

Possibilising Dance: A Space for Thinking in Choreography

by

Efrosini Protopapa BA (Hons), MA (Dist)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of PhD

School of Arts
Roehampton University
University of Surrey

2009

Abstract

This work concerns a project of *possibilising dance* through practices of *choreo-thinking*. Borrowing the concept of ‘possibilising’ from Deleuze, and in response to the theme of ‘exhausting dance’, as proposed by Lepecki, possibilising dance is pursued as a process of giving the possible a reality that is proper to it, in dance, rather than an opening out of possibilities, or the discovery and realisation of the (im)possible in dance. Choreo-thinking then describes a kind of ‘doing’ which constructs the space of the dance-possible. It is offered here, firstly, as an alternative approach to a set of practices, or certain modes of writing, that are typically considered as choreography, even when those appear to exhaust dance; and, secondly, as a way of working through the relationship between practice and theory in dance, with a view to producing a new conception of choreographic practice, in writing and onstage.

Given that this is a practice-based project, it is accordingly multi-modal, and offers choreo-thinking through written text, documentation of artistic practice and a live event. The opening sections of this thesis explore the themes of exhaustion, fatigue and possibilising in relation to the contemporary moment in dance and choreography, and depict the multi-faceted nature of practice in the current project through a series of manifold narrations. The choreographer is then (re)introduced as a writer who withdraws from her usual doing, so as to think through the idea of a transportation from the theatre stage to the board of a board game. This spatial shift is elaborated through a sequence of written tasks, on issues of horizontality, borders and the miniature, and questions about beauty and relations of belonging in choreography. The project’s closing live event, as well as the documented performance practice included in the DVDs, complement this writing, by offering another mode of choreo-thinking, as it returns from the page to the stage.

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Acknowledgments

I would firstly like to thank my supervisors for their insight and generosity in sharing with me an inspiring and challenging journey: Joe Kelleher for his contagious fascination with the magic of theatre and of thinking; Anna Pakes for her unique way of matching sharp intellect with great sensitivity; Carol Brown for setting an example of how one can professionally combine artistic activities with academic endeavours.

A deeply felt thanks to all my collaborators, for their commitment and enthusiasm, their playfulness and questioning attitude towards my propositions, their humanness and friendship; a very special thank you to Susanna Recchia, who has been on my side consistently both as an artist and as a friend throughout this project.

I extend my thanks to all staff, colleagues, fellow researchers and students I have worked with in the Dance Department and the Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance at Roehampton University. I have benefited immensely from belonging to such vibrant research communities, and, indeed, I look forward to our future dialogues.

This research project has been made possible with the financial assistance of the State Scholarships Foundation, Greece, a post-graduate scholarship from the A. S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, and a post-graduate bursary from the School of Arts at Roehampton University. Such support is invaluable and gratefully acknowledged.

A heartfelt thanks to my parents, Dimitris and Sophia, for their strong belief in me, and for expressing both their admiration and their concerns with utmost honesty; to my brother, Loukas, from whom I have learnt more than I ever expected, as our lives have grown parallel to one another bringing us closer despite actual distances; to all my friends, especially those who offered me a desk or a quiet room in the most unexpected of places, and to all who were luckily around to provide me with alternative perspectives towards life when I most needed them during this often alienating journey.

This work is dedicated to my partner, Giorgos Papadatos, who has lived through this project as nobody else could have; I will forever be grateful for his steadily caring presence, his unfailing patience, and his incomparable intelligence and humour, without which I would probably not have survived such a demanding period of life.

I. Introduction

Exhaustion appears to be the rim, or the horizon of exertion, to belong to the far edge of things: but it is in fact implicit in its beginnings. Exhaustion is closer to vitality than might appear, since the sign of vigour is that it desires the consummation of exhaustion. Strength consists in the power and the will to be drained to the invigorating extreme of exhaustion. 'Nothing like breathing your last to put new life in you', as somebody says in Beckett.

(Connor, 2003: [online]¹).

This project proposes and presents 'choreo-thinking' as a way of 'possibilising dance', or finding the place of the 'dance-possible'. Moreover, as a practice-based research project, it aims to do so both through a written thesis, and through artistic practice, live and documented. The idea of – or necessity for – 'possibilising dance' itself emerges as a response to a notion coined by André Lepecki, in his much-discussed book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (2006), which looks at the work of key choreographers who are said to have transformed the dance scene in Europe and the USA since the early 1990s. This notion is, namely, 'exhausting dance' – exhaust-*ed* and exhaust-*ive* dance, as I shall show. Hence, from the outset, this project may be understood as a choreo-graphic response or reaction to the phenomenon of exhaustion in dance, as noticed both within artistic practice and in what might broadly be termed (critical) dance studies. In other words, and looked at here as a contemporary symptom, exhaustion appears as this project's starting point, a springboard for discussion; or else, exhaustion appears as implicit in this project's beginning, to use Steven Connor's phrasing from the passage above, and not at all as situated at 'the far edge of things', which on the contrary would link exhaustion to an ending or closure.

Given the project's practice-based nature, as well as its specific aim of proposing 'choreo-thinking' as a response to a contemporary phenomenon, that of 'exhausting dance', this work is hence significantly framed by particular conditions related to its (the work's) contemporaneity. The contemporary in this case is meant both as that which takes place at the same time, the concurrent, and as the new (or the one struggling to remain new), the current or up-to-date. On the one hand then, exhaustion is noticed,

¹ From a talk given by critical theorist Steven Connor, in the 'Bare Life' panel, and as a response to a keynote paper by Alphonso Lingis, at the Research Symposium *Civic Centre: Claiming the Right to Performance*, London, 9-16 April 2003.

experienced and discussed in this project, not only as 'out there', in the work and writings of contemporary choreographers and theorists, but also as 'in here', in this author's contemporary choreographic work and writings. And, on the other hand, the idea of practice, which is meant to encompass writing as much as choreography, and other forms of practice too, is intrinsically connected here to the notion of a constantly evolving 'now'; or, one could say, the whole project thus appears as bound up with the concurrent. And, as we shall see, the search for the 'dance-possible' through 'choreo-thinking' subsequently also becomes a way of dealing with – or, even, coming to terms with – the continual (and persistent) struggle with (or against) the contemporary.

In what follows, I shall initially examine the concepts of exhaustion and fatigue, the possible and possibilising. Here, I will refer to texts by dance writers, such as André Lepecki, Bojana Cvejic, Pieter T'Jonck and Helmut Ploebst, while I shall also bring into the discussion related key theoretical terms found in the writings of critical theorist Steven Connor (2003 and 2006) and philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1997[1992]). Drawing on these sources then, I will offer some initial observations, in order to depict the scene in which this project takes place and to formulate the theoretical ground of this work. Finally, and given the multi-modal, practice-led nature of the project, I will introduce the subsequent sections and diverse material of this thesis, in order to offer the reader something like guidelines as to how they are invited to engage with the rest of this work as a whole.

From exhaustion to possibilising

André Lepecki's book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (2006) is perhaps the obvious place to start, given the prominence of the notion of exhaustion in it, already in its title. The book concerns 'a discussion of some recent choreographic strategies where dance's relation to movement is being exhausted', otherwise framed as 'a choreographic questioning of dance's identify as a *being-in-flow*' (Lepecki, 2006: 1, his emphasis). Hence, *Exhausting Dance* opens with the narration of occasions when anxiety and complaints were expressed against contemporary dance performance, in which dancing movement – in the sense of continuous movement or movement 'in-flow' – doesn't appear at all, but is rather replaced by 'kinaesthetic stuttering', or a 'hiccupping' quality in movement; or, even worse, with stillness; an absence of dance (in the sense of *danc-ing*) altogether. To begin with then, as the author argues, the 'dismantling' of a certain notion of dance as

displaying continuous movement in-flow, or else ‘the deflation of movement’ in recent dance performance, have problematised pre-established ways of viewing dance and of writing on dance. Most significantly, these tendencies comprise a broader ‘critical act of deep ontological impact’, as they seem to question the very basis of dance; that is to say, ‘the bind between dance and movement’ (ibid: 1-2).

It is at this point in Lepecki’s thinking, therefore, that the phenomenon of exhaustion in dance becomes almost indistinguishable from the notion of ‘betrayal’. More specifically, Lepecki characterises the phenomenon as a ‘self-betrayal’ (my emphasis): namely, dance’s betrayal of movement, which is considered as the very feature through which it (dance) has so far been defined (by artists, audiences and critics alike). In his words,

the accusation [of betrayal] describes, reifies and reproduces a whole project for dance by presupposing an ontology of dance in all of its aspects: in its essence, nature, purpose, means of production and modes of manifestation. Such a definite presupposition regarding dance’s being can be summarised as follows: dance ontologically imbricates itself with, is isomorphic to, movement. Only after accepting such a grounding of dance on movement can one accuse certain contemporary choreographic practices of betraying dance.

(Lepecki, 2004: 121).

Thus, it is further suggested that certain contemporary experimental choreographic practice comes to redefine, or to explode, the ontological ground of dance, ‘its essence, nature, purpose, means of production and modes of manifestation’, through the very absence of dancing; through a series of ‘still acts’, in Lepecki’s terms, which occur at the moment when all movement has been exhausted.

