while "kinaesthetic" is primarily used in the humanities and artistic research. As my aim is to relate kinaesthesia to dance and movements in different ways, the word "kinaesthetic" will be used as long as possible, although some divergence may appear. The following definition appears in an article by Caroline Potter:

In describing a sense of motion grounded in the daily experiences of the lived body, I will employ the term "kinaesthesia", which I define as: a dynamic sense of constantly shifting one's body in space and time in order to achieve a desired end.¹⁵

A dynamic feeling of constant change in one's own body in relation to time and space in order to reach a certain goal. What is really clarified here? Talking about time and space is very ordinary in theoretical discussions on dance but seldom problematized. In what sense would it at all be possible for us to live and act outside these categories? Moving in time and space is what we are doing all the time. It's not particularly connected to dance. Space here represents three-dimensionality, which is a precondition for all kinds of bodily existence. I develop another discussion on body and space later and will, therefore, leave this question here. Although Potter's definition seems to be much too intricate, a couple of lines later she explains that kinaesthetics might be under-

¹⁴ For a brief overview see: Mark Paterson, "Haptic Geographies: Ethnography, Haptic Knowledges and Sensuous Dispositions", *Progress in Human Geography* 33:6, 2009 (766–788).

¹⁵ Caroline Potter, "Sense of Motion, Senses of Self: Becoming a Dancer", *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 73:4, 2008 (444–465), p. 449.



stood as a general capacity to feel one's own bodily movements and to correct them according to cultural preferences. This is definitively a more useful definition in my opinion.

In 1921, Edwin Diller Starbuck formulated the idea that every kind of art is created in order to materialize different modes of perception:

Each of the arts, including spoken language, the highest of all, has been invented in order, in the first place, to objectify and fix the ten types of perceptions and images and, furthermore, to render them communicable.¹⁶

Certainly, this thought is fascinating. Would art, in all its different modes and genres, primarily be an effort to understand, develop and communicate the particularity of human senses? Kinaesthetics might, according to Starbuck, be connected to bending knees, the rhythm of music, dance, huge religious ceremonies, and to the tensed nerves, which are the result of religion or art putting a human's whole organism on tenterhooks. Here, one finds an interesting comparison between aesthetic and religious experience that I have discussed elsewhere.¹⁷

Starbuck does not limit himself to just include kinaesthesia in the five traditional senses; that is, sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. He succeeds in discerning no less than ten senses, among which the one he calls "the organic sense" is, according to him, probably the one that is primarily stimulated by art and religion.

Those who really enjoy music are rather apt to confess to some bodily marks indicating a response of smooth muscle tissue in which the organic sense is involved. Among such marks are cosmic thrills along the spine, tingling of the skin, deepened breathing, vibrations in the chest, diaphragm, or abdomen, quickened pulse, a glow of warmth, and many others.¹⁸

This is an embodied, emotional experience of wholeness absorbing a human being, tearing her away from herself, creating the most enliven-

¹⁶ Edwin Diller Starbuck, "The Intimate Senses as Sources of Wisdom", *The Journal of Religion* 1:2, 1921 (129–145), p. 143.

¹⁷ Elam, "Körsång och lust: En undersökning av körsång som sinnlig aktivitet och erfarenhet", *STM-online*, 2009.

¹⁸ Starbuck, p. 136.



ing and pleasurable feelings that are possible for a human to experience, he states.

To experience a feeling of wholeness where everything coincides, and where one is not in the body but where one truly is the body, is probably rather unusual in our culture. The reason perhaps is that it is a kind of pre-reflective condition that in some sense has to be ceased in order to consciously focus on it? Thus, the feeling of wholeness *in and with oneself* is mostly very short and, strictly speaking, already fading away when one is able to be aware of it. The “organic sense” discerned and described by Starbuck might perhaps be compared to the feeling of embodied unity described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In his phenomenological investigation of perception, he describes a mode of wholeness by comparing the body with a work of art. His description and reasoning has been interpreted many times and my version follows next.

A Movement in Motion

What does the complete body look like? How are all the parts twined together? According to Merleau-Ponty, the different movements my body needs to perform in order to move a flowerpot from the table to the window are known to me through the meaningfulness they create together. The stretched arm, the grasping hand, the stretching and wrinkling of back and shoulder – every movement is significant and their co-operation is not something learned.¹⁹ They look the way they do because of my aim to move the pot. The totality of the body’s movements is meaningful because of the movement’s collaboration to fulfil my wishes. In the same way, the whole of my body is known to me although parts of it are invisible to my gaze. Doubtless, I can “see” my foot inside the shoe when I move my toes.

The capacity to visualize one’s own body also embraces parts never seen, Merleau-Ponty continues. For example, there are people who have hallucinations of their own face viewed from inside. This immediate access to one’s body is also apparent in the fact that almost everyone recognizes their own silhouette and way of walking when watched on film. The connections between the different parts of the body and between visual and tactile experience are not created one after another

¹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 149.



and just growing stronger. I do not pull the different parts together one by one; the translation and merging is performed once for all of me: that's my body itself. What I perceive and experience of my body is *the body's interpretation of itself*.²⁰ Visual phenomena appear through tactility, and tactile phenomena appear through vision: the singular movement through the background of the whole body's position, etc.

Merleau-Ponty does not want to compare the body with a physical object but rather with a work of art. If you only approach a painting through a verbal description, it is not possible to understand the idea of the work, he says. The idea of the work can only be communicated through the paint, and it is only by looking that it is possible to understand the meaning. This way of thinking and comparison presupposes that you imagine the work of art as something more than the physical object that it is. This can be understood as the artwork being constituted in the meeting with the spectator. Thus, the work of art consists generally of all the meanings exceeding the literary. What makes the spoken word significant is, for that reason, not simply the word but all the ways it is expressed through gestures, accents and facial expressions. But this must not be interpreted as if the poem is independent of material support, Merleau-Ponty says. On the contrary, the written text must be preserved intact.

Its meaning is not arbitrary and does not dwell in the firmament of ideas: it is locked in the words printed on some perishable page. In that sense, like every work of art, the poem exists as a thing and does not eternally survive as does a truth.²¹

Like the body, the work of art is, therefore, both the object and at the same time something else. I now imagine the lived body as a movement – a movement in motion. Where the receiver is necessary for realizing the work of art, similarly, the body's interpretation of itself and the world forms the coherent movement which is me. A novel, poem or a painting is an individual, Merleau-Ponty continues. By that he means entities in which the expression cannot be separated from what is expressed, and whose meaning is only accessible through direct contact. And then, "It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of

²⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

²¹ Ibid., p. 151.



art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms".²²

Eugene Gendlin also discusses the kind of interpreting movement that according to Merleau-Ponty is performed by the body. In some sense, Gendlin brings the reasoning further at the same time as he strongly emphasizes embodiment rather than perception. Through self-knowledge the body can even know its surrounding and its human situation. In this sense, perception of colour, sound and smell are only a small part.

Our bodies sense themselves in living in our situations. Our bodies do our living. Our bodies are interaction in the environment; they interact as bodies, and not just through what comes with the five senses. Our bodies don't lurk in isolation behind the five peepholes of perception.²³

This foundational bodily feeling, which is a presupposition for all kinds of perception, also appears in Merleau-Ponty's text, Gendlin says. The body is the centre; it has intentionality and it is the platform that collects all the senses. The body knows the whole situation; it feels itself-living-in its context. We act from the bodily feeling of the whole situation, and without this feeling it would be impossible to know where we are or what we are doing.²⁴

In Merleau-Ponty's description of the embodied feeling of wholeness above, he also mentions the connection between vision and touch. Visual phenomena may appear through tactility and tactile phenomena through vision, he says. This can be seen as a mode of synaesthesia; a co-operation, or rather a reversal of roles, between the senses where the individual is not conscious of *how* she apprehends, but rather *that* she apprehends something. This kind of intertwining of the senses is of huge interest for a discussion on the spectator's perspective on dance and other forms of art as it opens for a possibility to understand how the visual can generate tactile and kinaesthetic experiences.

²² Ibid.

²³ Eugene Gendlin, "The Primacy of the Body, not the Primacy of Perception", *Man and World* 25:3-4, 1992 (341-353), p. 344.

²⁴ Gendlin, p. 345.



Haptic Visuality

Haptics is a rather unknown concept in contemporary aesthetic theory, which can be used to grasp this phenomenon. Etymologically the word can be traced to the Greek *baptēsthai* (tactility) and *aptō* (to feel). The term has not been used in this context for as long as there have been ideas concerning the phenomenon. A philosophical problem formulated in 1688 by William Molyneux, is an obvious link in the history of ideas of haptics. Molyneux's question concerned whether a person born blind and who had learnt to feel the difference between a sphere and a cube with his hands, would be able to make this distinction by vision if he later in life became sighted. A lot of philosophers, like, for instance, Locke, Diderot and Condillac, were involved in this problem.²⁵

Psychology uses the haptic as a general concept to describe the mentally expanded tactile sensation representing the comprehensive experience of living and acting in space. James J. Gibson talks about the haptic as the mechanism that serves the individual with information of embodiment and surrounding.²⁶ Ashley Montagu claims that the haptic is an acquired sense. Because we experience the surrounding with all our senses, the haptic system can imaginatively give us physical contact with places and objects once touched, which now are only visible.²⁷ Thus, it seems to be a kind of body memory, somehow connecting a present visual experience with a passed tactile perception, generating a tactile mode of imagination: an embodied understanding of an object's form, structure, volume, etc.

Contemporary phenomenological film theory uses the concept when discussing a kind of film experience where the body as a whole is involved. Prominent names in this discourse are Vivian Sobchack and Laura M. Marks.²⁸ In haptic visuality, Marks explains, the eyes func-

²⁵ Marjolein Degenaar and Gert-Jan Lokhorst, "Molyneux's Problem", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/molyneux-problem/>>.

²⁶ James J. Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.

²⁷ Ashley Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

²⁸ Laura M. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002; Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. Gilles Deleuze discusses how the haptic appears in paintings by Francis Bacon in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, transl. Daniel W. Smith, New York: Continuum, 2003.



tion as tactile organs. Touch is activated, meaning that the spectator's body is more engaged in the process than in optical visibility. Mostly though, both modes of visibility are involved in a movement both from far away and very close; from simply optical to multi-sensuously. A painful and current example is the scene in Darren Aronofsky's film *Black Swan* where Nina rips her cuticle off, while the audience crouches and whines.

The haptic does not primarily interpret a possible narrative message but works on a pre-reflective level with a strong connection to foundational feelings of pleasure and displeasure.

I would like to introduce the concept of haptic into a discussion of watching dance as I think it can be very useful. It is also important to find an alternative to one of the frequently used concepts, if not a dominant concept in the discourse in the field; namely kinaesthetic empathy, which I will soon return to.

The problem of becoming a spectator of dance is not simply a question of seeing – as if vision was independent from the rest of the body – but also a question of my whole body being constituted into a spectator-of-dance-body. I watch dance with my whole body at the same time as the concrete acting changes the pre-conditions for my perception.

David Blinder discusses Gibson's ideas concerning perception and awareness in the article "A New Look at Vision".²⁹ Gibson's reasoning is basically, according to Blinder, that perception is never about how a human watches the world but rather concerns the human's consciousness of existence in the world. Traditional distinctions between "subjective" and "objective", "inner" and "outer", etc., are repealed, and instead Gibson shows that perception is the subject's main contact with the outer world. That means, says Blinder, that perception can be seen as an ecological (approximately complex, multimodal) event rather than as a stream of mental acts. Gibson's strategy is not about asking what is in your head, but rather what the head is in: "The world is what we see; but the seer is part of the world".³⁰ Thus, to get out from one's own "bubble" is the same thing as sticking your head into the world, one might say.

This is precisely what happened to the viewer who stepped into

²⁹ David Blinder, "A New Look at Vision", *Topoi*, 5, 1986 (137–48).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142.



Cristina Caprioli's choreographic installation *cover2*.³¹ In this performance there were no fixed places for the spectators, instead, they could/should move around freely in the room. The comparison between this form and a "regular" dance performance is palpable. As a mobile viewer inside the choreography you are largely stimulated in a kinaesthetic, tactile and haptic sense. You take in the room, the dancers and the other spectators throughout your own body. Cords to step over, headlights that dazzle and that you have to make way for, dancers who almost step over you if you are seated where they suddenly pass, etc. The difference from a performance of a traditional set design is radical.

To look into an image or a diorama – or to walk around and be in the room together with dancers and props. Sitting in a row of seats means that you have a fixed focal point throughout the performance although it is different for everyone. Being able to move around means that you get a totally different bodily awareness. A distanced contemplation is impossible in this situation; you are inevitably part of what you experience.

The thought arises that with this form of choreography you get a more democratic situation as far as the viewers are concerned. In the fixed contemplation, individual experiences and knowledge probably play a greater role than in the situation where you move around freely. Although such a premise is not fully negated for the moving spectator, one can imagine that they will grow in importance. Here everyone stands more "stripped" and vulnerable to things that they encounter. Perhaps one's self-consciousness is more prominent here: you see what is around in relation to your own bodily self, simultaneously you see your own embodiment in relation to what surrounds you. And in relation to Starbuck's theory that different forms of art largely aim at understanding and communicating the various senses, this type of dance performance is undoubtedly a discourse on, in and through synaesthesia.

Kinaesthetic Empathy – the Concept

The audience/spectator is now the focus of a remarkably large proportion of dance research with regard to both the scientific and the artistic. It is unclear why dance and other performative practices are more

³¹ *cover2* is a piece in a series of choreographic works recently produced by the Swedish-Italian choreographer Cristina Caprioli and ccap. *cover2* premiered at Danscentrum, Stockholm, in January 2011. For more information and video clips see: www.ccap.se.



interested in understanding the receiver than is the case in other art forms. One idea is that the volatility and immateriality that characterize the performing arts make them more dependent on their audience than, say, painting. While you can return to a painting however many times you want, you can strictly speaking only see a dance performance once. And even if you admit that they show the same performance during for instance a month, it still will not be the same thing as a painting, which exists as a physical object. When the performances are finished, they are finished; material on a movie or DVD is something quite different.

Watching Dance: Kinesthetic Empathy is a British cross-disciplinary research project that took place during the period 2008–11 involving several universities.³² In a co-operation between audience research and neuroscience, the project investigates the ways spectators react to and experience dance. Qualitative research on audiences predominately engages only a small number of individuals as the aim is to get detailed and complex descriptions of their experiences of certain performances. In other words, what the researchers want to get is material that is both reflective and emotionally loaded. This material should be analysed for content as well as form; that is, what they say and how they say it.

The project *Watching Dance* works with questions like: What is the degree of kinaesthetic empathy for the spectator of dance? Do persons who watch dance often (without being dancers) experience kinaesthetic empathy to a higher degree than inexperienced spectators? In what sense do music and sound influence the degree of kinaesthetic empathy? The project's research questions arouse new and complicated questions for me, for instance: How is it possible to calculate degrees of empathy? How can you be sure that the respondents are talking about the same thing in relation to each other and to the researcher? How is it possible to decide whether music/sound makes any difference as it will be necessary to use the same performance a couple of times both with and without music/sound? As analysis and results from the project are not available yet, these kinds of questions must be left behind for the moment.

In the project *Watching Dance*, the concept of kinaesthetic empathy

³² <http://www.watchingdance.org/> (the link was fetched 2011-05-26). (Too late for me to read and discuss I found out that the project *Watching Dance* has resulted in a publication titled *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, eds. Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason, Bristol: Intellect, 2012.)

is derived from Theodor Lipps (1851–1914) and his theory concerning “Einfühlung”, which says that when you watch a body in motion, for instance an acrobat, you may experience a mode of “inner mimesis” – a feeling/representation/reflection of being that moving body yourself. Kinaesthetics as well as empathy are concepts that appeared at the turn of 20th century and which were later given other meanings and interpretations. In the book previously mentioned, Foster historicizes these concepts as well as the concept of choreography, and writes how their meaning has continuously changed.³³ At the same time, she shows how they together construct embodiment in a given historical and cultural situation. Foster’s book and her earlier works on the topic, along with the project described above, are examples of a huge interest in the concept of kinaesthetic empathy in the dance world. In short, kinaesthetic empathy is the most established concept in contemporary dance research when discussing the spectator’s physical and emotional experience of dance. Contemporary dance research also has an extensive interest in the so-called mirror neurons.³⁴

The question is whether one actually needs both the concept of kinaesthetic *and* the concept of empathy in order to explain the bodily engagement that sometimes is felt when watching dance? There is something in this combination that feels rather problematic although it is not easy to point at exactly. Can it be an underlying dualism in the need to use both these terms? “Kinaesthetic” representing the bodily feeling and “empathy” representing understanding and community between souls? A section in Foster’s book shows a slide somewhere around 1910–30 when, on the one hand, empathy as a concept tended to be more bodily and, on the other, the concept of the kinaesthetic

³³ Foster, *Choreographing*.

³⁴ See for instance texts by Ivar Hagendoorn at <http://www.ivarhagendoorn.com/>

Mirror neurons are also discussed by Judith Lynne Hanna: “It is likely that mirror neurons are active in the person carrying out a particular dance movement and in the person who watches that movement. The same code is active in both phenomena. The brain has a kind of social representation that could allow this simulation process to underpin the sophisticated mental functions of empathy, sympathetic kinesthesia, and understanding in student–teacher and dancer–spectator interactions. However, an individual’s personal motor repertoire is relevant; there are greater activations when expert dancers view movements that they have been trained to perform compared to movements they have not. Learning to dance by observation is cognitively related to practice: There is neural resonance between observed and embodied action.” “A Nonverbal Language for Imagining and Learning: Dance Education in K–12 Curriculum”, *Educational Researcher* 37:8, 2008 (491–506), pp. 496–97.

became more cognitively loaded.³⁵

The American dance critic John Martin was the first to develop kinaesthetic empathy as a concept in relation to dance, Foster writes. And she quotes:

Through kinesthesia, any bodily movement arouses a sympathetic reaction in the mind of the spectator. If it is a representational movement, the spectator recognizes it at once because in performing the same action he has utilized the same movement.³⁶

Martin's theory embraces the concept "inner man", which is reminiscent of Gilbert Ryle's critical description of the soul as "the ghost in the machine".³⁷ Another interpretation of the quotation from Martin could be that the concept kinaesthetic, in his usage, already by itself embraces a mode of "empathetic-taking-part-of" the dancer's movement, which means that the word "empathy" becomes superfluous. – I find support for this interpretation of the concept of the kinaesthetic in Professor Susan W. Stinton's reasoning when she writes:

This internal sensing has great significance not only for how one learns and performs dance but also for how we perceive the art. Without it, we certainly can see movement and patterns on stage, and hear any accompanying music, but internal sensing allows us to feel the dance and our response to it. We become participants, not just onlookers, as we breathe along with the dancers on stage, feeling the stretch that continues past the fingertips, feeling the body landing silently from a jump. Those who have never experienced a dance performance from this perspective have missed half of it.³⁸

I am not saying that one definition of the concept is more correct than another. The way someone defines kinaesthetic, empathy and other concepts is a historical and cultural question, as Foster shows. In my

³⁵ Foster, *Choreographing*, pp. 154–58.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 156.

³⁷ In his critique of Descartes' dualism the analytic philosopher Gilbert Ryle introduced the label "the ghost in the machine". *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson, 1952.

³⁸ Susan W. Stinton, "My Body/Myself: Lessons from Dance Education", in *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds*, ed. Liora Bresler, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2004 (153–167), p. 154.



research, though, it is definitely more interesting to continue with a two-fold understanding of kinaesthetic as both “to feel one’s own bodily movements” and “to bodily feel/be aware of the other’s movement”. One reason is that it will make it easier to talk about the dancer as extraordinarily kinaesthetically experienced, which will also make her more receptive at rehearsals. The experienced dancer who has total control of her movements will also be more perceptive of other dancer’s movements. There is a connection between the eye and the kinaesthetic that is reminiscent of how the haptic describes the connection between the eye and the tactile in the previously mentioned texts. This implies that the kinaesthetic, in its complexity, should be understood as a possible mode of haptic experience.³⁹

Additionally, recognize (“känna igen”) has a particular dual meaning in Swedish: partly “I recognize the movement” and partly “I feel that movement (again)”.

Notions on Movement – Body – Space

Sometimes it seems as if dancers indulge in tactile experiences. It is not just a question of feeling and touching the other dancers, or intertwining on the floor like worms; physically exploring the space seems to be equally frequent, touching the floor with feet, hands and body. Their own embodiment tries out, is tested by, weighs down, and relates to present surfaces. Is touch the most prominent sense for a dancer? The other’s body is seen in the corner of the eye but primarily it is felt through warmth and the puff of air that it generates.

The untrained person has to be conscious of her body’s collected movements: the angled knees, the arm that is lifted, and the hand that is supposed to make a slack wave. Afterwards – for the professional dancer – the entirety is not a problem, but she can rather focus on the significance of every single movement, the expression of each single part of the body. The more overarching control, the more one can isolate and focus on nuances and refining the bits and pieces.

Body and space as inseparable. What does that mean for movement and dance? The inclined floor in cccover is a concrete example of the

³⁹ See Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, Oxford: Berg, 2007.



dancer's adaptation to the foundation.⁴⁰ At the same time, the inclination is apparent for the spectator because of the dancer's way of moving, which is determined by the material reality. The movement is connected to this specific foundation and this specific room. The thought of making a choreography completely based on the idea of a specific space now grows stronger. The space is not just creating movements but also other bodies. The surrounding is mainly determining the way we move: walking, crawling, climbing, swimming, rolling, crouching, hesitating, and zigzagging ... A soft and dusty surrounding – in what sense will it influence my way of moving? It is only when you consciously occupy the floor that you can realize your own body's possibility to create and perform space. According to the French dance historian and critic Laurence Louppe, contemporary dance does not *reproduce* space as other forms of art but, rather, *produces* it: "Bodies do not organise themselves in the form of a circle or triangle: they are the circle; they are the very angle which cuts a diagonal".⁴¹

The sense of touch is prominent in dance as well as in watching dance. Perhaps one should rather say the *senses* of touch, as it is obvious that there is more than one tactile sense activated through dance. For example kinaesthetically, how one's own body finds the right steps – or sometimes not when the feet simply slip away. I try to find the movement that I have seen being performed many times, but when I practice it I can feel from inside that it is wrong. Although I know how it should look, it is impossible for me to make it. And it does not have to be an advanced movement; a wave with one of my hands is enough.

What concepts and terms that can be connected to the complexity of touch are coming back in the dance world? Once again, the significance of the surrounding, the kind of bedding that the feet move on, the actual distance to the other dancers and to the walls, words that describe an outer as well as an inner feeling. Compared to just watching, my own engagement becomes more concrete as a result of doing. To practice physically, to learn the terms that belong to the dance world results in my "room-of-understanding" being furnished and thus becoming more

⁴⁰ Cristina Caprioli and ccap, opening night at Danscentrum, November 2009.

⁴¹ Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, transl. S. Gardner, Alton: Dance Books, 2010, p. 132.



functional. It is basically a sort of foundational hermeneutic where my pre-understanding embraces my bodily being as a whole.

How is space performed/experienced in the choreography of *cut-outs & trees*?⁴² The dancers in *cut-outs & trees* build space partly in relation to each other, partly according to the continually changing surrounding. One single body on stage cannot create space. Is it possible to find a usable verb for this? To make spatial or en-spatialize? Crucial concepts in the choreography are, for instance, to keep, to support, to push, to press, to repeat ... all verbs. The spectators are permitted/requested to move freely outside the scene, to walk around the ongoing performance in order to watch it from different angles. Thus, this is a mixture of the two forms of spectatorship, which were discussed earlier in connection to *cover2*, that is, being-in and diorama-observation respectively.

What does it signify that the dancers are able to perform completely different movements from myself? And why do you never see fat, clumsy, uncontrolled bodies dance? There is an aspect of beauty in dance that almost seems to be an imperative.⁴³ Not even in the choreographies of Birgit Cullberg is it possible to perceive the movements as ugly, although it sometimes seems to be the purpose with its sharply slanted feet, wildly kicking legs, and rolling gait. These patterns reject our culture's traditional idealized way of movement, particularly related to the movement of female bodies.

Pleasure has to be prominent in dance: the feeling one has when one manages to make a movement, to possess a room or a scene, to know you are admired, to dance together, can only be described as pleasure. It seems also obvious that, as well as in choir singing, vision and touch co-operate in order for the dancers to communicate well.