However, it might be useful here to make a necessary clarification, with regards to the kind of dance that is being ‘betrayed’. To be more accurate, one would rightly say that the phenomenon of betrayal seems to apply specifically to *theatrical* dance. In this sense, the absence of movement in-flow becomes noticed, and is felt as a betrayal towards dance, within a particular framework, that of the theatrical performance. Certainly, a favourite story of the dance community that provides evidence for this – and which opens the discussion in *Exhausting Dance* (see also Bauer, 2008a) – is the one about an audience member taking legal action against the Projects Arts Centre in Dublin and the International Dance Festival of Ireland (IDF), after having seen the show *Jérôme Bel* (premiered in 1995, created by Jérôme Bel) at the Projects Arts Centre, as part of the festival’s 2002 edition. On the one hand, audience member Raymond Whitehead accused the festival organisers of having deceived him, having ‘breached the contract’, by advertising the show as a dance performance. On the other hand, he

complained that he had been shocked and disgusted by a performance that not only did not contain 'a single step of dance' (Whitehead, cited in Bauer, 2008a: 35), but also featured nudity and excretory bodily functions such as urination on stage. If this was a performance that could be characterised as 'anything but dance' (O'Tuathail, cited in Managh, 2004 [online]), then it seems that according to Whitehead it had no position in the theatre. In fact, following this incident, Whitehead became what we could describe as 'the traumatised theatre-goer': 'He had not been able to attend theatre since' (Managh, 2004 [online]); as if, not only the spectator, but also the space of the theatre itself had been assaulted.

Of course, Lepecki's 'exhausting dance' does not take place only in theatres; for example, he also discusses works performed in galleries, such as La Ribot's *Panoramix*² and Trisha Brown's *It's a Draw/Live Feed*³. Here too, however, one could imagine a spectator like Whitehead feeling betrayed; even more so, given that, arguably, what gets betrayed in these cases is not only movement as dance's ontological ground, but also the space of theatre itself as its actual ground. If, on the one hand, it appears as if theatre is the space where movement occurs in order for it to qualify as dance (in the sense of those 'steps' that an audience member like Whitehead expects to see, in order to justify their visit to the theatre and to satisfy their desire of attending a *dance* performance onstage), then, on the other hand, it would seem that when a dance performance goes as far as abandoning the theatre, it betrays dance once again, not only *as action*, but also, consequently, *as art form*. In this way, the disappearance of any act of dancing on the stage, and/or the disappearance of the theatre stage altogether in dance performance, could be read as a betrayal of dance as *performance*; both these cases, in this sense, would comprise a breaching of the contract by which dance is allowed to participate in the theatrical economy, which in turn could be described as '*theatre-going and dance-viewing*'.

Further on in *Exhausting Dance*, we find that the 'whole project' mentioned above – the one that wants dance ontologically rooted in movement, so that the exhaustion of dance (as movement) becomes a self-betrayal of dance (as an art form, in the sense of theatrical dance) – is theorised by Lepecki as concurring with the overall project of modernity, whose ontology in turn rests on the kinetic, an ongoing motility, a propensity

² Presented at Tate Modern, London, in 2003, as part of *Live Culture*, in collaboration with the Live Art Development Agency (see also Lepecki, 2006: Chapter 4, pp. 65-86).

³ Performed at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, in 2003, in collaboration with the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (see also Lepecki, 2006: Chapter 4, pp. 65-86).

to movement. At least, this is the understanding of modernity that Lepecki puts forward, based on the writings of cultural historian Harvie Ferguson and German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. On the one hand then, as Lepecki notes, Ferguson has claimed that the propensity to movement is modernity's most significant and stable 'emblem' (cited in Lepecki, 2006: 7). On the other hand, Sloterdijk has also argued, in an interview with Bettina Funcke, following the completion of his trilogy work *Spheres*⁴, that the basic experiences of the modern and the postmodern are such that they construct 'a world based on the mobilization and the easing of burdens' (cited in Funcke, 2005: [online]). Hence, he continues, there emerges a need for a theory that articulates 'the experiences of a world of lightness and relations', in a way that it becomes a critique of gravity and an investigation into notions of mobilization.⁵ Of course, it should be noted in our case that Sloterdijk's overall agenda, of constructing a new topology for the modern world in cultural theory, is quite different to Lepecki's, whose interest lies in understanding the ontological grounding of dance in movement through theorisations of (constant) mobilisation; still, alongside Ferguson's proposition, Sloterdijk's thinking provides Lepecki with a conception of movement which leads him directly to dance's modernisation.

In particular, Lepecki uses ideas that link modernity to kinetics and mobilization, as a basis on which to understand and elaborate on dance historian Mark Franko's views on the discipline performed by the (modern) dancing body. Thus, the former proposes the identity of the modern subject as 'a disciplined body performing the spectacle of its own capacity to be set into motion' (2006: 7). In this way, the kind of choreographic practice that emerges at the rim of exhaustion, where motion as dancing is no longer being performed, becomes, according to Lepecki, a political gesture of criticising, resisting and destabilising modern subjectivity:

perhaps the recent exhaustion of the notion of dance as a pure display of uninterrupted movement participates of a general critique of this mode of disciplining subjectivity [...] If we agree with Ferguson's insight that movement is modernity's permanent 'emblem', then [...] to exhaust dance [as ontologically isomorphic to movement] is to exhaust modernity's

⁴ Peter Sloterdijk's trilogy, titled *Sphären/Spheres*, was completed in 2004, with the publication (in German) of the third volume, *Schäume/Foams*. The first volume, *Blasen/Bubbles*, was published in 1998, and the second one, *Globen/Globes*, in 1999. None of these three has been translated into English, although a section from *Schäume* appears in the journal *Distinktion* (No. 16, 2008), translated from the German into English by Julie Di Filippo (see Sloterdijk, 2008[2004]).

⁵ Sloterdijk's overall argument here stems from his interest in departing from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, which, he suggests, interprets the light as appearance and the heavy as essence; for Sloterdijk himself, then, it is lightness, the air and the atmosphere where 'the "essential" now dwells', since 'the heavy has turned into appearance', given 'the occurrence of abundance in the modern' (Sloterdijk, cited in Funcke, 2005: [online]).

permanent emblem. It is to push modernity's mode of creating and privileging a kinetic subjectivity to its critical limit.

(ibid: 7-8).

Finally then, the still-act, a dancer's presence as standing still, and so the latter's non-participation in motility, potentially undermine and resist 'the general economy of mobility that informs, supports, and reproduces the ideological formations of late capitalist modernity' (ibid: 16). With Lepecki, exhausting dance appears as a political act of resistance: firstly, against the 'kinaesthetic politics' of modernity, in Sloterdijk's terms (cited ibid: 13); and, secondly, against all that allows 'for dance and dances to constantly be recycled, reproduced, packaged, distributed, institutionalized, sold' (ibid: 126). To quote another theorist who often deals with the contemporary phenomenon of exhaustion in dance – although she does so in slightly different terms from Lepecki's (as we shall see when we return to her writings later on) – this kind of 'still-act' choreography may also be seen as going against what Bojana Cvejić calls 'supermarket workshopping', which supposedly offers to workshop participants 'the image of the dance world' (2006a: [online]); in this sense, it goes against the following non-exhaustive list of what somebody trained in dance, and/or working in dance, might eventually want to blame for having resulted in their own physical exhaustion:

strict techniques named after dead masters applied to carefully selected bodies, continuous modelling of bodies through endless repetition of exercises, dieting, surgeries, the perpetuation of systems of racial exclusion for the sake of 'proper' visibility, an endemic eruption of archival fevers, the international and transcultural spreading of national ballets performing nineteenth-century steps for the sake and glory of dancing their status as modern nations [...], the merchandising of brands and names, the franchising, the fetishes.

(Lepecki, 2006: 126).

No wonder then that many of the artists that Lepecki and other writers identify as choreographers whose practice resists pre-established modes of producing, creating and presenting dance, all seem to somehow start from a basis of questioning the necessity, nature and/or potential of dance as an art form. Indeed, many of them come from a strict dance training background, so that their choreographic practice is often proposed as their way of dealing with, or rebelling against, that past training.

In order to examine a few examples of such cases here, we may start from Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero, whom Lepecki, in fact, includes in his discussions most frequently, given that he has also collaborated with her on a few occasions as a dramaturg. It is in Helmut Ploebst's book on what the author proposes as 'New Choreography', that Mantero states:

I'm not a dancer, I don't want to be a dancer, I want to do whatever I feel like doing, I want to do whatever is necessary to do. It's not obvious to me to make dances in terms of theatrical, composed dance. [...] I don't make dances. I make performances.

(Mantero, cited in Ploebst, 2001: 54).

Ploebst, then, who also works both as a critic and as a dramaturg in the European contemporary dance scene, presents Mantero as an artist who has translated into choreography questions like: 'what does dance say?', 'what can I say with dance?', 'what am I saying when I'm dancing?' (ibid: 42-43). Here, her relationship to her training as a ballet dancer becomes significant too, as Mantero claims that, in order to deal with such questions, she has actually turned to everything that was forbidden in ballet, such as 'touching the lights and curtains and breathing a little on the stage, being a little normal, looking at and touching things' (ibid: 38). In this way, Mantero becomes the choreographer who 'left dance in the dust', since 'dance vocabulary seemed simply too poor' (ibid: 40). Indeed, she appears here as a choreographer for whom dancing has been exhausted (and exhaustive), and who feels the need to turn elsewhere in order 'to say' – with or without dance.