To Understand Dance and What it Can Do or 'Thinking in Movement'

Quite often you hear statements to the effect that "once becoming highly skilled in bodily activity, you can no longer think of it con-

⁴² *cut-outs & trees* is another production by Cristina Caprioli, opening night at Venice Dance Biennale, June 2010.

⁴³ See Ivar Hagendoorn, "Can Dance Be Disgusting or Is It Forever Doomed to Aestheticism?", www.ivarhagendoorn.com.



sciously without losing it". The problem is discussed and problematized in an article by Barbara Montero, and she calls it simply a Maxim.⁴⁴ She admits that a consciousness directed towards, for instance, climbing a stage will most probably create problems, but in relation to a bodily-directed professional practice like dance, the claim doesn't hold up under scrutiny.

Dancers often think aloud, Montero says. During rehearsals and sometimes even during performances, they may whisper some kind of code which represents a feeling they try to maintain. One reason why a conscious presence during the performance can be important, she says, is because habit, in the performative arts, can result in a performance that lacks spark. Probably because an exact repetition time after time (if that is possible) leads to boredom. The best performances are often ones where the audience is given the opportunity to see someone who consciously thinks in action. Montero makes a comparison between a person giving a lecture from memory and someone reading from a script. In large part, our interest in the lecture from memory is that we see someone who thinks in real-time:

As I see it, a performance that proceeds entirely automatically would be flat. It would be, in certain respects, like watching a machine; although the output could be amazing, that most interesting of spectacles, the human mind, is lacking.⁴⁵

It does not hurt to point out that she really is talking about thinking-in-action not about thinking-out-action. But how can we understand this mode of thinking? Can it really be understood with "normal" thinking?

According to Sheets-Johnstone, improvised dance is a mode of thinking: thinking not comprehensible through ordinary language but only with metaphors.⁴⁶ Ordinary language limits us to facts, which means that we are inhibited in our conceptualization of the quality of our experience. To think in movement is of course a bodily phenomenon, Sheets-Johnstone continues. Through experience the body con-

⁴⁴ Barbara Montero, "Does Bodily Awareness Interfere with Highly Skilled Movements?", *Inquiry* 53:2, 2010 (105–122).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴⁶ Sheets-Johnstone, "Thinking in Movement", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39:4, 1981 (399–407).



tains movement in a literal sense. This foundational, embodied mode of being is also fortified by Merleau-Ponty, whom Sheets-Johnstone discusses briefly. When Merleau-Ponty discusses paintings by Cézanne he talks about “thinking in painting” as a process where seeing becomes gesture. This should not be interpreted as if movement simply follows perception, Sheets-Johnstone says. Rather, it means that perception is intertwined with movement in the sense that it is impossible to say when one thing ends and the other thing starts.⁴⁷

Is it possible to imagine the reverse, that is, that gesture can become seeing? In that case, the reasoning is certainly interesting with regard to the spectator's perspective. One's own movement/gesture condenses vision through layers of bodily memories.

The point Sheets-Johnstone tries to formulate is that thinking is not necessarily a purely mental question. Thinking in movement is a way of being in the world: a way to wonder and to explore the world, to get in touch with it moment by moment, and to live one's embodiment. The whole reasoning has to be connected to the acknowledgement that movements do not have to refer to anything beyond themselves. They are intelligent in their own right, which does not mean that they can never be related to certain cultural standards or be given a meaning in relation to certain aesthetic theories. To understand that dance does not have to be something beyond itself, Sheets-Johnstone says, is to understand Gertrude Stein's “a rose is a rose is a rose”, that is, that a rose does not represent anything.

No more than the body must a dance stand for or refer to something beyond itself in order for the phenomenon to be dance: to have meaning is not necessarily to refer and neither is it necessary to have a label.⁴⁸

Slowly, pieces in the complicated puzzle to become a spectator of dance seem to fit together. The text by Sheets-Johnstone is something of a breakthrough for my efforts. I start to understand why contemporary choreographers, dancers and dance theoreticians want to approach

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 402.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 406.



dance as an art form. A comparison to music is perhaps most fitting. The dancer's body can be compared to how the pianist's fingers pick notes out from the piano; the movements match the notes.

Irrespective of whether they are improvised or organized, the movements should be watched in their own right, that is, as if there is no hidden message to decipher. Why did it take such a long time for me to reach this insight? Why could none of the dancers or choreographers that I have been surrounded by for the last two years explain this in a comprehensive way? Instead, an article in a very theoretical, aesthetic journal – granted that Sheets-Johnstone has been a dancer – shows that words and reflections are sometimes necessary to open up one's mind to difficult art forms.

It is definitely interesting to consider why dance as art has not succeeded in establishing a picture of itself as exactly the art form where movement can be a means as well as a goal. Can the explanation be the fact that so few of the professionals in the field actually try to verbalize their thoughts about dance? Or can it be that we, the spectators, generally have problems getting rid of the idea that a human being who moves tenderly and expressively is not necessarily striving to express anything special? Even if, as Sheets-Johnstone says, what is performed in a dance is a movement that can be recognized as common in everyday life, it has now been stripped from ordinary cultural meaning. The movement exists in the moment it is performed but does not point to anything beyond itself, regardless of any kind of meaning that could be ascribed to it.

But is it possible to stop once you have learnt to "read"? How do you consciously stop recognizing the, for you, obvious and common meaning in order to reach something different? And what is this other? In this situation, it would be easy to start mystifying dance as an art, something that would ruin my whole argument. Perhaps it is now time to try to get in contact with other kinds of meaning instead? But if it is primarily the movement as such that shall be perceived and understood by the spectator, perhaps it means that meaning in this case is fundamentally a question of bodily feelings and affects? The reflective mode of interpretation must be turned off, and bodily interpretations must take over. A movement then must partly be understood in relation to one's own body's abilities and the skill required to perform it. In the encounter with dance, as well as with other kinds of art, there is no



exact distinction between perception and what is being perceived. Here, in-between the subject and object dwells the aesthetic. And would it then be so peculiar if a dancer's gesture or movement creates a physical sensation that constitutes a kind of meaning for the spectator? When Shusterman discusses Wittgenstein's thinking about bodily feelings in the aesthetic experience, he considers something similar, writing:

In other words, we might sharpen our appreciation of art through more attention to our somaesthetic feelings involved in perceiving art, instead of narrowly identifying art's feelings with the familiar kind of emotions (e.g. sadness, joy, melancholy, despair, etc.) that often make art appreciation degenerate into a gushy, vague romanticism.⁴⁹

Cover11, 22 October

A new choreography by Cristina Caprioli at Danscentrum in Stockholm. This time the audience is sitting down; the chairs stand in a semi-circle in front of the dancers who once again are the excellent Anja Arnqvist, Emelie Johansson and Madeleine Lindh. It consists of a sequence of scenes where the dancers occasionally struggle like animals. Two of the scenes stand out as particularly haptic. The first scene is when they are standing straight up and silently make letters and words with big grimaces. In the other they perform many movements that would conventionally be considered rather ugly and grotesque. The dancers also accompany these movements by making different sounds – plopping, whining, and clicking – which reinforce their movements and also my feelings. Why do the peculiar movements generate a stronger kinaesthetic experience than the traditional dance movements? Another thing that becomes obvious is the way the dancers are joined and how important they are for the choreographic process. The fact that the same dancers are involved in the whole cover production means that their particular styles and way of moving can be fully realized. The dialogue is present and made visible.

Pina. A dance movie by Wim Wenders, 23 October

In this movie about Pina Bausch and her company the previously men-

⁴⁹ Shusterman, "Wittgenstein's Somaesthetics: Body Feeling in Philosophy of Mind, Art, and Ethics", *Revue internationale de philosophie* 1:219, 2002 (91–108), p. 102.



tioned dialogue appears even more palpably. The different dancers build the dance piece by piece together with the choreographer. A short word or comment from Pina is the key that starts the process. The dancers suggest a movement and immediately get a response; the choreographer knows instantly whether they are on the “right” track or not, that is, whether they are following her unstated intention. They talk *a lot* about feelings. The feeling determines; it has to feel right. Of course, this has to involve different kinds of feeling: the dancer’s kinaesthetic feeling of the movement but also their “gut feeling” of what the choreographer wants. One of them works on a “happy movement” – and he also looks happy all the time. A happy movement? Yes, in this context it is natural.

The Method Over Again

What does it mean for our project and more specifically for my own research that we are training physically together? It has taken a long time for me to understand the significance of my training/dancing with the goal of seeking answers to my research question. The relevance of the method has grown gradually; artistic research is to a great degree a searching for method. By that I do not mean that I and the other theoreticians are practicing artistic research, but in some sense we still end up in a grey zone due to our dance training.

The purpose of reporting method in artistic research – as well as in the humanities and qualitative social sciences – is not primarily that one should be able to repeat the process and get a similar result. That would be a stupid idea. It is rather a question of becoming aware of the significance that method actually has for the process and result as a whole. Method, one can say, is both means and end in this context. And an alternative method will simply lead to another result. Due to this, talking about method and its relevance is completely different from a methodological discussion in the sciences. Thus, the question is whether our joint process can be said to embrace a method at all when the method might in reality constitute the expected result. But whose result? My project definitely has a purpose beyond revealing the method, which means that for me our training doubtless can be called an aspect or part of method. But at the same time it is also a method that has influenced, not to say, created the result of my research.

Primarily, the dance training has given me two insights. The first is



that I have recognized the role that language plays for the instruction and repetition of dance. And it is not just a complementary part or something that dominates – but rather something completely intertwined with practice. The second is that I have learned more about the role of the body and the kinaesthetic in aesthetic experience. Seeing with one's body means that if I have performed this and other similar movements my pre-understanding will be more well-founded. My contemplation seems to have become more complex and more pleasant as a result.

A trailing wake motion that can be experienced as being out of sync with oneself. The lower body moves forward while the upper body is still in the middle of a backward motion. Is it possible to perceive that a dancer is doing this without first experiencing it corporeally yourself? On some level, perhaps. But recognizing it without a human body must be impossible.⁵⁰

When Montero discusses proprioception as an aesthetic sense, it is a reasoning that in some sense touches my own assumption regarding learning to see with the whole body.⁵¹ This skill appears primarily as something that is of benefit to professional dancers but which also strengthens the spectator's experience.

Do dancers' movements "resonate" in observers' bodies? Is there any evidence that while watching dance (and other aesthetically valuable bodily movements) we represent the movement not just visually, but kinesthetically as well? If there is a system, "a mirror system" let us call it, whose function is to produce such a resonance, it would help explain a number of things. For example, it would help explain why watching good dancers is such an important element of dance training [...] [I]t might also help explain why people who have never had dance training often do not appreciate certain aspects of dance as readily as those who have had dance training: having done similar movements oneself might heighten one's proprioceptive awareness, which, in turn,

⁵⁰ To wake up one morning with a beetle's body and the consequences that will have for one's future aesthetic experiences is described by Christopher Perricone. See his "Bugged Out: A Reflection of Art Experience", *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 37:2, 2003 (19–30).

⁵¹ Montero, "Proprioception". Although Montero is looking for evidence of some kind of neural system her questions concerns almost the same thing as mine.



might facilitate the proprioceptive experience of the movement done by others.⁵²

We are learning a new part from a choreography, this time a work by Per Jonsson.⁵³ By now, we find it easier to talk about how we experience the work, what we feel concerning the movements and what we think they remind us of. The fact that we now have some common references thanks to joint experiences of performances and movies is causing the dialogue to deepen. Perhaps we have also got better at noticing details and imitating Cecilia's movements. It is obvious that a combination of showing-imitating but also saying-listening is necessary. The necessity of this combination is emphasized in Donald Schön's second book on reflection-in-action with the title *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*:

*Instructions are always incomplete, as we have seen, and are often read as ambiguous, strange, or incongruent with the listener's understandings. Similarly, every demonstration is ambiguous, always open to the question "Just what in this is to be imitated?"*⁵⁴

One might think that, when it comes to dance, it is just a question of taking a good look. What the choreographer/teacher/practitioner is doing is exactly what one is supposed to do, and that therefore the last question in the quote would be irrelevant. But this would obviously be ignoring or misunderstanding the significance of the imaginary, which very often supports a choreographer's movement. It is about verbal descriptions and movement sequence demonstrations that take place simultaneously; like for instance, that the movement is supposed to begin in the shoulder and not in the hand, or that it is the floor that draws different parts of the body towards it, or that the movement se-

⁵² Ibid., p. 237. When I almost had finished my work with this text I found a new article by Montero where she argues even more strongly for the idea that dance training may enrich the individual's experience of watching dance. Although she primarily focusses on the aesthetic judgment her reasoning definitely is supporting my own. See Barbara Montero, "Practice Makes Perfect: The Effect of Dance Training on the Aesthetic Judge", *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science* 11:1, 2012 (59–68).

⁵³ The choreographer Per Jonsson created a number of important dance works before he died much too young, for instance *Schakt* from 1983 (the piece we are working with), *Ayas öga* from 1992 and *Rivers of Mercury* 1998, which was his last one. Cecilia Roos was working very close to Per Jonsson and she is also the curator of his work.

⁵⁴ Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987, p. 111.

quence should be performed with a body that is slowly melting as if it was made of wax – the performance of the movements is completely dependent on these images. At the same time, it is impossible for the dancer to understand this layer of the movement solely by looking; the instruction has to be spoken. But once it has been spoken, this way of thinking will be incorporated in a bodily-kinaesthetic-linguistic practice: accessible and usable for everyone in the actual context.

Now Csordas' idea of a cultural phenomenology, which was described in the beginning, is becoming more relevant to my study. What we seem to be dealing with is a culturally developed sensuous engagement that embraces both our bodies and our language. Though this phenomena may be perceived in our group to some degree, it is more obviously visible for instance in *ccap*.⁵⁵ Thus, it is not a question of pure subjectivity or of something completely general. Rather it is more like a discourse that embraces talk as well as embodied action practiced by a choreographer and her/his dancers or company – or by a teacher and her/his students. This does not mean that the word has to be there first, or that the movement has to be there first either. No communicating human being can leave language or her/his body behind. But as the purpose in this context is to show/transfer a certain movement, the focus is on movement. Language is the “other side”: priceless, attached, and used seemingly unconsciously. By now it must be clear that the selection of words is in no way random. Rather it is done through experience and also through the particular form of discourse that is described here. The sequences of movements that can sometimes be connected to a specific choreographer often include this other side; a sequence of words – metaphors – supporting, thinking in, and through, movement.

Movement Backwards and Forwards

Now, what were the questions that I asked as direction for my research? I would now like to take a step back to address these questions in order to sum up the discussion's most important results. To conclude, I then move my attention in a completely different direction to reason hypothetically about the possible significance of a heightened bodily awareness in relation to art and aesthetic experience.

⁵⁵ What I mean is the co-operation between choreographer and dancers that I have had the opportunity to follow in their work with the different cover-pieces. A similar sensuous-linguistic engagement in a specific group appears in the movie of Pina Bausch and her company.

What does the spectator's bodily engagement look like – how can it be described? What might the connection between language and sense experience be? How will my perceptions of a particular dance work change when I learn to dance parts of it myself? In what sense can imagination be discussed as bodily grounded? Will my consciousness – as an embodied activity – change as a result of the training and thus create a more complex experience of other forms of art as well?

Kinaesthesia, a mode of perception that I had not considered before, has had an apparent role in this study. This is not strange as “kinaesthesia” denotes the feeling/experience of one's body in motion and is thus a regular part of everyday training for a dancer. But kinaesthesia also appears to be important, if not foundational, for the spectator's aesthetic experience and construction of meaning. By becoming more bodily present and aware it appears possible to be able to *watch with one's whole body* where kinaesthetic is a necessary component. The connection between language and sense experience is obvious. Simply to start to talk about how it feels to make different movements – to formulate one's body's actions in words – means that you become more conscious physically. That this is done with the help of metaphors in dance training has been clear. There is a need to create new metaphors when demonstrating a new movement – basically the use of metaphors is something unavoidable, denoting that dance belongs to the discourse of “the aesthetic”.⁵⁶

The metaphors have given our training a complexity through a “showing-telling” dynamic, meaning that I have succeeded in creating images that embrace my whole bodily being. Through this a kind of embodied meaning has slowly developed, which can also manifest itself in the role of the spectator. Muscles, sinews, and skin constitute basic tools for interpretation and are parts of my register of possible images; tactile receptors have reinforced the eyes.

The choice of words and concepts are not unimportant or coincidental at all. They are part of, and express, the specific discourse shared by the different groups that for some reason are dancing, training and talking about dance together.

Reconsidered, it seems very clear that the research questions and the reasoning they generate are clearly linked together and also con-

⁵⁶ For a discussion of seeing-as and as-if as key concepts in relation to the aesthetic, see Elam, *Emotions*.



struct each other. The dependence that has appeared between language, movement and sense experience cannot be elicited by one question. Rather, a bundle of questions from different angles is necessary. Still, the question concerning a possible “scattering effect” that a heightened bodily awareness might generate must be considered.

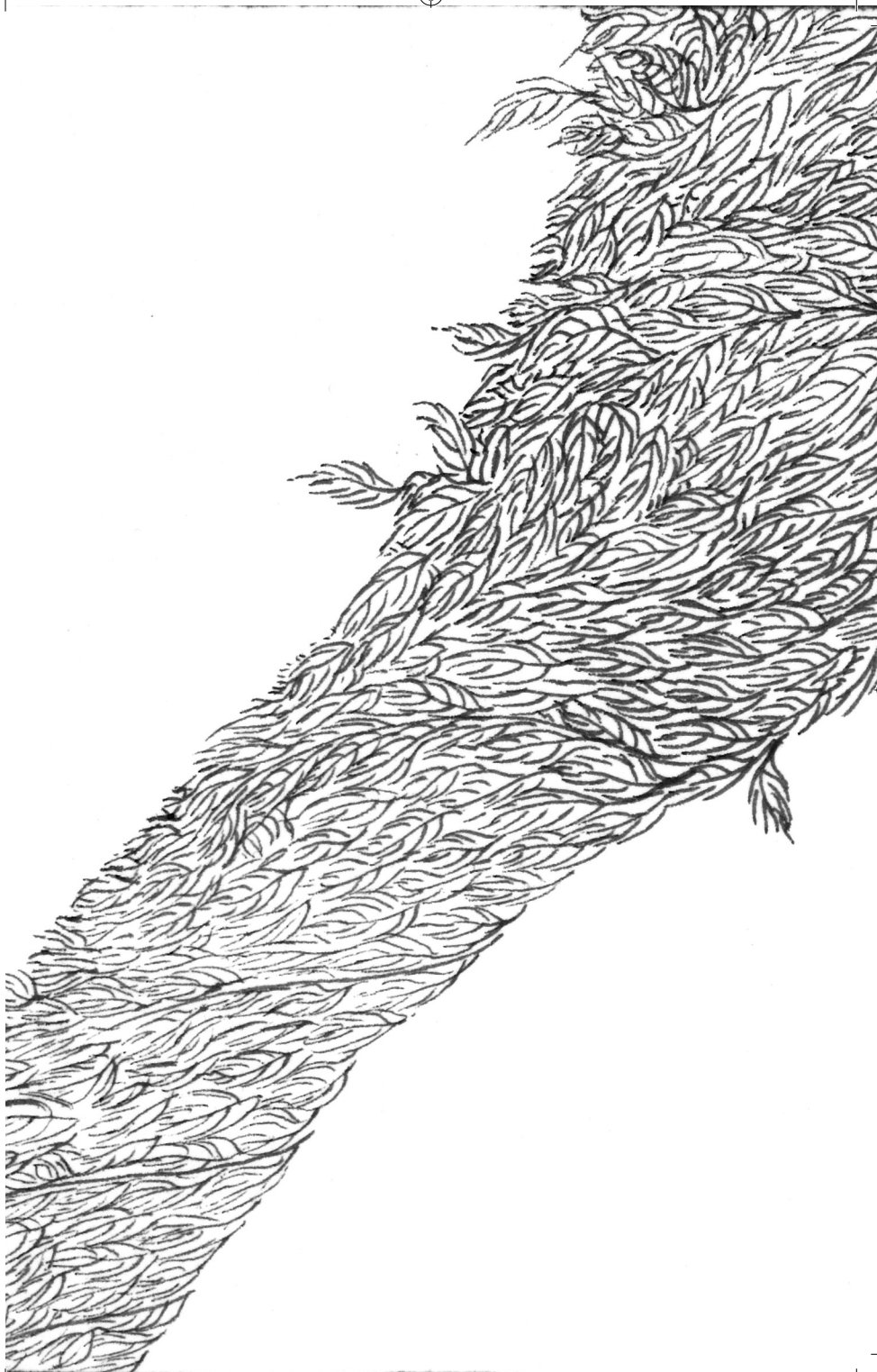
How it should be answered is probably dependent on what I mean by “bodily awareness”. And why call it bodily awareness if I want to embrace a discursive and conceptual context simultaneously?

A painter who has been training her eye to make distinctions between nuances and who effortlessly masters different techniques, who has seen all the important master pieces at art museums all over the world, who has discussed painting with friends and colleagues and who is familiar with the domains of contemporary art, will have a different experience of a painting than someone who has no experience of art at all – that is obvious. But is it also obvious to talk about a *stronger* experience, and if so, how can that be argued for? And will it automatically follow that the painter also openly and without prejudice can experience other forms of art more easily than someone who is not an artist?

These questions have to remain open, as they are definitely dependent on different individual's capacity to make conclusions. But to develop a capacity or knowledge in one field is probably also a *chance for a changed relation* to everything else. One's perception is sharpened; the thought has more references than before; something is felt once again (in a meaning also embracing recognition). The spectator of dance that has appeared is not something that in the future can only be activated when visiting dance performances. It cannot be a question of developing an isolated attitude, which is only relevant for a certain kind of phenomenon. Conversely, the fact that I have developed tools for constructions of meaning on a bodily basis will probably open up for a broader register of experience also in relation to other kinds of art. And perhaps not just art. A continued and conscious training of this embodied constitution of meaning can hopefully lead to a more complex perception also of the everyday. But again, this embodied consciousness is completely and wholly developed together with an enriched discourse where words accompany movements in action as well as in spectatorship. That means that language has to continue to accompany when gaze-body-thought are turned forward to new and different movements.











Whose Body?

The Difference between Seeing and Experiencing

Cecilia Sjöholm

The Problem of the Kinaesthetic Impulse

As one of three philosophers in a project on dance interpretation, run by dancer and professor Cecilia Roos, I suddenly found myself attempting to perform Ina Christel Johannessen's choreography *NOW SHE KNOWS*. Finding myself in the process of repeating the choreographed movements I caught a glimpse of a possible technique for interpreting choreographic work. Cecilia used holders and marks that helped us understand the movement or gesture of expression that she wanted us to execute. For example, pose like Isadora Duncan, make signs with your fingers that are unintelligible. I found other personal markers, or signs, such as movements that resembled baroque dance, Cecilia's resemblance to a character taken out of *The Ring*, which I then tried to imitate.

In that process, I became acutely aware of the complexity involved in the perception and kinaesthetic interpretation of a moving human body. As we see and experience dance, is our experience grounded in perception, or is it primarily kinaesthetic? Or is it both? It appeared that Johannessen was using this ambiguity in her choreography, shifting the language of the choreography between different points of view. In this text, I will look at the way that this ambiguity works and how it can be described. I will use our practices with *NOW SHE KNOWS* in order to explore the difference between the perception and experience of a dancing body. The ambiguity arising in the gap between seeing and experiencing is of interest not only for a possible interpretation of *NOW SHE KNOWS*. On a more general level, it engages wider questions to be examined in dance theory, aesthetics, phenomenology and philosophy.

As we see a body move, it is not easy to tell what we perceive and how we actually perceive it. At some point in our practices, Cecilia placed a camera on her arm and attempted to film us practicing. The result was shaky, showing only fragmented images of our bodies. This can perhaps be viewed as a failure: the camera lens captured nothing



like a human perspective. At the same time, the experiment unravelled the complexity involved in the human perception of moving bodies. A complexity that became the focus of our attention as we, the philosophers, attempted to follow Cecilia with insecure postures. As we see another body move, our perception is formed in a dialectics between what we experience and what we perceive. As I watch a body move, I feel the movement in my own body. Dance is a lived experience. What we experience is a kinaesthetic impulse. What we perceive, however, is not only movement; it is movement invested with, for example, social, cultural or aesthetic meaning. As a theoretician attempting to perform, I became aware of the interconnected nature of these two, an intertwinement that, at the same time, exists despite the presence of a gap: it is not obvious that a movement should have a cultural meaning, but it acquires it over time. The difference between perception and experience is not only a question of physical corporeality or impulses of sensibility that interact. The impulses may also disturb and interfere with each other, opening the question of how social antagonism appears in and through moving bodies. Movements rule our attention, produce fantasies, saturate our gaze and make our body shudder, sometimes without us knowing why.