One gets a similar feeling about Jérôme Bel's relationship to dance and particularly to dance training, from the way in which he often speaks in public lectures, lecture performances or discussions with the public. At this point, though, it should be noted that, admittedly, it seems that the French choreographer has a tendency to want to sound slightly more provocative or radical, braver perhaps, than Mantero and other choreographers making work around him. In fact, it could be argued that, not only what he says, but, also, the way in which he makes claims, the style and attitude in which he states his resistance to dance (and dancing), even his look in terms of clothing, are all part of the artistic persona he constructs for his audiences and the discourse that he builds around himself and his work. As Una Bauer very accurately and wittily tells the choreographer himself, while interviewing him for *Performance Research* (2008b: 46), it seems that when speaking to the audience, Bel's aim is to communicate 'an impression of a carefully constructed ambivalence', which is supported not only by what one could perceive as a strange mixture of arrogance and friendliness on his part towards the audience, but also by his appearance, often consisting of bright, colourful t-shirts, loose trousers and fashionable-looking shoes. Bauer adds in her list of elements that constitute the style of Jérôme Bel, as he appears and speaks to the audience, 'a mixture of ambiguous coyness, shyness and an irresistible charm', 'playful gesticulation', smiles, or even bursts of laughter after saying something, all 'giving an

impression of a mischievous boy who can't quite believe what he is saying' (ibid). Indeed, she convincingly suggests that Jérôme Bel - the character, the one presenting his own work in talks, is to a certain degree consciously constructed, and that the production of discourse around his artistic work and around the choreographer himself, are inextricable from what we perceive as the whole of Jérôme Bel's work. Cultural politics put aside for the moment, it is perhaps not accidental then that Jérôme Bel is the one who emerges so prominently, as a key and greatly influential figure, in most discussions on the current phenomena of the exhaustion of movement and the disappearance of dancing from dance performance; not just because these phenomena are truly noticeable in his choreographic work, but because they are particularly highlighted by the discourse surrounding such work. And this discourse – which, I would go on to suggest, lingers between the theoretical and the anecdotal – is sustained both by writers, audiences and academics, and by the choreographer himself (as we may notice, for example, in the way he talks to Bauer, ibid).

Given the above, it would clearly not be difficult to elaborate further on the discourse surrounding the figure of Jérôme Bel, particularly if we were to draw from occasions when he has talked about his work himself in front of an audience, either in the form of a discussion / public lecture, or from within a performed work, such as *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2005). Although I will return to this point later, here let us pursue further ideas linked to exhaustion, in particular, and only concentrate on a few instances, where Bel elaborates on his relationship to dance (as dancing). Two years after the incident at the International Festival of Ireland, for example, in a public interview at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin again (2006), just before a performance of *Pichet Klunchun and Myself*, Bel admitted that he has always had an interest in the idea of stopping the dance in order to focus on ideas; not the medium, but ideas, although 'of course you need to know how to dance in order to be able to do this [to stop the dance]' ('Public Interview', 2006: [my notes]⁶). Similarly, in his interview with Bauer, he claims that his interest has shifted from dance (in the sense of the activity of dancing), to 'what is around the dance' (in the sense of dance production), by which he means the life of the dancer, the body of the dancer, the audience of the dance performance, the history of dance, or the role of the author, for example (Bauer, 2008b: 44).

Alongside the above, plenty of other statements by Jérôme Bel can be found which reveal his particular and clear-cut way of 'resisting dance/dancing'. For example, claims

⁶ See Bel (2006).

against working in a dance studio space ('Not Conceptual', *Parallel Voices*, 2007: [my notes]⁷), based on the thought that, if one does not care about producing dancing necessarily, then any kind of space might be suitable for practice; or, claims against working with trained, skilled and beautiful dancers ('Artist Talk', 2008: [my notes]⁸), a decision which, as Bel himself believes, makes his work political, as it allows him 'to represent weak bodies', who appear humble on stage and do not dominate the audience with their skills (cited in Bauer, 2008b: 48). Of course, this latter idea echoes Yvonne Rainer's famous 1965 manifesto, and particularly the part which says 'no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer' (Rainer, 1974: 50). In fact, in a one-hour lecture-like performance, at the Lilian Baylis Studio, Sadler's Wells, London (2009), which was initially titled *27 Performances* and then got renamed into *The Spectator*, Bel discussed a list of influential experiences he had while going to see dance; here, he spoke directly to the audience from a list of notes, describing the works and the effect performances had on him, so as to reveal his own approach and thoughts on dance, and the relationship of live performance to its audience. Interestingly, he almost always started describing a work by commenting on whether it featured trained dancers, potentially able to seduce the audience with their skills, or performers who seemed less keen to demonstrate their training, or, finally, completely untrained people (such as Steve Paxton's *Satisfyin' Lover*, 1967). Noticeably, then, his obsession with the existence or not of dancing and/or trained bodies in dance performance reveals Bel's eagerness to resist not only dancing but also the conditions that frame dance production, and which privilege, support and promote primarily spectacular movement, executed perfectly by impressively skilled dancers.

Finally, I would like to refer here to Maguy Marin, precisely because, on the one hand, she is not usually considered as belonging to a certain group of European choreographers, which includes Bel and Mantero, mentioned above, but also Jonathan Burrows and Xavier Le Roy, to mention a couple more that are often discussed alongside Bel (and to whom I will refer again later). On the other hand, though, Marin is a choreographer who also describes herself as always having worked on the fringe of dance, in a way similar to Mantero.⁹ In an interview with Estelle Ricoux, for example, Marin asserts that, even if dance is fundamental to her because she trained in dance,

⁷ See Bel et al (2007).

⁸ See Bel & Burrows (2008).

⁹ In fact, I will come back to a specific work by Marin, her piece *Umwelt* (2004), which I saw at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, in 2006; this work, I suggest, shares some of its characteristics with works by the choreographers mentioned above, and, in this sense, it too seems to work through the idea of exhaustion, and towards a proposition of how dance might appear onstage other than as (exhausting and exhausted) dancing.

she feels the need to go beyond it. As her work matures, she questions whether she still needs movement (or what we call dance) as the driving force in her work, and concludes: 'Probably so, but I don't really care whether there is dance or not. I don't care about what it is made of' (cited in Ricoux, 2006: 16). What is noticed here is not exactly a preoccupation with whether something classifies as dance or not (in the sense of *dancing*), but rather a potential interest in the methods through which one could perhaps go beyond dance, or beyond the issue of whether movement drives the creation of dance performance or not. And, although this 'going *beyond*' remains slightly vague and ambiguous – one wonders, for example, what it is that might lie beyond movement, or what it might mean for someone to go beyond the idea of movement, or, even, whether this 'going beyond' does not constitute itself a sort of movement – it seems here as if movement, or a concern for movement, is not enough for the choreographer to engage in what she does; or, at least, as if the question of what form movement might take is not a primary choreographic concern anymore.

And so, to go back to the idea of 'exhausting dance', let us first accept Lepecki's premise that, indeed, choreographers do seem to have exhausted dance. Even if they each use different terms to express this idea, the ones I have referred to here, at least, all seem to be interested in something *other than* dance, whether they place that other *against*, *around* or *beyond* dance. The political dimension of this, as introduced by Lepecki, remains to be proven, and is indeed an issue I will return to towards the end of this thesis. At this point though, and in order to further theorise the kind of other-ness that is being searched for by choreographers (and which is potentially responsible for their 'betraying' of dance), I will approach the issue from the point of view of another debate. To be exact, I will choose not to escape an admittedly contentious term, often coined for performances which seem to be exhausting dance; namely, 'conceptual dance' ('konzept tanz' in German). And so, I will also briefly refer here to debates about whether this is an appropriate term to use for the kind of performances presented by choreographers including the above, as well as Raimund Hoghe, La Ribot, Juan Dominguez, Boris Charmatz and Thomas Lehmen, to mention a few more.

While it is not clear when and by whom the term 'conceptual dance' was first introduced, it most likely occurred as a reference to conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s; that is, performance art and certain visual arts practices with which 'conceptual dance' seems to share some basic questions, on the body, on presence, on the politics of art and on art's capacity to reflect on its own conditions through the art works themselves. At the same time, Bojana Cvejić sees the term as a consequence of

critical theory's 'incursion' into choreography, given that many of the abovementioned choreographers openly invoke philosophical writings as inspirational sources for their choreographic practice. This includes particularly the writings of post-structuralist thinkers, such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Cvejić suggests that, whereas '[u]ntil the 1990s one could [get away] with speaking about dance performances by asking what kind of object of dance a performance produces; by defining, first, style with a formalist concern with the body as the instrument for a certain technique and, second, subject matter by way of metaphoric representation', today, because of some dance's inspiration from philosophical thinking, we are able to ask 'not what kind of object a dance performance is, but what kind of concept of dance it proposes' (Cvejić, 2006a: [online]). By sourcing concepts from 'other – not specially, autonomously or intrinsically belonging to dance – domains of knowledge, theoretical discourses and cultural practices', choreographers are now conceptualising dance – not *in* or *on* dance, but conceptualising *dance*, through and by choreographic practice, through and by making, producing and presenting dance performance. In other words, and following Cvejić's proposition, it could be argued that certain choreographers today seek to produce a new concept of dance with each one of their works, rather than to produce works which comment on and/or (re)present ideas or concepts through choreographed dancing. In the latter case, we could suspect, one leaves the performance with a sense of what the work looked like and what it was *about*; in the former case, however, one leaves with a proposition about what dance performance might be, or about how dance performance may function, a proposition in any case unique to that specific work and even, perhaps, unforeseen or unthought-of before (see also Cvejić, 2006b: [online]).