Kinaesthesia is much discussed in, for example, the fields of dance theory, sport science and neurophysiology but very little in philosophy or aesthetics. In this article, I will limit myself to a discussion of *NOW SHE KNOWS* and to the phenomenological tradition. Phenomenology hints at something that is all too often forgotten in the discussion: the kinaesthetic impulse may both support and interfere with our other senses. Maurice Merleau-Ponty talks about a *perception ambiguë*, an ambivalent form of perception, which indicates that our sense perceptions are never just weaving together the world as a seamless whole; sometimes they are disconnected and even in conflict with one another.¹

The theory and practice of dance can add something much needed to the philosophical study of corporeality. The microcosm of Cecilia Roos' project on dance interpretation is illuminating: bringing in three philosophers may not appear to be the best of help in a project

¹ Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, transl. Richard C. McCleary, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 230 and Merleau-Ponty, *Le Monde sensible et le monde d'expression*, eds. Emmanuel de Saint Aubert and Stefan Kristensen, Genève: MetisPresses, 2011, p. 62–63.



of dance interpretation. In terms of method, however, it was a good choice. Rather than merely using philosophy to theorize movement, the project used the practice of dance to illuminate the phenomenon and analysis of kinaesthesia. This was not an easy task. After decades of reflection on the body, and despite corporeality being observed and subject to theorizing and criticism in multiple fields from a variety of perspectives, the relation between bodies remains an area which philosophy has difficulty encompassing. The way in which bodies interact with and affect each other is being studied in the fields of psychology, neurophysiology, anthropology, sociology, phenomenology, choreography and dance theory. The way in which we respond to and interact with other bodies is a fundamental aspect of the study of human behaviour. With Nietzsche as the great exception, however, philosophy has rarely considered kinaesthetic experience, up until the 20th century.² Even with the work of Husserl, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, it remains relatively obscure; Merleau-Ponty gave the question of movement a lot of attention, but much of his writings are notes and lectures that have only recently been published.³

Already in the 18th century, it became clear that the five senses do not summarize the full range of the human body's sensible capacity. Humans are capable of seeing and hearing. These are the two senses that are most often described: Through our sight, we get an overview. Through our hearing we get access to language, and thereby the law. Through taste, smell and touch, we are accessing sensations in which our corporeal being is immediately present. But this description obliterates many other kinds of sense perceptions.⁴ One of these is the perception of bodies in movement. When we see a body move, as it walks, runs or dances, we sense the movement of the other body in our own. One could even claim that we, to a certain extent, are "dancing with" those other bodies. This rather elusive feeling could be called the kinaesthetic impulse; through it, the difference between the other body and that of our own appears to be if not overcome then, at least, diminished.

² Kenneth King has discussed Nietzsche's closeness to the development of modern dance through Isadora Duncan in "The Dancing Philosophers", *Topoi* 24:1, 2005 (103–111).

³ For instance, Merleau-Ponty's lecture notes on *Le Monde sensible* from 1953 came out as late as 2011.

⁴ This is why James Gibson's work on *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* was groundbreaking. Not only did he identify kinaesthesia but also the haptic aspect of sensibility; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.



The discussion of kinaesthesia has been given ample attention in contemporary research on dance. One may broadly distinguish three directions that sometimes complement, sometimes outweigh each other. First, we find studies that rely heavily on the phenomenological tradition in order to understand the impact of kinaesthesia in dance in terms of sense perception as a sixth sense.⁵ Secondly, we find studies that use kinaesthesia in order to understand the development of choreography.⁶ Thirdly, we find studies that use kinaesthesia and dance in order to show how movement underscores and helps produce forms of agency that change over time and with culture.⁷ The latter is often critical of the phenomenological method since it fails to account for cultural, social and political aspects of dance. The critique of its universalistic tendencies may be well-founded. However, by highlighting the interac-

⁵ Here Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's *The Phenomenology of Dance*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966/1980, followed by *The Primacy of Movement*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999/2011, are groundbreaking. Other examples are Sondra Horton Fralciugh, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987; Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering*, Northampton: Contact Editions 1994/2012; Jaana Parviainen: *Bodies Moving and Moved: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Dancing Subject and the Cognitive and Ethical Values of Dance Art*, Vammala: Tampere University Press, 1998. See also Deidre Sklar, "Unearthing Kinesthesia: Groping Among Cross-Cultural Models of the Senses in Performance", in *The Senses in Performance*, eds. Sally Banes and André Lepecki, New York: Routledge, 2007 (38–46).

⁶ For instance Jeroen Fabius "Seeing the Body Move: Choreographic Investigations of Kin-aesthetics at the End of the Twentieth Century", in *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader*, eds. Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut, London: Routledge, 2009 (331–345); Ann Cooper Albright, *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997; *Dancing Bodies, Living Histories: New Writings About Dance and Culture*, eds. Lisa Doolittle and Anne Flynn, Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2000; *Dancing Female: Lives and Issues of Women in Contemporary Dance*, eds. Sharon E. Friedler and Susan B. Glazer, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997.

⁷ See for instance Susan Leigh Foster's *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, London: Routledge, 2011, which looks at the question of kinaesthesia from a historical perspective. Replacing the concept of movement with that of gesture, Carrie Noland defines it as "the nodal point where culture (the imposition of bodily techniques), neurobiology (the given mechanics of a human sensorimotor apparatus), and embodied experience (the kinaesthetic experience specific to an individual body) overlap and inform one another", *Agency & Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 8. Noland is referring to the neurosciences and to psychology in order to counter what she perceives as an all too great emphasis on affect in the humanities. See also Hanna Järvinen's critique of kinaesthesia from a historiographical point of view, "Kinesthesia, Proprioception and Past Corporeal Knowledge" in *Inside Knowledge: (Un)doing Ways of Knowing in the Humanities*, eds. Carolyn Birdsall, Maria Boletsis, Itay Sapir and Pieter Verstraete, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2009 (209–227).

tion between bodies, phenomenology proposes differentiation between bodies, experiences and perspectives.⁸ The specific work engaged with in this project, *NOW SHE KNOWS*, points to the antagonistic possibilities inherent in the phenomenological kernel of the concept of kinaesthesia. The difference between the body that we inhabit and the body that we see and objectify can be used to explore the complexity of our perception of moving bodies. The concept of kinaesthesia may appear to apply some kind of smooth, instinctual apprehension of flowing gestures. Looked at more closely, however, kinaesthesia plays a part in antagonistic forces being played out.

Now, What Do we Know?

First performed in 2010, Ina Christel Johannessen's *NOW SHE KNOWS* is a choreographed performance gathering 20 female dancers of different ages from the Nordic countries. One of the aims of the piece is to set a certain kind of culturally formed experience on stage: "the physical and bodily representations of Northern European women today".⁹ The dancers represent different kinds of experience and different ways of relating to dance. Johannessen has given various dancers in the group the task of improvising sequences, determined through different experiences. For example, be pregnant. Be a mum. Show a secret language. The dancers have then improvised sequences, caught them on camera, and then sent the digitalized version to Johannessen. Johannessen has cut the material and returned the sequences in a modified version. The work, then, is a result of improvisation, but in a form that is shaped and monitored. The kind of experience represented should not be understood as "gendered", "cultural" or "social" in general terms. It gathers, rather, the experience of Northern European women as incarnated in choreographic history. Here we find sequences recalling, for instance, the dance theatre of Margareta Åsberg or the explosive cho-

⁸ I miss this aspect in the use of phenomenology in Sheets-Johnstone as well as in Foster. Sheets-Johnstone speaks of the body as a "seamless whole", "Thinking in Movement", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39:4, 1981 (399–407), p. 387. Foster suggests that sense perception in Merleau-Ponty is a synthesizing activity. Both fail to account for the differentiation that lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment – the notion of gap or écart. Cf. Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, pp. 164–165 and Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining – the Chiasm" in *The Invisible and the Visible*, ed. Claude Lefort, transl. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, pp. 130–156.

⁹ <http://www.zerovisibility.no/performanceschedule/now/43-now-she-knows/106-staging-a-woman>

reography of Per Jonsson as performed by Cecilia Roos. A dancer like Cecilia Roos incarnates a piece of choreographic history; her corporeal memory is a living archive of movements and gestures. The bodies of the dancers performing with Cecilia in the piece incorporate a tradition less present there as choreographic language than in the form of experience and corporeal memories. For Carrie Noland, cultural memory accumulates in the gestural language of bodies, a memory that can be studied primarily within the arts.¹⁰ However, Noland does not distinguish between the way in which corporeal memory expresses itself, and the way in which it accumulates as experience. In the piece by Johannessenn, choreographic history, and thereby a female tradition of movements and gestures, is transmitted in the form of experience, which does not necessarily translate to choreographic language. As Cecilia Roos performs, she does so with gestures hinting at her experience as a dancer, but these are not representative for “feminine” experience as such. The fact that a female tradition is transmitted, rather than simply expressed in the piece, underlines the fact that it is the very concept of experience that is being explored. The piece does not claim to represent certain kinds of experience associated with certain kinds of women. It puts the very idea of experience on stage, exploring it as movements, kinaesthesia, body language, and choreographic tradition.

The experience that is being examined, however, is categorized as that of Northern European women. What kind of experience is that? What would be typical? The think tank World Economic Forum publishes a so-called Gender Gap report every year, where Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland compete in gaining the first position in recognition of their work for gender equality. It is well known that the countries of Scandinavia share a long and rather successful history of the emancipation of women. The piece by Ina Christel Johannessen, however, complicates that image. How is an emancipated Northern European female body supposed to move? What is it supposed to look like? What should be exposed, and what must be hidden?

One of the most beautiful solos was performed by Pia Elton Hammer, who was pregnant at the time of the premiere of the piece, performing sitting on the ground. Elsewhere in the piece, we see a woman (Cecilie Lindeman Steen) beating herself, yelling with a restrained voice: “I am a mother”. Her body language is awkward and appears

¹⁰ Noland, pp. 1–17.

tortured. This is a scene that serves to expose the aspect of the work that promises to speak, specifically, of the experience of women. Her dance is marked by frustration and disappointment. This is a solo created by the dancer herself, exposing, perhaps, her own experiences. Here Johannessen takes the most “holy” of all female experiences and exposes it as marked by a certain insular loneliness, attacking the myth of blissful maternity through corporeal gestures. Here, as well as in many other scenes, Johannessen exploits the vulnerability of the dancers in ways that sometimes appear shocking. One scene exposes four women coming on stage, dressed only in tutus and clumsy masculine boots. They appear under unforgiving stage lights that enhance, rather than blot out wrinkles and other signs of age and experience on their bodies. Set between the masculine boots and the feminine ballet skirts, their bodies appear both clumsy and elegant, both shy and assertive. The soft movement of the chorus, reworking the chorus of *Swan Lake*, enhances the conflicts inhabiting the four nude bodies even further. The contrast is made workable by the implicit references to the famous ballet of Julius Reisinger, with its music by Tchaikovsky. Included in the scene, however, is also a comment on *Swan Lake* as performed by Cullbergbaletten and Mats Ek a couple of decades earlier. In his choreography, the ballet was transformed through a self-assured interpretation that made the bodies appear stronger and more muscular, questioning the romantic view on the body, ballet and the relationship between the protagonists that has otherwise dominated the piece. Ina Christel Johannessen incorporates not only the choreography of *Swan Lake* but also the deconstruction of that piece in her particular definition of experience. Her work does not tell the story *about* Northern European women. It tells a story *through* the bodies of these women, avoiding scenes that would objectify or conceptualize these experiences. Again, the work does not tell *of* the experience of women. It tells *with* and *through* corporeal experiences, showing that experience to be multiple, ridden with conflict and rich in expression. The work builds to a large extent on the idea of experience as incarnated in and by movement. Experience, then, becomes reflected in gestures that sometimes appear contradictory and confusing. This aspect of the piece is difficult to capture intellectually. It speaks to our kinaesthetic impulse, that is, our sense perception of a moving body.

The Earth Does not Move

So how are we to account for the difference between perception and experience? On a page in his *Nachlass*, Husserl famously scribbled down the somewhat enigmatic headline: “Overthrow of the Copernican theory in usual interpretation of a world view. The original ark, earth, does not move”.¹¹ So the earth would not move? Clearly it does, given the instruments of measurement that have been developed since Copernican science. What Husserl is pointing to, however, is that it does not move *for us* as we perform our measurements. Our situated body sees no earth move. If it experiences movement, it is through a position in which it experiences itself as lack of movement. Within science, however, there is no place for pointing out the ground from which the measurements are made, the ground, or *arche*, that offers an experience of the kind of facticity that makes science possible. It is this differentiation – between the earth as a measurable, astronomic body, and the earth as the point of view inherent in every measurement – that founds Husserl’s description of kinaesthesia.¹² Husserl describes the difference between the lived body that constitutes us as transcendental subjects in space and time and the body we experience as a physical entity. This is the difference between *Leib* (“lived body”) and *Körper* (“physical body”).¹³ The horizon for our conception of other bodies is the lived body. Husserl sees a circular movement between lived and physical body, which means that the subject, since it experiences itself as a lived body, will also perceive itself as a body that can be objectified and described. The patterns and power of movement are experienced in us, and they can be described in terms of proprioception, describing the position and movements of our

¹¹ Husserl’s article that was contained in the manuscript “Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum Phänomenologischen Ursprung der Räumlichkeit der Natur” is reprinted in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, ed. Marvin Faber, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968 (307–325). The text is translated into English as “Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does not Move”, transl. Fred Kersten, revised by Leonard Lawlor, in *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, eds. Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002 (117–131). The text is translated into French in Edmund Husserl, *La Terre ne se meut pas*, transl. Didier Franck, Paris: Minuit, 1989 (11–29). Cf. Juha Himanka, “Husserl’s Argumentation for the Pre-Copernican View of the Earth”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 58:3, 2005 (621–644).

¹² The earth is not only a celestial body, but also a synthesis of “mutually connected single experiences”; Husserl, “Foundational Investigations”, p. 118.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 123. Lived bodies are perceived as the bodies that are the centrepoints of space and time; “Körper” or carnal bodies are bodies that are objectifiable and identifiable.

limbs. We can use the concept of proprioception in order to describe our body from a physiological perspective. In phenomenology, however, it acquires a more general meaning. Husserl describes kinaesthesia in terms of an *arche* through which corporeal movements can be measured in relation to a feeling of “inner motions and inner rest”.¹⁴ This inner motion offers some kind of foundation for our conception of the world and other bodies. As we see other bodies, we experience them in relation to some kind of original corporeality where movement is a foundation, or *arche*, that cannot itself always be perceived, although it colours our conception of the world. If we see a stone we perceive it as still since it is not moving, as if it is set in kinaesthetic rest. The environment we perceive stretches out according to two intersecting maps: One map is drawn by the body of sense perception. The other of the map “I can”. These two maps intersect and condition each other.¹⁵ Do we really need to separate them? Is it not the case that we experience the movements of other bodies simply because we experience our own body as, potentially, moving? Kinaesthesia is to be found at this intersection. My grasp of other bodies is formed through a capacity of *Einfühlung* – a concept that has little to do with emotions or empathy with other individuals, but rather with the way I am touched by the inner movement of other bodies. *Einfühlung* is intercorporeal rather than intersubjective. Through my lived body I am capable of conceiving other bodies and of putting my experience in relation to theirs.¹⁶ Only movement, Merleau-Ponty notes, can grasp movement.¹⁷ The body of *Einfühlung* offers a horizon through which I can participate in a shared world, where feelings and experiences are related to a body of inner movement, my own as well as that of others.

If all our knowledge is derived from the point of view of a corporeal horizon of kinaesthetic impulse, then how are we to account for angles that we cannot discern, disturbances and trickeries in our field of vision, and ambiguities arising in the gap between the body of my

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty discusses this à propos the function of intentionality in his analysis of his patient Schneider in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. Colin Smith, London: Routledge, 1962, pp. 98–153. Consciousness, Merleau-Ponty argues, is primarily a function of the “I can”, *ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁶ This discussion and reading of Merleau-Ponty can be seen in Merleau-Ponty’s notes to his lectures on *The Origin of Geometry*, as rendered by Leonard Lawlor in Lawlor et al., *Husserl at the Limits*, p. xix.

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible*, p. 26.

experience and the physical object of the body of the other? In order to account for ambiguous phenomena in the field of perception, Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of *perception ambiguë*. A *perception ambiguë* is a disturbance in the field of perception, a disturbance of which we are not always fully aware. We may be blinded, in denial or stumbling on our fancies, incapable of understanding what we see, failing to categorize, conceptualize or fully fathom what is in front of us. An ambiguous perception can be described as the presence of stumbling blocks in the field of consciousness or as a kind of avoidance where consciousness is “brushing” its objects rather than encompassing them, avoiding them as they present themselves, falling over them without seeing them.¹⁸ He also mentions a *conscience ambiguë* as a result of the Freudian discovery of the unconscious: it arises through the presence of other forms of consciousness in our vision.¹⁹ A *perception ambiguë* is Merleau-Ponty’s particular interpretation of the Freudian discovery of the drive.²⁰ The drive is understood as the intertwinement of body and mind, the “body’s mental function and the mind’s incarnation”.²¹ This means that an ambiguous perception must be understood at a level where the body is clearly affected. An ambiguous perception does not relate only to other bodies or the movements of other bodies. Given that we perceive the world in relation to our own “inner” movement, however, the way in which we perceive other bodies and sense their movements will never be neutral. The sensory system of kinaesthesia is invested with a desire that “opens” our bodies to the outside, and makes it part of the circuit that Merleau-Ponty wishes to relate to the Freudian drive. The kinaesthetic impulse is not to be understood merely as a natural instinct or as the experience of a form of flow. Neither is it to be understood merely in terms of gestures that are culturally shaped and coded. It is ridden with investments that are sometimes conflicting and confusing. In fact, the phenomenon of drive becomes particularly acute in the discussion of the kinaesthetic impulse experienced in relation to other moving bodies.

For Merleau-Ponty, the unconscious is not another form of knowledge or process taking place in a hidden location of consciousness. Instead, it is something unused, unclaimed: a reservoir revealing itself

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 230.

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible*, pp. 62–63.

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 230.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *ibid.*



in instances that we are unable to grasp through our limited field of consciousness. This, for Merleau-Ponty, unravels the truly revolutionary aspect of psychoanalysis, a revolutionary potential that it has failed to fully grasp itself. Freud believed the unconscious to be an inner “image” Merleau-Ponty says. But the real power of the unconscious, he argues, is played out in the relation between bodies in terms of desire, introjection and projection.²² Freud found the principles that dominate our corporeal schema but failed to grasp the consequences. Psychoanalysis did not discover new symbols or other forms of consciousness. It discovered the libidinal character of our corporeal schema. Intentionality, or the way in which our bodies are used in projects and projections, is to be understood in terms of intercorporeality, rather than intersubjectivity. There is no desiring subject outside of the body.²³

As seen above, Merleau-Ponty discusses the unconscious in terms of the intertwinement between introjection and projection. These are concepts stemming from the writings of Freud, who relates them to the instinctual formation of the ego. They are also, however, central to the object theories of Melanie Klein.²⁴ What makes Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation particular is his consistent refusal to distinguish between the body of the other and the body the subject; a distinction that is central to psychoanalytical object theory. From a psychoanalytic perspective, introjection and projection are symptoms. For Merleau-Ponty, however, introjection and projection are caught in a circuit integral to the life of bodies as such: we introject the desire of the other and project our own in a circular movement through which bodies affect each other. These movements of projection and introjection may be interpreted in various terms, and they are not to be pathologized. One cannot, however, ignore the aggressive components in sexuality that Merleau-Ponty

²² Rather than being an internal “image” as the Freudian unconscious, Merleau-Ponty says in *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, transl. Robert Vallier, Evanston: Northwestern, 2003, pp. 279–282. M. C. Dillon attempted to explain the organizing function of Merleau-Ponty’s unconscious: “[...] it is not the case that an alien or demonic intelligence dwells in the depths of the psyche and deliberately (or mechanically) obscures its emissaries, it is rather the case that reflection, in its attempt to retrieve and explore an experience, tends to modify the mode of givenness of the experience.” Dillon, “The Unconscious: Language and World”, in *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspective*, eds. Patrick Burke and Jan Van der Veken, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993 (69–83), p. 76.

²³ Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, pp. 280–281.

²⁴ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, transl. Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: Karnac, 2006, p. 230.



himself refers to, components indicated by the late Freud: aggression being the “interior” of sexuality in which we aim at persons not things, but which tends to colour our perception of our environment.²⁵

In the choreography of *NOW SHE KNOWS*, the stumbling blocks of *perception ambiguë* are integrated into the piece and explored as aspects of experience. Maternity, traditionally offered as a loving, tender body, is presented as the out-of-breath monologue of a nervous, androgynous figure. Nudity, traditionally offered in the arts as beauty, is offered ungracefully and accompanied by the heavy stomps of four unwilling, exposed bodies.

Maternity, naturally, is a theme that is deeply integrated in the question of experience posed by the work. The homepage states that the dancers share a number of children between them, and it is assumed that maternity is among the things that must be explored in the performance of female experience. This experience, however, is performed with dense ambiguity. The character performing the sequence is dressed in dark trousers and T-shirt, gasping incongruously out-of-sync with her movements in Norwegian, “I am a mother”. Off stage, there is nothing ambiguous about a mother with a short haircut and dark trousers. In the piece, however, these insignia underscore an ambiguous effect; as the character gasps her chant of motherhood, she is at the same time hitting her chin, performing movements that suggests some kind of self-punishment, frustration, aggression aimed at the self as well as the state of motherhood. We cannot tell the one from the other and become uncertain of cause and effect. Perhaps we also feel shame when confronted with such blunt ambiguity in relation to motherhood, uncertain of how we are to receive a dancing confession of mixed feelings. In this sequence, an ambiguous perception is produced in which we feel, perhaps, both sympathetic towards and distanced from the dancer, certainly not neutral. As the dancer implies hitting her own chin, her pain is not corporeal, but the gesture of self-aggression is enough for us to react with confusion. A confusion caused by the kinaesthetic response to her movements of auto-aggression.

As the four half-nude dancers appear, we are again taken aback by confusing gestures. Our kinaesthetic expectations are thrown back at us as we see the female bodies move; instead of performing feminine movements, they walk and move like male bodies. The dancers, in turn,

²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 230.



play with our expectations, throwing them back at us, questioning our presuppositions and integrating them in their movements. At the same time, their nude bodies express vulnerability when confronted with the world's glance, a vulnerability that they can both use and express. Their bodies are set in the crossfire between perception and experience, between the insignia of the female body and the movements of the male worker. Here, we see an unravelling of the antagonism in the cultural description of gender, which will inform the way in which the figures are interpreted in the piece. As we look closer at the postures of the nude dancers, however, we discover a deeper conflict at play, a conflict that sets us on the track of Merleau-Ponty's conception of ambiguous perception.

Johannessen works with our expectations and lets the symbolic insignia of the figures in terms of clothing, looks and body posture contrast with the corporeal movements of the dancers. The movements of the figures confront us as wholly ambiguous: we cannot discern how we are to categorize the kind of kinaesthetic experience that these bodies give rise to.

As the nude female dancers in their tutus stumble on in their boots, it is the weight and tension of the crudeness of their movements that strike us, together with the exposure of their bodies. As we experience their movements, we become aware, also, of an aggressive component to our own vision that has been imposed on us. That aggression serves to denude the bodies of the dancers, who themselves, with a sullen furiousness, stumble against us, throwing the aggression at us. Where does the aggression begin? Paradoxically, it is in moments like these, where the circular movement between introjection and projection, body and mind that Merleau-Ponty speaks of becomes a moment of differentiation between seeing and experiencing. We perceive the bodies as aggressive, and we experience their aggression in our bodies through our kinaesthetic sensibility. But what appears to be so confusing, what brings out our experience as truly ambiguous, is that we do not know where the aggression starts. A circular movement between dancer and audience, gaze and body, body and gaze, is produced between bodies. Ultimately the circularity can only be understood if we consider the way in which perception is cut between seeing and experiencing: seeing bodies that we can objectify on the one hand and experiencing their movements on the other. Throughout Johannessen's piece, the ambigu-



ity of perception is mobilized in the movements of the dancers.