A certain tension is once again perceived, however, between what we may now understand as 'conceptual dance' (and the practice of 'conceptualising dance') and what dance critic Pieter T'Jonck calls 'the more general practice of contemporary dance' (2004: [online]). The issue emerges in an insightful overview that T'Jonck gives of what conceptual dance came to mean in Belgium after *Klapstuck #11*, a festival curated by Jérôme Bel in 2003, following an invitation by choreographer Alain Platel, who had curated the two previous editions of *Klapstuck*. The one curated by Bel, in particular, has been considered as a festival that 'opened up the horizons of contemporary dance to other disciplines, that launched a lot of conceptual questions and that stressed the creative role of the audience' (unknown author, 2004: [online]). Most importantly, a year after the festival, Bel organised a meeting, where all participants in *Klapstuck #11* were invited to reflect on the issues that had emerged as

part of the festival. Hence, an interesting collection of texts looking at ‘conceptual dance’, as well as transcribed discussions that took place as part of that event, were published after the meeting in *Sarma*, an online platform and electronic archive for dance and performance criticism.

In one such text, then, T’Jonck emphasizes self-reflexivity as an alienating characteristic that work considered as ‘conceptual dance’ had for the public, and therefore brings up the notion of betrayal again, similarly to the way the concept features in Lepecki’s writings, as seen earlier. What is worth noticing here, yet might not come as a surprise perhaps at this point, is how the notion of ‘the broader public’ comes up in T’Jonck’s passage. In this way, it acts here as a reminder of Raymond Whitehead, the betrayed spectator who was traumatised by Bel’s performance in Dublin (2004), to the extent that he could not return to the theatre – a site where, as we shall see later, the question of ‘the public’ emerges as a central and quite problematic one indeed.

‘Conceptual dance’ came to be perceived as a hybrid, a rival definition of contemporary dance that seems to be at odds with the more general practice of contemporary dance. Indeed, it was said that the festival delineated and at once consecrated a certain course of things within contemporary dance that didn’t suit or oblige everybody within the artistic community and/or in the public. To put it bluntly: ‘conceptual’ dance seems to have attained a degree of self-reflexivity which makes it ultimately uninteresting for a broader public, and even seems to betray things that were at stake in contemporary dance in the decades preceding the turn of the century.

(T’Jonck, 2004: [online]).

On the one hand, though, and with regards to the term ‘conceptual dance’ itself, it should be pointed out, following Lepecki (2006: 45), that, although the particular European movement in dance has been gaining shape, visibility, and force since the mid-1990s, it does not constitute an organized movement; neither should it therefore have a proper name. Indeed, and according to Cvejić (2005: [online]¹⁰), it might be a bit presumptuous to refer to the work of a group of choreographers with generalised, ambiguous and often provocative terms, which include not only ‘conceptual dance’, but also ‘anti-dance’ and ‘non-dance’ – terms which are undeniably linked to the notion of the ‘extinction’ of dancing within dance. Moreover, and this should also be noted, even the choreographers themselves who seem to get included in discussions of this trend

¹⁰ This is a talk which was given by Cvejić in the panel ‘Research and Laboratory’, as part of the conference *INVENTORY: Dance and Performance Congress / Live Act / Intervention / Publication*, at Tanzquartier Wien, 3-5 March 2005. The panel was curated by Xavier Le Roy, and included, apart from Cvejić and Le Roy, Gerald Siegmund, Christophe Wavelet and Mårten Spångberg. The same paper appears in Hochmuth et al, 2006: 48-56, with a footnote/response by Gerard Siegmund.

in the contemporary European dance scene, deny that they belong to a closed category and do not accept labels such as the above (Burrows et al, 2004: 9-10).¹¹ And, on the other hand, perhaps we could go even further, and question what might truly be the problem with a term like 'conceptual dance', apart from the issues raised above. Is it only the fact that such terminology consists of fixed labels, so that work described as such might be irreparably accused of all sorts of betrayals, un-interesting self-reflexivity, dry intellectualism perhaps, as well as the ambition of (and potential failure in) producing new conceptions of dance? Or is there something deeper in the structure of the phenomenon of labelling itself which is at stake here?

Quite interestingly, Cvejić (2006a) is the one who points at this latter possibility, and, in doing so, I suggest that she also brings the conversation back from those debates on terminologies and the notion of a betrayal of movement, towards a consideration of what might be proposed as a deeper and older problem in dance; namely, the way in which dance and choreography have historically been going through a constant (and endless) process of definition, exhaustion and re-definition. Here, it is useful to invoke Noël Carroll's essay 'The Philosophy of Art History, Dance, and the 1960s' (in Banes, 2003: 81-97), which traces theatrical dance's history up until the 1960s, when artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Simone Forti, Douglas Dunn and others, all Andy Warhol's contemporaries, brought dance history to its 'climax' and, in Carroll's view, 'opened a new world of dance: not an end to dance, but perhaps a new beginning' (ibid: 96). Carroll compares and interprets this moment in dance's history as analogous to the moment marked by Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964), described by art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto as the work that marked the end of art and hence brought art history to its closure, a climax (Carroll, 2003: 81). Hence the whole essay could read as verifying that change and shifts in practice have generally been a central part of the dynamic of dance history; but, one also gains a sense here that dance history is often described and understood as a process whereby each new generation overthrows the paradigms and practices of the previous one, as if through constant revolutions. Moreover, it is interesting to notice that Carroll proposes a progressive and linear history, which he links to the project of representation in visual arts, in order to arrive at a sort of end-moment in dance history; this is an exhausted moment, perhaps,

¹¹ Writers who have focused on the abovementioned choreographers and who discuss the issues such works raise about choreography today, as well as the problem of their grouping under various vague and often inappropriate labels, include, apart from Cvejić, Lepecki and Ploebst, British dance historian Ramsay Burt, German theoretician and dance and performance critic Gerald Siegmund, as well as younger critics and writers from Central Europe, such as Pirkko Husemann, Joroen Peeters, Rudi Laermans and Dorothea von Hantelmann.

which also marks, however, a new beginning. And yet, today we are again speaking of a new end-moment, or at least a newly reached point of exhaustion, as if admitting that endings recur or repeat themselves, proving somehow that true exhaustion (or a true end of art) has not been reached yet, or indeed might never arrive.

It is important to notice here, as well, that not only historians and theorists but also dance artists themselves have a sense of this pattern in dance history, even from the inside, while they are actually producing work *within* history. For example, in the 'Meeting of Minds' symposium, which took place at Greenwich Dance Agency, as part of the *London International Summer School 2004*, organised by Independent Dance, choreographer Jonathan Burrows passionately spoke about dance-makers' 'extraordinary ability to split ourselves into two camps all the time' (Burrows et al, 2004: 9). This phenomenon he historically traced back to the split between ballet and contemporary dance, but he also discussed with reference to the subsequent dualistic oppositions that emerged in dance history, of the narrative versus the abstract, and then of set material versus improvisation. Finally, he also arrived at the much discussed debate around the idea of 'conceptual dance'. In his own words, 'and then we had the split between theatre and abstract dance, and now we seem to have entered into the period of a split between conceptual [and] non-conceptual work' (ibid). It is as if, according to Burrows, the whole of dance history has been constructed upon such dualities, their overcoming, and their subsequent substitution by new ones.

Similarly, in a round table discussion as part of 'Characters, Figures and Signs: Choreography as "Doing" and "Saying"', a *UBS Openings: Saturday Live* event at Tate Modern, London, in 2009, Mårten Spångberg, dramaturg, choreographer and writer in performance, also swiftly described two decades of dance history in the following terms: the 1980s were about signification, and so dance was concerned with the body as a sign, while the 1990s were about perception, and so dance then became obsessed with ways in which the body perceives (2009: [my notes]¹²). And then? Then, as expected, the discussion got stuck again in terminology and the inappropriateness of the term 'conceptual dance'; and, indeed, Judson and the 1960s and 70s came up, as a moment in dance history which has become pertinent again at the beginning of the new millennium, even though, according to Spångberg at least, it seemed to be forgotten during the 1980s and 1990s.¹³

¹² See Cvejić et al (2009).

¹³ For a different proposition about the links between choreographers that appeared in the 1990s and the dance history that preceded the 1990s, see Ploebst, 2001: 265-271. Here, Ploebst argues that what he calls 'New Choreography' can be stretched, so that its historical traces might include not only Judson, but

It is not surprising, therefore, that the current moment in dance is often accused of repeating what already happened in the 1960s, or, under softer criticism, is thought to be reviving some of the questions and thinking that took place during the Judson times. Yet, here we are again, theorists and choreographers alike, unavoidably participating in a discussion that assumes a sort of cyclical motion in dance history, in the sense of a series of repeated endings, one through which moments and problems occur and recur; here we are, therefore, still claiming every now and then that we have reached exhaustion and are seeking renewal. Furthermore, it seems that for such moments of 'revolution' or 'renewal' in dance history to occur, and in order for them to claim themselves as such, a pre-existing and already established dance (trend) should necessarily be presupposed, which the new one comes to destabilise or undo. Hence, to refer to another insightful note that Bauer makes when interviewing Jérôme Bel, even if one were to agree that Bel's work, for example, does question the medium of dance in an effective way, when trying to support such a statement, one could get lost in 'a rather dogmatic set of assumptions on what dance is and how questioning functions' (Bauer, 2008: 45). Bauer therefore tells Jérôme Bel: '[P]aradoxically, one has to stick to a very conservative idea of what dance is, in order to be able to say that your work is questioning it' (ibid). That is to say, in our eagerness to embrace (the) new trend(s) as revolutionary and unthought-of before, have we at the same time developed a tendency to devalue what in each case constitutes past dance practice as too conformist and always in need of a renewal?

A potential answer is to be found in a claim often made by Bojana Cvejić, who shrewdly describes this very process of the constant interplay between exhaustion and re-birth or re-definition as an obsession with contemporaneity. In her own words:

When a name appears, like 'conceptual dance', it is rejected as a misnomer: both the choreographer and the programmer are wary of any terminology that can raise polemical acts against history in favour of dance's obsession with contemporaneity. A denomination of a current dance practice is undesirable because it can only reiterate the protocols of exhaustion and

other artists too, from Isadora Duncan and Vaslav Nijinsky, to Butoh protagonists of the 1950s, Fluxus artists, or even Robert Wilson. Interestingly, and even if some of the statements included in Ploebst's own book, by artists such as Jérôme Bel or Vera Mantero (as seen earlier), seem to communicate a different sort of attitude towards dance history or dance training, the writer still claims that "New Choreography" today potentially contains all the movement concepts of dance' and that in no way does it appear as 'belligerent' towards the aesthetic of modern dance or post-modern ballet. This approach sounds quite refreshing, and offers an alternative uniting thread through dance history. Nonetheless, it contrasts with the impression that is communicated by contemporary choreographers themselves, in the way they seem to perceive the relationship of the current moment to specific historical moments in dance. What is more, the discourse of choreographers themselves helps construct the critical commentary surrounding their work, which may explain why the binary/cyclical view of dance history persists in much of that commentary.

reaction whereby dance refuses historicity in order to entertain the prestige of contemporaneity that society assigns to it. This is why bringing up 'conceptual dance' does not open but forecloses any discussion with the question: and what comes after 'conceptual dance'?

(Cvejić, 2006a: [online]).

Indeed, London-based Canadian dancer and emerging choreographer Mattias Sperling, a participant in the first dialogue that took place as part of the international project *Europe in Motion*¹⁴ at Springdance Festival in Utrecht (2008), has asserted that the dominant questions in most of the discussions that took place amongst dance artists as part of that project were the following: 'And now, what?', 'What do we do after Jérôme Bel?'¹⁵. Surely, I can imagine that, as far as dance's obsession with contemporaneity goes, alongside those questions lingering in the mind of young choreographers, there is also probably another parallel set of questions currently preoccupying programmers and producers: For how long might 'conceptual dance' be contemporary and experimental? Might the exhaustion of movement lose its political impact and its subversive quality as a form of resistance? When will that happen? Again, what next? It is not choreographers alone, therefore, who participate in this ongoing alternation between exhaustion and re-invention; rather, they are joined by producers, dancers, theorists, as well as audiences, in developing an anxiety while waiting for that which will come to renew dance just after having exhausted its previous present. The notion of exhaustion then becomes interlinked with that of contemporaneity, which hence features as crucial in a project of 'possibilising dance' in order to deal with 'exhausting dance'.¹⁶

To take the discussion further, however, and in order to understand such a phenomenon and its implications in broader theoretical terms here, I propose that we refer to Gilles Deleuze's essay 'The Exhausted' (1997[1992])¹⁷, where the philosopher writes on Samuel Beckett's play for television *QUAD* (1984), as well as *Ghost Trio*

¹⁴ *Europe in Motion* took place between spring 2008 and spring 2009, and included four dialogue projects between twelve different choreographers each time, four from Holland, four from the UK, and four from Romania. It was organised by the Springdance Festival in Utrecht, Dance4, which is the UK National Dance Agency in Nottingham, and the National Centre for Dance in Bucharest (CNDB). As Artist-in-Residence at Dance4 in 2008, I was invited to participate in the last of the four meetings (Utrecht, April 2009), while Mattias Sperling, Associate Artist at Dance4, took part in the first meeting (Utrecht, April 2008). The second and third meetings were held in Nottingham (October 2008) and in Bucharest (March 2009) respectively.

¹⁵ Conversation between Mattias Sperling and the author (October 2008).

¹⁶ This point will be pursued further in Section II, where I elaborate on the challenges of trying to situate this practice-based project within the contemporary.

¹⁷ This essay is part of Deleuze's book *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1997[1993]), where the philosopher examines a number of literary works, looking at them both as texts (critical) and as forms of life (clinical), as proposed by Daniel S. Smith (see 'Introduction', p. xxiv). The particular essay was first written in 1992, and appears in the English edition I refer to here in a translation by Anthony Uhlmann, revised by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco.

(1975), *Nacht und Träume* (1982), and *Eh Joe* (1965).¹⁸ Exhaustion in this case is entirely linked to the combinatorial, which Deleuze defines as ‘the art or science of exhausting the possible through inclusive disjunctions’ (ibid: 154).¹⁹ More specifically, the way the combinatorial works in Beckett is the following: the character appears to have at his/her disposal a set of variables, and the task they engage in is one of imagining all the possible combinations of those variables that might exist. In so doing, the character sees the variables as equal and interchangeable, while they also lose any sense of preference in relation both to particular variables and to specific combinations. In Beckett’s *Watt*, for example, we are given all the possible combinations of footwear that the character of Mr. Knott uses for his feet, which include ‘on each a sock, or on the one a sock and on the other a stocking, or a boot, or a shoe, or a slipper, or a sock and boot, or a stocking and shoe, or a stocking and slipper’ and so on and so forth (Beckett, 1988[1953]: 200). Whereas in this case the combinatorial is explored through language, in *QUAD*, however, the performers appear to be exhausting the space itself, through a walking task determined by specific combinations of spatial configurations. What is typical in both cases, as well as in other similar cases in Beckett, is that all combinations remain equally possible, yet none becomes preferable, or more significant; in fact, in cases where language is used to construct combinations of variables, those usually remain unrealised, so that the character just lists possibilities in a way that none of them appears as closer to becoming realised.

In the opening part of his essay, therefore, Deleuze makes two points on the subject of exhaustion: Firstly, he draws a distinction between being tired and being exhausted, which he extends to a further distinction between realisation and possibilisation:

The tired person no longer has any (subjective) possibility at his disposal; he therefore cannot realize the slightest (objective) possibility. But the latter [possibility] remains, because one can never realize the whole of the possible: in fact, one even creates the possible to the extent that one realizes it. The tired person has merely exhausted the realisation, whereas the exhausted person exhausts the whole of the possible. The tired person can no longer realize, but the exhausted person can no longer possibilize.

(Deleuze, 1997[1992]: 152).

Hence exhaustion occurs, according to Deleuze, in the form of an exhaustion of possibilities through a combination of the set of variables of a situation, but ‘on the

¹⁸ For *QUAD*, see Beckett, 1984: 289-294; for *Ghost Trio*, see Beckett, 1984: 245-254; for *Nacht und Träume*, see Beckett, 1984: 303-306; for *Eh Joe*, see Beckett, 1984: 199-207.

¹⁹ Beckett, undeniably, offers the philosopher a number of typical examples of the combinatorial. ‘Beckett’s entire oeuvre’, as Deleuze notices, ‘is pervaded by exhaustive series’ (1997[1992]: 154).

condition that one renounces any order of preference, any organization in relation to a goal, any signification' (ibid: 153). Therefore, in exhaustion, or, as one exhausts possibilities through the combinatorial, one realises nothing, even if they seem to be accomplishing something; one is not passive; one is active, but for nothing (ibid: 153). In tiredness, however, as Steven Connor explains, 'the possibility of realising one or other thing is reduced, though the structure of possibility itself remains in place' (2006: [online]). At the same time, the only person who can exhaust the possible is precisely the exhausted person; because it is he who has renounced all need, preference, goal or signification. And so, Deleuze turns his focus towards the subject of exhaustion and makes a second important point: what seems to fascinate him most in Beckett is that 'exhaustion (exhaustivity) does not occur without a certain physiological exhaustion' (ibid: 154), which is no other than that of the Beckettian character (Mr. Knott, for example, in *Watt*). In other words,

[t]he combinatorial exhausts its object, but only because its subject is himself exhausted. The exhaustive *and* the exhausted. Must one be exhausted to give oneself over to the combinatorial, or is it the combinatorial that exhausts us, that leads us to exhaustion – or even the two together, the combinatorial and the exhaustion?

(ibid: 154).

We might perceive then exhaustivity and exhausted-ness as working both ways through the combinatorial, each leading towards the other and both reinforcing one another. And hence the exhausted person is the one who ends up engaging in exhaustive processes, in the same way that the exhaustive person (the one who engages in processes of exhausting possible combinations) is the one who ends up experiencing exhaustion.

While speaking of the combinatorial, however, and before we return to the distinction between exhaustion and tiredness, let us shift back into dance, and consider at this point both Maguy Marin's work *Umwelt* (2004), as well as one of Jérôme Bel's early works, *Nom donné par l'auteur* (1994). In the latter piece, on the one hand, two performers appear on stage with a set of everyday objects (around a dozen, as far as I remember), and present them to us, forming possible combinations of pairs, and therefore also possible meanings which emerge in the spectator's mind, as one watches the objects being exhaustively matched, combined, separated, swapped. Bel seems to be working quite systematically here on a combinatorial system towards exhausting the possibilities of meaning-making and signification. In *Umwelt*, on the other hand, ten (or so) men and women perform a constant and circular walk in-

between vertical panels which are set-up in a row closer to the back wall of the stage, leaving equal gaps between them. The performers appear and disappear as they walk in a steady rhythm in-between the panels, dressed in different sorts of clothing, holding various kinds of objects and in different relationships to each other. One gains a sense that this might be a perpetual parade based on a series of combinations and variations of people, props, and images. As Marin explains, this kind of choreography is entirely generated by a system based on polyrhythmic patterns, which are in turn combined using mathematical permutations of multiplication and repetition (Ricoux, 2006: 14). What is interesting is that, despite the madness and obsession which lies at the heart of such processes (for the one who engages in them, but also potentially for the spectator watching the combinations being exhausted), Marin admits that she finds pleasure in applying combinatorial procedures to her own work, given that, after all, the process of working through possibilities never actually seems to exhaust them; rather, for her it opens up new possibilities, without ever marking them out, or resolving them. One creates the possible, as Deleuze would say, just as one realises it. Hence, *Umwelt* keeps going, until the thread which has been unwinding between two spools during the performance finally becomes entirely unwound: 'The piece is not resolved. It just has to stop eventually' (Marin, cited in Ricoux, 2006: 14).