The Body as a Field of Social Antagonism

Susan Leigh Foster has renewed the kinaesthetic study of dance by suggesting that kinaesthesia cannot be conceived at a pre-reflective level. It does not involve an automatic succumbing to another body but an engagement with others, a base for creating a social existence. My moving body makes a difference in the visible world, being a part of it.²⁶ Against Foster, however, I would like to argue that the pre-personal, corporeal, libidinal field is a strong factor in determining unconscious aspects of our social context. As Charles Taylor has argued, without a complex theory of embodiment, the question of identity and personality may become flat and uninteresting. The body is ambivalent. On the one hand it may be fully integrated into our conception of ourselves, on the other it may well counter our projects.²⁷ In the practice of dance, the distinction between the body as a site of experience and the body as a physical force comes to the fore. The distinction is crucial for Merleau-Ponty's conception of a *perception ambiguë*, a conception indicating that the body, and its movements, is neither simply natural nor simply culturally shaped.

In the process of attempting to follow Cecilia's movements, of attempting to dance, I have found myself increasingly alienated by texts that describe dance as a kind of intuitive flow, or, as Sheets-Johnstone does at some point, as a seamless interweaving between movement and perception.²⁸ I probably think much harder when I dance than when I write, and there is absolutely nothing seamless about it. Contemporary choreography, whether it is theatrical or more abstractly conceived, has integrated knowledge of the kinaesthetic effect into its register. Sheets-Johnstone argues that the lived experience of dance is a kinaesthetic experience for both the dancer and the audience.²⁹ Sheets-Johnstone, then, proposes dance to be irreducible to any other form of experience; it speaks to our kinaesthetic sensibility rather than operates at the level

²⁶ Foster, "Movement's Contagion: The Kinesthetic Impact of Performance", in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 (46–58), p. 57.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, "Embodied Agency", in *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Essays*, ed. Henry Pietersma, University Press of America, Washington, D.C., 1989, p. 17.

²⁸ Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy*, p. 487.

²⁹ Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology*, p. 29.

of, say symbolic comprehension. A work like Johannessen's, however, shows that it cannot be irreducible to sheer kinaesthesia, or symbolic comprehension. The phenomenological question about the relation between perception, movement, and the kinaesthetic effect of dance does not imply a natural, instinctual process. The elaboration of movement, whether it occurs in dance, sport or other areas, is hard to grasp, both in reflection and the practice of movement. As we elaborate our movements, we are not just following the kinaesthetic feeling of the body. The elaboration forms a kind of transposition between the movement that we attempt to exert – as exemplified, for instance, by the movements of Cecilia that I desperately try to follow – and the kinaesthetic impulse that we experience when we see the movement of the other body. The movement becomes transposed into and exposed to the social space of other viewpoints and bodies, to whom the kinaesthetic gesture is directed. What appears is not a shape or a symbol, the individuality of the dancer, or the representation of a character. What appears is rather a movement that can be interpreted in multiple ways, inviting the viewer to share the kinaesthetic impulse from which it arises. Contemporary dance, unlike classical dance or earlier forms of modern dance, is not an alphabet of gestures that can be brought together in a given language. It shows, rather, the human body as frail and desiring, in need of an audience and of other bodies in general. It can only be understood if we conceive of it as sharing a social space with other bodies and viewpoints. From that point of view, Foster is right in attempting to add the question of social identity to the exploration of kinaesthesia. To think about dance includes thinking about the question of social space and how dance is exposed in it. If we are to understand contemporary dance, we need to add this aspect to the phenomenology of movement.

However, the relevance of the work of Merleau-Ponty for the understanding of social antagonism has often been underestimated. Rather than expressing the body as an organ of instincts, Merleau-Ponty describes it as a space of social antagonism, according to Charles Taylor. Movements may be the expressions of, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, forms of libidinal introjection or incorporation.³⁰ This is a variety of what he calls *Einfühlung* – a way of relating to other bodies that has little to do with conscious forms of empathy. *Einfühlung* is the unconscious

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, p. 279.

investment of desire that may take place between bodies.³¹ This means that the kinaesthetic impulse is formed in a social space in which I am not an autonomous agent. My body is an organ emitting and receiving impulses over which I cannot wholly become the master. We cannot be in control of what appears through our movements, although we are striving towards a certain kind of appearance. Not only are we creating appearances with our movements, we are also exposing something of which we are not fully aware. As we dance, what appears is not a form, a concept, the individuality of the dancer, or the representation of a character. What appears is an ambiguous perception: a certain vulnerability, a certain incapacity perhaps, to be in control of the kinaesthetic impulse.

For Foucault, the body is produced as subjectivation, submitted to norms and expectations that can only be repeated and confirmed.³² From such a viewpoint it is subjectivation rather than libidinal powers. A simplifying claim would be that the body is culturally determined. From such a position, Merleau-Ponty's libidinal body would be an unacceptable theorem to accept. As we discuss dance, however, it becomes implausible to reduce the body to a cultural construction, ignoring the ambiguities and the mechanisms that follow with the kinaesthetic impulse. In dance, the mechanism of *Einfühlung* can be explored and examined at a kinaesthetic level with social implications. The body is set in a field of social antagonisms, where introjection and projection relieve each other. These processes may take on somatic expression, expressing introjection of others through movements and gestures. My body and my movements are not just expressions of my personality, my unique way of being, or my style. My body makes me vulnerable to the gaze of the world. The world is not just open to us as embodied subjects; it may also force its gaze on us.

This may explain why bodies have been subjected to inner repression and disciplining. Frantz Fanon writes in the 60s about the body of the black, colonized citizen, striving to look like the white colonizer, not just in speech, thought and culture but also in gestures, posture and movement.³³ It is no coincidence that postcolonialism thrived in

³¹ "[...] what I see, I see as a spectacle for others, because there is an *Einfühlung* with it and through it with other sensings", Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, p. 283.

³² See for instance *The History of Sexuality 3: The Care of the Self*, transl. Robert Hurley, London: Vintage, 1988.

³³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl. Charles Lam Markmann, London: Pluto,

an era where the implications of corporeality and embodiment were explored. It is also no coincidence that feminist art came to fruition in an age where performance and dance flourished. Performance art comments on the fetishization and commodification of the body, as part of a critique of a capitalist system. Here the female body becomes extra charged in relation to movement. When Judy Chicago performed a match of boxing in big shorts, the natural aspect of the aggressive, masculine pattern of movement was undermined (*Boxing Ring*, 1970). When Carolee Schneemann explored Pollock's masculine idea of painting as an action, she performed it as a return to the idea of what traditional painting is about: doing it with her nude body. Rather than being reduced to an object, she let the nude, female body capture the experience of painting (*Eye Body*, 1963). In 1964, as Schneemann performed *Site* with Robert Morris, she made a live comment on Manet's *Olympia*. *Site* was tableau, theatre, dance and sculpture, attempting to undo the fetishization of the female body. With the new forms of performance, the social role of bodies and the movements of bodies acquires a central role. The body symbolizes a meeting between individual and collective. While the body is singular, it is interpreted by the community in terms of gender, social belonging, ethnicity, etc. Creating ambiguity around the question of how bodies are to be perceived, the dancer is not just commenting on social space but creating it anew.

As a wave of performance works was launched in the 60s, the interaction of the nude, vulnerable body of the artist with the audience was placed in focus through the work of Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, Marina Abramović and many others. Several female artists used their bodies to break down the difference between intimate/public, body/gaze, and subject/object. The use of live bodies placed in vulnerable positions, to be exposed to the eyes of the public, created a new way of presenting art, and a new aesthetic turn focused on the body and the movements of the body. The performance pieces followed in the footsteps of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Often, phenomenology is referred to in order to understand the way in which these works interacted with their audience. Performance art, Amelia Jones writes, changes the image of subjectivity radically. The subject is set "in process" and engaged with others rather than reducible to a single universal image of the self. Comparing early performance art to developments

1986, pp. 89, 191–97.

in phenomenology, feminism, and poststructuralism, Jones conceives of all of those discourses as a critique of the Cartesian subject. Here, again, we need to interrogate the critique of that subject in a discourse set between an analysis of embodiment as experienced and perceived, and an analysis of what we consider to be social aspects of agency. Jones avoids any reductionism to one or the other. She conceives of the radical potential of phenomenology in conjunction with the development of art. The interrogation of the Cartesian subject, as enacted in performance art from the 60s onwards, argues Jones, is the single most pressing philosophical issue of our time.³⁴

One could well add contemporary dance to the philosophical framing of this aesthetic, emancipatory project. Contemporary dance – here exemplified by *NOW SHE KNOWS* – speaks about the existence of plural forms and kinds of experiences; it demands *Einfühlung* on a corporeal, kinaesthetic level, not empathy from a given, socially easily identifiable position. The reception of such performance demands allowing one's position of perception to be challenged and displaced. Whose body are we perceiving? Whose body are we experiencing? Although the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty builds on a distinction between the two, it is at the same time that very distinction that points to the permeability between the position of the body of perception and the body of experience. Introducing psychoanalysis to his discourse, Merleau-Ponty is throwing back the gaze laid upon the moving body by the perceiving body, showing it to participate in the experience of movement not only from a kinaesthetic point of view, but also from the point of view of desire, aggression, confusion, etc. Contemporary dance is exploring that aspect of kinaesthesia, pursuing an older tradition of the art of performance. One of the most interesting aspects with the work of Ina Christel Johannessen is the way in which she points to the position of dance in a tradition of emancipatory discourse. Contemporary dance has, to a certain extent, developed out of performance art, but it carries a history of its own. In her choreographic work, Johannessen is clearly pointing to movement as a form of discourse that is irreducible to another form of expression or experience. Movement is in itself part of the debate on how we are to conceive of commodification and desire, emancipation and subjugation, and the kinaesthetic impulse

³⁴ Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 203.

is an inalienable aspect of social interaction. The history of female experience is not written on the body – it moves through an experience that can never be directly expressed but can be hinted at through gestures, styles, movements and postures. It is a history that runs parallel to the history of female emancipation. We can read it through the tradition of contemporary choreography and dance. In this way, *NOW SHE KNOWS* is a work that very much can be conceived through its own title — the knowledge referred to does not apply to an object, and it is not an intellectual form of knowledge. It is transmitted through movement and corporeal memories.

The scene that was performed by Cecilia on stage, a scene created by Cecilia herself, in which she “performs a secret language” with her hands was eagerly repeated by all of us in the studio. It is a scene that uses hands and fingers in order to sketch some kind of ciphers, impossible to interpret. In this scene, an ambiguous perception is created through the multiple layers of movement that appear: not only of the body in movement but also that of the hands, standing out, performing their own movements, creating their own signification as if through a secret kind of writing. The hands, for Merleau-Ponty, carry a signification of their own. On the one hand, they belong to the corporeal schema. On the other, they are capable of signalling and gesturing at a level that we may well perceive as a language of its own.³⁵ In *NOW SHE KNOWS*, the hands of Cecilia, also, enhance that we do not know; the gestures remain enigmatic, creating yet again an ambiguous perception in which our desire to know is confronted with the impossibility of knowing. The hands talk of another kind of experience. Our corporeal experience remains enigmatic, untranslatable, perhaps, into any other kind of language. On the other hand, the piece by Ina Christel Johannessen, like many other works in contemporary dance, points to a kind of experience of which philosophy has all too long been ignorant: that of movement, of the kinaesthetic impulse, and of dance as an archive of corporal memory.

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible*, p. 201.







Embrace the unknown

Irène Hultman

Moving, but not moving and yet still moving. Flat on my back with arms and legs outstretched and eyes closed, concentrating on my breathing while waiting for ballet class to begin. Without warning I experienced moving, very clearly moving. It was as if an unseen force travelled throughout my body gradually clearing out obstacles and allowing for a free passage of something I could not name. Surprised and excited I wondered what this sensation was, and more importantly what it consisted of. In retrospect, I understand that this experience in 1976 was the beginning of my somatic research. At that time, I was unformed and just beginning my dance journey. I practiced for technical ability, to be able to translate and interpret any dance that came my way. My goal then was to hone my craft so as not to be limited to a certain style of execution or expression. I wanted to learn and master everything. I was hungry for knowledge: Not ready, but hungry, and certainly ready to learn. I was listening both externally and internally in order to gain knowledge of both the body and the mind.