Can we think then of these choreographers of exhaustion – or, exhaustive choreographers, in the sense of choreographers who attempt to exhaust all possibilities through combinatorial patterns – as tending towards exhaustion (in the sense of becoming themselves exhausted) at the same time? Or, would there be a way for them to avoid exhaustion, in order to maintain their ability to possibilise? Is this even desirable? A return to Lepecki's points on the exhausted dancer and/or choreographer are pertinent here; I shall refer this time to Michal Sapir's review of *Exhausting Dance* for *Dance Theatre Journal* (see Sapir, 2006: 49-50), and in particular to a passage which sounds somewhat ironic, but also slightly amusing in the way the writer approaches the exhausted and exhaustive subject:

These performers seem to take the fashionable complaint 'everything has already been done before' personally: it's as if this everything has been done *by them* [my emphasis], and now they are totally exhausted, can hardly move a muscle. So they sit there at their desk and present a slideshow, or stand around taking off layers of branded shirts, or just about balance for 30 minutes on their toes, trembling with effort and frustration. These performers exhaust the possibilities of choreographic technology, taking it to its logical confusion [...]. But they also exhaust choreographed movement in order to use it all up and be done with it, and start moving in alternative ways. The task they define for themselves is to find the energy to go on.

(ibid: 49-50).

It is in this last claim, namely the 'going on', that the exhaustive *and* exhausted person stumbles upon. On the one hand, then, one remembers the lines 'you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on', from *The Unnameable* (see Beckett, 1994[1958]: 418), which seem like the eternal Beckettian character's curse (an existential one, one may dare say). On the other hand, we might also think of the situation in which the contemporary choreographer finds himself/herself today: no matter how exhausted one feels, or how much they think they have exhausted movement, the imperative remains 'to go on'. In fact, it seems that complete exhaustion never takes place; rather, what remains is tiredness. And so, as choreographers, we might need to admit that, actually, we have not yet exhausted movement; neither have we exhausted modernity; we have not yet exhausted the market, as we have not yet exhausted our strategies of exhaustion. And this is why and how we still move, still make and perform choreographic works; this is why we still watch and discuss; this is why we still teach, still learn, still write. Following Deleuze, this is why, on the one hand, we seem to suffer under the impression that we might be exhausted, and that there is nothing further to realise, or, more specifically, that we can no longer realise dance; yet, on the other hand, possibility remains at our disposal, and so our obligation becomes to keep going, to create possibility as we realise it, to invent the new perhaps, or, in other words, to possibilise.

Might it be more helpful then to return to the concept of tiredness or fatigue, and use that, rather than exhaustion, in discussing the current situation in contemporary choreographic practice? Are the symptoms of fatigue more similar to what we are noticing and experiencing as choreographers and writers? If complete exhaustion never takes place, could fatigue be proposed as a catalyser for change, or a condition which instigates (or guarantees) the 'going on', given the possibility which remains and seeks our attention even while (or precisely as) we remain 'tired'?

I turn again to Steven Connor, and his essay 'Chronic Fatigue', in which the author discusses the notion of fatigue as an alternative to that of exhaustion. Interestingly, Connor begins by showing how fatigue is more appropriate when one speaks of performance practices: If it is true, he proposes, that performance is 'unthinkable without energetics', and so is therefore always 'labour-intensive, requiring the gathering of resources, and the training for what will always be an expenditure of effort', then, undoubtedly, '[a]ll this seems to make it apt for performance to inhabit the phenomenology of fatigue, since it cannot in any case not' (Connor, 2003: [online]). Indeed, this claim could not be of more relevance to dance practice, which is

traditionally and quite particularly premised upon 'sweaty bodies' and physical exertion, as seen earlier. These bodies remain constantly tired, in a state of fatigue, but never get exhausted; precisely because their task is 'to keep going'.

Additionally, for Connor, fatigue holds within it a greater political potential than exhaustion, certainly within the field of performance, but also, one could imagine, in more general terms. Connor's argument unfolds, following Deleuze, on the assertion that exhaustion promises and belongs to finality (or leads to a sort of end-point), whereas fatigue is always and in its essence chronic, always partial, always missing an absolute opposite. Therefore,

[e]xhaustion means the elimination of choice and possibility; but there is something voracious and appetitive in this elimination. Exhaustive logic is logic that systematically goes through all the permutations of a solution to a problem in order to exclude them all. Fatigue, by contrast, remains open, just about, to every possibility. That's why fatigue is so strong – and so *tiring*.
(Connor, 2003: [online]).

Through fatigue then, and not through exhaustion, one might arrive at the seemingly desirable, but also extremely tiring (precisely because it is not exhausting), notion of possibilising. One can possibilise as long as one remains tired, because only then do they remain themselves open, 'just about, to every possibility'. Connor, therefore, also sees in fatigue a certain sense of self-limit or holding-back, against exhaustion, against the elimination of choice and possibility, as he writes it in the passage above. To sum up his point, it seems clear that a cultural phenomenology of fatigue can indeed be offered not 'as a function of how strenuously and exhaustively we have geared ourselves up for and gone in for it'; rather, as 'the pursuit of ever greater reserves of never-expiring energy' (ibid).²⁰

It is here then that a new kind of thinking could emerge for dance too. What we might be making a case for now is not just dance's dissociation from (or reconnection to) movement, neither its exclusion from the project of modernity (following the exhaustion of movement, or with a view to avoiding physical exhaustion). Rather, we are now in the sphere of the possible, in the way Deleuze means it, where our task is that of possibilising. This is a task of giving the possible a reality that is proper to it; or, in choreographic terms, of finding what it might mean to construct the dance-possible. This is not then a case of actualising the possible in order to exhaust it; nor does it

²⁰ Within the context of the 'Civic Centre' event, Connor also makes a case here for 'a politics able to bear with a kind of weary thought, a thought weary of cruelty, war, pride, exhaustion, extermination and ordeal', which he presents as a proposition of a kind of 'negative politics' (see Connor, 2003: [online]).

concern a process of locating the possible (or, even, the impossible) and striving to realise it until exhaustion. Rather, it is a task of possibilising, in the sense of creating the possible, of staying open to all possibilities, just about. Here, we hold back, we pace ourselves, we resist exhaustion, even as we realise the possible; that is, we create possibility even as we realise it.²¹

To draw this discussion to a close, and if one were to use both the notion of fatigue, as proposed by Connor, and Deleuze's notions of possibilising and of the possible, in order to respond to the phenomenon of exhausting dance, as discussed by Lepecki at the outset of this piece of writing, then the following two concluding propositions could be made:

Firstly, that fatigue, rather than exhaustion, might be a more appropriate term to use for certain kinds of practices which might seek to engage in possibilising dance. Fatigue, after all, seems to be a concept which appears as much more aligned with what Lepecki refers to in the concluding chapter of *Exhausting Dance* as a sense of 'expanded present'. This is in turn a concept which Lepecki finds in Henri Bergson's writings, and which puts forward the idea of a multiplication of presents which produces nothing but contemplation (Lepecki, 2006: 129-130). To which Deleuze would add, as Lepecki himself notes too: '[F]atigue is a real component of contemplation. It is correctly said that those who do nothing tire themselves most' (Deleuze, 1994[1968]: 98, also cited in Lepecki, 2006: 130). And hence, possibilising dance in a state of fatigue might also suggest a connection of choreographic practices to a certain idea of contemplation or thinking, the kind of tiring thinking which seeks to remain open to all possibilities.

²¹ Another point which Deleuze makes, in *Difference and Repetition* (1994[1968]), concerns the distinction between the possible and the virtual in the way each relates to reality, or the real. For Deleuze, the possible, on the one hand, is opposed to the real, so that 'the process undergone by the possible is therefore a "realisation"', while the virtual, on the other hand, is not opposed to the real, but 'possesses a full reality of itself', so that '[t]he process it undergoes is that of actualisation' (ibid: 263). Hence, Deleuze continues, 'to the extent that the possible is open to "realisation", it is understood as an image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible' (ibid). For a further understanding of this distinction, I suggest Todd May's interpretation of the two terms, in an essay where he discusses the different approaches of Deleuze and Badiou towards the One and the Many. As May understands it, the possible, on the one hand, might be defined in Deleuze as that which resembles the real, but is not real, because it is not actualised. It is hence the real, 'minus its character of actually existing' (May, 2004: 70). The virtual on the other hand differs from the possible in two ways: firstly, it is indeed real, it exists; and, secondly, it does not resemble the actual in the way that the possible resembles the real; and this is because when the virtual is actualized, such actualisation does not concern the bringing into existence of a possibility (which existed as image before), but rather an expression of something which does not resemble the real. Hence Deleuze's proposition of the actualization (of the virtual) as 'genuine creation' (1994[1968]: 264), rather than as a pre-existing possibility, which goes on to materialise.

Secondly, then, that to claim back fatigue in dance, as a way of also claiming a space for contemplation or thinking in choreography, could probably suggest 'doing nothing'. This would remind us in turn of Deleuze's statement on the combinatorial, that one realises nothing, even if one seems to be accomplishing something; so that, one is not passive, one is active, but for nothing. Hence, claiming a space for thinking could presuppose a clear distinction between possibilising dance (through tiring thinking), and doing dance (or actualising dancing, as Deleuze would say²²). It is here then that the concept of choreo-thinking emerges, precisely where the need is noticed for a practice of possibilising dance as a form of doing which seeks to construct the dance-possible. On the one hand, then, possibilising dance appears as a tiring practice of contemplation, of imagining or thinking; a mode of doing which allows dancing to hover in fatigue. On the other hand, though, what remains is the necessity to identify how not only thinking (or writing) but also choreographic practice (in the sense of performance-making) might participate in such a project of possibilising dance. Moreover, how, given the nature of this research project as practice-based, the relationship of theoretical contemplation (or choreo-thinking) to practices of staging performance might evolve as part of a process which seeks to construct the dance-possible.

The way the rest of this goes...

Following my introductory exploration of the concepts of fatigue, exhaustion, possibilising and the possible within the context of contemporary dance practices and writing, in Section II, which follows, I address the specific methodological problems that occur in this project, given its central task of 'possibilising dance', or of claiming a space for thinking in choreography, as a response to the contemporary phenomenon of 'exhausting dance'. Here, I particularly focus on two issues: firstly, the paradox of attempting to carry out a practice-based project which makes a case for what seem like practices of 'thinking' or 'contemplation' – practices of '*non*-actualising', one could suggest, as opposed to practices where 'doing' (or, indeed, 'performing') seem to be the primary focus; and, secondly, the challenge of dealing with the notion of contemporaneity, through a project that expands in time, and which therefore produces and discusses contemporary artefacts, but always at a time when they have become already 'past' (and have therefore potentially missed the moment of dialogue with their own contemporary). It is by engaging with such issues, then, that I will situate this

²² See footnote 21, p. 22.

project within the contemporary dance scene, in order to further unpack the notion of contemporaneity and to propose contemporary practice as a series of encounters.

In Section III, I attempt to reveal the way in which this research project developed, the different forms the practice within it took, and therefore also the different ways in which it implicated the choreographer-researcher as it unfolded. This I do in a linear sort of fashion, almost like narrating a story; or, rather, more like attempting to find a narrative thread that weaves through the four different stories I narrate, which I consider as reflecting on the multiple strands through which the project gradually grew. Hence, the practice narrated here does not concern only the making of performances, but other types of activities too, as these framed my understanding of the critical issues of possibilising and of the contemporary, which lie at the heart of my research enquiry. The aim here is a double one: firstly, to reveal the multi-layered (and messy) nature of the sort of practice which lies at the heart of an organised document such as this one, so as to allow the reader to make connections between the structured theoretical discussion pursued here and the specific and often scattered moments of practice which have led to different theoretical enquiries; and, secondly, to offer the reader a sense of the way in which practice has served throughout this project both as a tool through which to identify and explore theoretical questions, and as a link with the contemporary dance scene, by which I mean that field of encounters in which and through which artistic practice is questioned and developed. Hence storytelling is offered here as an event of writing, an opportunity for an encounter – this time an encounter between the writer and the reader – which operates as a form of (writing) practice itself; or, it could be seen as the outcome of a multi-layered practice which developed through its own sense of ‘continuity’ and ‘futuraity’, as I will argue, following Susan Melrose.

While Section III, then, aims at tracing some of my theoretical concerns back to specific moments or encounters in practice, in Section IV, I (re)introduce the choreographer and discuss choreography as writing, in order to then propose an alternative practice of choreo-thinking. Following Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, I suggest that in order to pursue this kind of thinking, I need to withdraw from my usual ‘doing’ as a choreographer and to relocate someplace else. I therefore propose a rethinking of the theatre stage, where my doing usually takes place, as the board of a board game, which might offer in turn new ways of imagining, or thinking through, the space of the dance-possible.

In Section V, then, I embark on a series of tasks in writing, whose aim is to reveal a practice of choreo-thinking as it attempts to construct or imagine the space of the dance-possible. This takes the form of a journey of thought, from the theatre stage to the board of a board game. Throughout the pages of this section, the writing does not seek to explain a studio-based practice, to articulate or justify any performance-making decision, or to necessarily reveal the logic of a performance piece (even though it is expected that at this point the reader will have probably started to draw connections between this written thesis and the choreographed works presented as part of this project, which the reader will have seen either live or on the DVDs – see below). Rather, as hinted at earlier, I consider these written tasks as one more sort of doing, a research practice as well as an outcome, in which I have engaged in the same (creative, I would hope) way in which I engaged with any other kind of practice involved in this project. Hence the practice of writing (in this particular section, but also in the thesis as a whole) has often sought for and followed its own rules of construction, within a specific set-up, and led by its own particular aims and objectives. The question of how such a writing practice (or choreo-thinking) might fold back into performance-making is then addressed in the concluding Section VI, where I also return from the game board to the theatre stage and I briefly revisit the question of dance and politics, as this has been raised, following Lepecki, in the previous pages of this Introduction.

Apart from the way in which it appears in writing, for the reader of this thesis practice ideally features here as live performance as well. It is imagined, in other words, that the reader might have had a chance to see live the performance piece *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]*, a solo choreographed for performer Susanna Recchia, and performed for examination purposes towards the end of this project. Otherwise, the reader is invited to watch the edited video of that performance on DVD 2, which is attached to the end of this thesis as Appendix II. Inevitably, the encounter between performer and spectator in the live event cannot in any way be compared to the encounter the viewer of the DVD might experience with the video recording of the piece. For both the reader who might have seen the piece live, and for the one who did not, I have included on DVD 2 a recording of the piece as it was performed in The Michaelis Theatre at Roehampton University on 29th April 2009, as part of my PhD examination, as well as another performance of the work at the Kikker Theater in Utrecht, as part of the Springdance Festival, on 23rd April 2009. It is suggested that the two recordings might help the reader, whether they have seen a live performance of the piece or not, to better understand the nature of the work as a semi-improvised / semi-set piece, which operates as an open score; this is a choreography, as I like to think of it, which

comprises of both written rules (i.e. the score), which the performer reads from visible pieces of paper onstage, as well as unwritten ones, which are shared and have been collected throughout years of collaboration between myself and Recchia.²³

Furthermore, performance practice appears in this thesis through documentation of other works choreographed as part of this project. These are three performance pieces that were presented publicly, often more than once and/or in more than one version, in London as well as other cities of the UK. Here, I have not always chosen to offer recordings of the whole work, but also edited shorter video clips or a photographic slideshow accompanied by sound, depending on the piece, so as to exemplify the specific concerns and conditions of practice in each case. To the extent that I consider the performances of those works as past encounters that took place between specific performers and specific audiences, I therefore do not expect that the reader who will view this material on DVD 1 (Appendix I) will be able to gain a complete sense of that encounter through the documentation²⁴; instead, this DVD is included here as evidence of certain activities which happened, and which have served as one of the diverse routes through which I arrived at the propositions I am making with this project.²⁵

Finally, it should be said that, whereas major sections of this writing do not refer to my performance-making practice directly, the reader is invited to interrupt their experience of reading this text and to engage with the material on the DVDs, not only at points where I invite them to do so, but at other moments too when this might feel appropriate while reading. Hence, throughout the rest of this writing, instances of practice, which have informed my writing, will return here from different moments in time, both through my own accounts of practice and through documented material. In this way, the thesis will reflect on or respond to various, distinct, multi-modal, but also multi-temporal processes and encounters that have all formed significant parts of this project, sometimes in obvious and sometimes in more indirect ways.

²³ In fact, the final four tasks of Section V are similarly presented as principles of performance, which frame this as well as other past works of this project, and which can be thought of as accompanying the written tasks or instructions I usually offer the performer(s) in the form of a performance score.

²⁴ For a relevant discussion on the ontology of the live event versus mediated performance, see Phelan (1993) and Auslander (1999), and for a discussion on the subsequent issues that emerge for documentation in practice-based research, see Lycouris (2000), Rye (2003) and Ellis (2005).

²⁵ The works on DVD 1 will be discussed in Story #1, Section III, while DVD 2 links more to the discussion of Section V (as explained above, footnote 23). For some further thoughts accompanying the DVDs, I guide the reader to Section VII, which follows the conclusion of this thesis in the form of a postscript; this short essay is an expanded version of the text that was handed out to the audience of *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]* at Roehampton University, and which briefly (re-)frames the choreographed pieces on the DVDs in relation to my project as a whole.

II. Questions of method and context

We have seen in Section I that a route towards possibilising might open up for dance whilst the choreographer hovers in a state of fatigue; this is when, supposedly, however tired, s/he manages to keep open to all possibilities, *just about*, as pointed out by Steven Connor (2003: [online]). Furthermore, it has been proposed that it is through the so-called activity of 'choreo-thinking' – in the sense of a sort of doing which is not dissimilar to contemplation, or pure imagining – that possibilising might be pursued from within this state of fatigue. But let us remember here, as well, that such possibilising through choreo-thinking has been proposed specifically as a response to the contemporary phenomenon of exhausting dance, which in turn has led to the need for a new breath in dance, a sort of renewal that will allow dance to 'keep going'. What needs to be addressed at this point, then, is the slight paradox that perhaps emerges between the idea itself of thinking, or contemplation, as a doing which resists actualisation, and that of possibilising as a way of ensuring that one 'goes on' in practice. In particular, two questions occur in relation to the nature and purpose of the (choreographic) practice within a project like this, which seeks to claim a space for thinking in choreography: Firstly, how might practice understand itself within (or against) contemplation as non-actualisation, or as a not-doing of dance? Secondly, how does practice respond to exhaustion as a phenomenon directly linked to contemporaneity and, therefore, how could it be placed within the context of its own contemporary?