This incident instilled in me a deep desire to understand what caused that particular experience on the floor. Attempts to recreate the same sensation standing up were not successful at all. The floor, where it all began, had to be the guiding tool. The floor with its physical support was a place where the letting go of control could happen. Through letting go, the body opened up, allowing for new experiences and a new awareness. I tried to grasp mentally what took place in order to capture and recreate the feeling. That never worked. Instead I always had to start “fresh”. The moment was always different and I was a different person each time. I do remember being thrilled and excited by the realization that I – the Me – were so many. I quickly discovered that to control the moment was to destroy it, but totally letting go did not work either, because then there was no imprint, no memory. Action and non-action always involve a battle over how much or how little control to use. There was a dialogue going on inside me. But how do you catch and perceive it? My obsession became to make the unseen seen. I continued by trying to peel off the outer layers, to reach what I

thought was some kind of core.

Interpretation

Interpretation is a big word. We all interpret in some way; as a choreographer, I interpret my own ideas, and as a dancer I interpret both my ideas and those given to me. There is a freedom in interpretation. There is an existence in, a research and experience of interpretation. There is also an outcome. And there are tools. The different outcomes are clear when comparing choreography and set material with improvisational material. Since I love both improvising and making and dancing set material, interpretation gave me very different experiences of expression. I have often compared these expressions to filmmaking. Using the documentary film method is comparable to dance improvisation – it's direct and in some way unpredictable. Fiction then becomes the choreographic process with a somewhat predictable outcome and a set goal. Within this comparison, I also use the film terms close-up and long shot. In fact, when, as a dancer, you start using words, a close-up is imminent. You cannot hide – a different sense of self happens which translates even to the viewer. I think it partly has to do with audibility – you hear. To hear, do, and experience at the same time keeps the sensation here and now – it's imminent. You cannot hide as an interpreter, and it is very difficult to allow the mind to interfere with that reality. In class, when teaching, I sometimes just have a dancer talk, so as to be aware of where he/she is in that particular moment. What inevitably happens is what I call a zoom from a long-distance experience, where there is a sense of falseness, to a close-up, with true expression. This change happens both for the doer and for the viewer.

I believe there is no real creative difference between the maker, the doer, and one who experiences – we all have our parts to fill. We have our duties and our journeys. To improvise you have to be “in tune”, listen to instinct, answer to the environment and read cues that are both internal and external. You are at each moment in a new moment, sometimes comfortable and sometimes not. You have no choice but to go on. It is by its nature a living and breathing process. The more “contact” you have with yourself the more “knowing” you are on a bodily plane, which gives you more “options” to express yourself. The same is true in creating set material. When working out a language, an artistic vision, you must know thyself. When you create material, being in the present



makes it very hard to remember the material. It is almost impossible to be both experiencing and remembering at the same time. The unavoidable studio questions are: What direction do I go? Am I close? Is this something? We have all experienced both the frustration and joy in finding or not finding “choreographic solutions”. I have been on both sides of the fence, wondering whether and when to make a decision, and ultimately still doubting if it is the right decision? Again trust, we have to have trust. What we know is often very comfortable and is therefore the path most often chosen. The unknown is uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and has not been quality checked yet, and it is therefore chosen less frequently. This is true of both external visual cues and internal bodily habits. When do you know a habit is a habit and not really what you want? You don’t. You make a choice. It is a process, a process of discoveries. That is the ongoing beauty of Dance.

Convey – Communicate

The poly-directional movement and complex choreographic systems of Trisha Brown, one of the most prolific post-modern choreographers of the last century, allowed one’s mind to follow the body. I am convinced that correctly executed poly-directionality carries with it authenticity. When following the directional intent the body will give direction back. The end of one particular movement becomes the beginning of the next. The dialogue between the mind and the intelligence of the body increases. You listen and follow. The time, area, and place between the controlled and the uncontrolled increases, and the ego, the self, dilutes into a pure expression of body and mind. Improvisation inherently carries with it a sense of being in the present; however, improvisation does not carry authenticity with it as a given.

The 1970s and 1980s were eras of uncovering – different uncoverings. Grassroots organizations invited choreographers and teachers who did not “fit” the big institutions to come and share their ideas. These invitations were essential as a compliment to general dance education, and Sweden was no exception. The dance world in Stockholm, and future dance makers, benefited greatly. In Stockholm in the late 1970s, two of Trisha Brown’s original company members came to give a workshop through Danscentrum. They taught *Locus* (1975), which was created by Trisha Brown as a method to teach her dancers her highly personalized, idiosyncratic and poly-directional movements. Thanks to





that workshop, I had my second “aha” moment.

I discovered that the integration, of simultaneously doing and experiencing, in-the-now, in the precise moment, came solely from the architecture and rhythm of the movements. This was undeniable. The direction and intent of the movements became the expression, and the sensation became emotional. I discovered that it is in fact an impossibility to not feel in any moment; i.e., “you cannot not feel”. A dance seemingly “cold” is a knowing or unknowing choice of expression – the feeling is not inherent in the movements. Abstract dance does not mean it is devoid of emotions. The actual rhythm and the visual rhythm together form the expression.

Continue

With these new experiences I went to New York City to study the Cunningham technique with an ulterior motive: to look for dancers to dance with – dancers who shared my desires, ideas, and urge for discovery. I found them. Every Monday you went to open dance at the Performance Space 122 – paid two dollars – and danced with others – you shared or didn’t – but you discovered. It was an era of self and others – but primarily of self. It was about yourself in relationship to yourself, others, and/or the architecture of the room you were in.

Particularly important for me was a workshop with post-modern American choreographer Simone Forti, exploring joints, rolling across the floor, leading with our heads. While totally immersed, I discovered my internal workings in relationship to the external world. Simone Forti had the ability to share the unnameable. Something translated and transcended through her. Her simply asked question, “What did you think?” – resonated. What did I think? Body and mind became connected. The importance of trust and allowance, trust and allowance in yourself, came back and made an imprint that never went away. I was immersed in the New York scene in the 1980s. I would be lying if I said that that time didn’t influence me greatly. I was influenced by the theatre: Mabou Mines, Spalding Gray, Peter Brook, and Andrei Serban. The poetry influenced me: Ann Waldman, Allan Ginsburg, the Naropa Institute and Jazz dance through Lynn Simonson. And the city itself: Washington Square Park, loft parties. It was all a gigantic schooling process. And then, again, there was Trisha Brown.





Continue Repetition

I am very grateful to have had the experience of being in The Trisha Brown Dance Company, on many levels. I felt – movement-wise – as if I was home. Her rhythms and downbeats, her playfulness and intelligence – it was truly mind and matter. My previous research, internal flow, peeling off, trance-states, and the movement investigation, all came together in Trisha's work. Not quite all but almost all. Learning through doing. Intensive touring, with its lack of distraction and concentration on dancing, shaved off years of my own research.

Touring involves repetition. Repetition of the same pieces over and over. This repetition of abstract pieces created a question – where to go now? If there is no story to “hang your soul” onto, where do you go? I found quite quickly that the psychological mind has an end – you can only go so far. Being a Swedish dancer, meaning a psychological dancer where emotions mattered, I created, within Trisha's abstract work, “scenarios” to live in. I had to create a reason bigger than myself. This didn't work in the long run, since every moment has to be experienced anew. I could lean on that idea, but it wasn't enough – I had to go with the body. I had to deepen my bodily experience to reach my “emotionality”. This is still an ongoing investigation. How are movement and emotion codependent and when is a true expression really true? Through the touring process and relentless repetition, I learned to trust in yet a new way. And through the creation of what is known in the Trisha Brown working environment as the “building process”, I learned a different kind of research. I learned the importance of intention, the construct of lines and “drawing in space”. What follows what, and why, even if it is a curve in contrast to an angle. I learned about the architecture of the body in relation to the architecture of the space, organically put together, to see, to decipher, to perceive and to discover the finer nuances in dance, what it communicates. I learned the importance of the dancer's roles, who they are, and what they give. I learned an innate happiness, a positivism of sorts. I would say that I graduated from the school of Trisha Brown.

Slowly and gradually, I became less interested in researching myself as a dancer. I started researching from another point of view. What is the next step? What else is inside of me? Simple questions in a complicated world. I needed other dancers to play with, to resonate with, and to expand the circle. By incorporating others, you also enter into



another psychology since everybody starts a process with not only their own history or baggage, but also their hopes and dreams. It was fascinating to try trying to find the essence of a dancer. I was drawn to dancers that, as I called it, had a “hunting element” – meaning they were looking for something within themselves. Again, I was very lucky to be able to work with extremely generous and giving dancers. The creative relationship consisted of a sharing where neither could exist without the other. This co-creative attitude and interdependency became the premise for my choreographic work.

Trance and Dance

Trance and dance are closely related. There are mini trances happening all around us. The action of dancing, any dancing, is in some way a trance. This “trance-state” was extremely important to me as a stepping stone in developing as an interpreter. Through dancing I could reach an altered state – a trance state. Early on it was reachable with the breath, by giving the mind too much or too little oxygen – an organic high if you will. The mind directed the body. The experience in “time and space” became heightened. The internal and external relationship expanded, and the ability to know and to sense the body increased. The air became codependent, literally and physically.

Later, an altered state was reached by just simply being in the moment. My amazing Swedish teacher and choreographer, Kjell Nilsson, gave me a gift. It was the gift of experiencing the moment, the gift of experiencing the depth of time through his choreography. He trusted me with his movements. I relived his movement choices. I became one with my movement and his choice. He was excellent; I trusted him. Without that trust, my inhabitation and noninhibition would not have been possible. In this situation, the original idea created the movement and the expression, which then could be communicated. The body followed the mind. I was in it for my own personal satisfaction, and it felt great. Each time, I was transported somewhere else for a moment, and each time I learned and discovered something new about myself. I felt I came closer, but I was not sure to what. Obsession with living, being, and wanting took me to the undoing. To undo what has been so I could find a somewhat naked vulnerability. This action of “allowing” unlocked insights into a reversal, from the body following the mind to the mind following the body.



To let the mind follow the body, you have to be fully physical in the now. The present moment is now, and you must not separate the moment and the movement, not be before the movement in your thought and time and not after it either. In order to embrace the unknown, make the unseen seen and just be, it's very good to have a dance partner. My very early dance partner, Swedish dancer and choreographer Per Jonsson, shared my interest in trance and in states of being. Together we spent hours improvising, moving through dance and music. For us, dance was rhythm and states of being. Each movement and state created a response in ourselves and in the other. We shared that response, and then it came back to us in a new way. We embraced an unknown, which may have been known to others but was new to us. It was this sharing that was our strength. It created an affirmation that allowed us to take another step, both deeper and higher, in the internal-external dialogue, moving toward an ultimate expression.


This affirmation gave way to a question about when an expression is real and when it is false. Is there such a thing as false? I could experience more or less success in reaching a certain state, but was that state experienced outside of me as well? Does the audience's experience correspond to the performer's experience of truth? It turns out that this is not always the case. That realization became another one of my guiding principles, both in interpretation and in dance making.

Shifts in Decades



For me, as a creator, I cannot make a distinction between the concepts: dancer, choreographer, researcher, or teacher. The goal of creating a deeper and more authentic expression is equal in all those roles. Through my thirty some years of experience, I have come to understand that we are all creators with different roles to fill. My role has shifted throughout my career and is still shifting. Each decade carries with it its own body discovery, its own shift, which goes hand in hand with the interpretational aspect of dancing, both bodily and mentally. A certain refinement has happened over the years. Muscular elasticity has been lost but much insight has been gained. What surprises me most is the richness of aging. The insights gained into oneself are very encouraging.

None of this could have happened without the tools I gained along the way. Choreographic language, where form is the result of





the movement direction of each body part and the intent behind it, has been to this day a true revelation. I think much of the difference in dancers today lies in the awareness they have gained of themselves. The dancer's technique and ability to control, to lose control, and to act on instinct are all tools to be used in interpretation and dancing. The more awareness – the better the dancer. This quest to increase perception and awareness never ends. How far can we reach? How deep? I have found that listening to your body and to the individual(s) you are dancing with – in addition to looking – increases both awareness and perception. If there is a true and real dialogue between the internal and the external experiences, the authenticity of the expression is usually a given. This authenticity feeds back into the viewer as well as the dancer (who are both, in a sense, the creators) and enables the expansion of personal boundaries to allow change and the deepening of artistic expression. This process is what furthers the art of dance.



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