Singular practice within (or against) general context

Not just an event: *this* event. *This* event is its own everything, its own happening, a singularity.

(Massumi, 2002: xxvii, his emphasis).

I would like to propose that the task of addressing the questions above emerges here as one of examining the singular (practice) against general context(s), in the sense that these notions appear in the writings of Susan Melrose (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a). Amongst others, Melrose poses a series of questions about the relationship between writing on performance and what she calls 'mixed-mode' and 'multi-participant' performance practices, which expand across different artistic disciplines and might

involve a number of collaborating artists respectively (2006a: 125). While on the one hand, then, she regards theorists/writers as expert-spectators, in the sense of academics who write from the point of view of the spectator (rather than that of the artist as doer), on the other hand she is primarily concerned with the ways in which theorising might also be happening by artists themselves as expert-practitioners, especially within collaborative contexts (2005b). Hence, she often stresses the notion of the singular (or 'collective individual') expert signature(s) behind artistic practice, and is particularly interested in understanding the modes and operations of the economy that guides art-making processes as 'professional singularities' (2005a: [online]). After all, Melrose considers this as a significantly different economy to that of (academic) writing on or about performance, and often speaks of 'a lack of fit between *two complex economies of practice* [her emphasis]' (2003: [online]); a lack of fit, that is, between the economy of performance-*writing* and that of performance-*making*. While the former is a post-event writing *about*, the latter is conceived as the 'emergent event' itself. Hence, the act of theorising performance (as event) in writing is concerned with 'work already made' and involves a 'looking backwards'. On the contrary, professional artistic practice, which is concerned with the making of work, and all the theorising that might be happening as part of that, evolve within an 'intermix of *continuity with futurity*' (Melrose, 2006a: 126, her emphasis). This is because the artist looks forward with curiosity, as Melrose claims, not necessarily with a view to producing something new, but certainly with a desire to facilitate 'the emergence of something not yet seen but recognised, something both continuous with, and judged to be *better* than, the already-seen' (ibid, her emphasis).

Essentially, in many of her writings on ideas such as the above, Melrose adopts Brian Massumi's theorisation of 'the event'. This allows her to outline possible ways in which performance (as event) enters and participates in the specific knowledge economy – or, 'knowledge complexity', to use her own phrasing – that we might broadly term as 'performance studies' within academic institutions (and which could be expanded, for the purposes of my research interests here, to include the field of 'dance studies', given that my thesis seeks a dialogue with this particular set of discourses too). In fact, in what follows, I will be returning to my understanding of 'the event', as proposed not only by Massumi (2002), but also by Alain Badiou (2001). Throughout this discussion, Melrose's proposition, following Massumi, that the event – any kind of event – is *singular*, will be of particular relevance. 'There is no general event', Massumi points out, no 'general conditions of the event'; '[t]here is only *this* event' (2002, cited in

Melrose, 2005a: [online]). In fact, elsewhere he describes the event as a 'fall-out', an 'accident', an 'anomaly', which is

not reducible to a particular thing or state of things belonging, according to a logic of resemblance, to a general type. It is not defined by what it shares with others of a kind. It is a self-defining field. It belongs only to its own field conditions of anomaly.

(Massumi, 2002: xxvii).

If we accept this proposition of considering choreographic practice and performance as having such an (accidental) evental nature, we might also therefore understand the practice in this project as a singularity, an 'occurrence' (ibid: xxvii-xxviii), framed by its particular field of conditions, not necessarily resembling other types of practice, and hence also not easily classifiable as belonging to a general type, according to which one would know how to approach or discuss it theoretically and/or in writing. What is required hence in this case is an extra attention to the parameters or the particular 'field conditions' of *this* practice. We return thus to the idea of the contemporary, as framing an occurrence; we discover, in other words, the nature of practice here not only as event, but also possibly as always somehow contemporary. The question then is how *this* (anomalous) artistic practice is contemporary. What are its specific (contemporary) field conditions? Moreover, how does the contemporary frame, define, support, necessitate, or potentially undermine, such practice's relationship to the ideas of the dance-possible and choreo-thinking? Finally, could the proposition of possibilising dance lead to a new understanding of the relationship between (contemporary) performance practice and theoretical writing?

Stumble #1: On non-actualisation and 'the event'

At this stage, the reader might have already noticed a certain kind of resistance so far on my part to discuss actual instances of my practice and/or specific works that I have choreographed and presented as part of this project. As if those events have not been able to enter the flow of this writing, or interact with these written pages, not even in the form of a short reference, a description or analysis based on experience and memory. As if the dance, whatever dance, stopped as soon as I attempted to approach the idea of possibilising dance; or, perhaps, as if the dance has kept happening, but elsewhere, far from the dance-possible as it [the dance-possible] has been pursued in this writing. In a sense, and if one of my concerns here is to keep going in dance, despite exhaustion, I nevertheless find myself non-actualising dance; which is to say, I get

closer to possibilising dance only in writing, and by not quite yet allowing dance to feature here as a *dance*. Is it the case, then, that as soon as dance becomes actualised as event, it simultaneously loses its place within the dance-possible? How can I grasp and/or retain the dance-possible *in practice*? Or could I not, by definition? Which is to say, is the idea of possibilising dance inextricably linked to a thinking which can only find its form of presentation in writing, on the page rather than the stage? After all, the way in which it initially emerged as a concept here has indeed been through an engagement with theoretical sources and written discourse, particularly the writings of Lepecki, Deleuze and Connor (as seen in Section I). How then is (my) performance-making practice to enter this discussion?

I will actually for the moment keep resisting the option of allowing my own practice to appear here, as a conscious strategy through which to also resist the acceptance of two hypotheses, which could indeed be assumed in practice-based research projects: firstly, that it is clearly possible, if not completely uncomplicated, to incorporate the experience of one's own artistic practice within theoretical discussion and, vice versa, to integrate an understanding of theory within such a practice; and, secondly, that this kind of integration is primarily what the practice-based researcher aims to achieve, as both artist and academic (potentially), often by discussing their own work in writing and, equally, by projecting, using and/or demonstrating a theoretical thinking in and through their performance work. My intention here is not necessarily to go against such options, more so to show that this way of speaking about the relationship between theory and practice, or between writing and performance, might be not only generalising, but also quite inappropriate or inadequate within this context. In fact, it is only by questioning even the basic premise of practice-based research that we might be able to pinpoint some of the specificities of the problem within this particular project.

I will start with a short detour into another choreographer's practice, which is, unsurprisingly perhaps, Jérôme Bel again, given his reputation as someone who indeed occupies the stage as an expert-practitioner, in Melrose's terms, but still chooses not to present dance as he does so; instead, as we shall see, he 'speaks theory' to the extent that we could wonder, I suppose, why he does not collect all the theoretical thinking that he speaks onstage in a written thesis to be awarded with a practice-based research degree. One could argue, after all, that this is precisely why Bel is a favourite of theorists and research students: because of the fact that the theoretical basis of his work is already provided by the choreographer himself; it is as if he has made the connection with theory for us, he has created the discourse and has

already directed us towards the theoretical discussion that could be had on his work. This time, then, I am not so much interested in the 'non-actualisation' of dance that happens in any performance of his, where Bel subverts our expectations of wanting to see 'dance steps' on stage, by presenting us with something 'other than dance', but in his talks and lecture demonstrations, where it is known to us that what we have paid our ticket for is specifically this: to see and hear the choreographer himself speak about his work, whether that is a particular piece of his, or his choreographic work and thinking on the whole. As claimed earlier, after all, especially with Bel, these kinds of talks (or *events*) seem to belong to his oeuvre as much as any other performance of his. In fact, the reason I invoke Jérôme Bel again here is precisely in order to show that, despite appearances, not only does the expert-practitioner here *not* practice a theoretical discussion of dance which could (or could not) imply a non-actualisation of dance, but moreover he hints at the impossibility of him ever achieving that. In a way, what Bel's example will prove to some extent is the problematic, or at least puzzling relationship of the event to theoretical discourse, which in this project translates into a problematic relationship between performance-making practice and the idea of possibilising dance as a not-doing (or non-actualisation) of dance.

In particular, I would like to focus on the talk/event that was offered *instead of* Bel's 1998 piece *The Last Performance*, as part of the season called 'Jérôme Bel Showtime', which took place at Sadler's Wells in London (February 2008) and included his works between 1995-2005.²⁶ Instead of the actual work, Bel presented a lecture demonstration on *The Last Performance* – and, indeed, this is how the evening was advertised – consisting of a talk intersected with sections from another piece of his, *Shirtology* (1997), which was performed live in-between his speaking. What is of particular interest here is the explanation Bel gave to the audience about why this piece had become a lecture and was not touring as a performance anymore. On the one hand, then, this is because *The Last Performance* was, according to Bel, an unsuccessful performance piece, in the sense that it did not work with the public: people got bored throughout it, did not understand it, and often left the theatre in the middle of the show. On the other hand, it was because, as Bel admitted, he still thought the ideas that had inspired the work were crucial to his thinking and work overall, and so he hoped that these ideas could potentially be interesting for an audience, if only he

²⁶ Interestingly, *The Last Performance* (1998) is one of Bel's most written about works by scholars, as well as a favourite of PhD students, as the choreographer himself informed the audience in a public discussion with Jonathan Burrows which concluded the season at Sadler's Wells (see Bel & Burrows, 2008). And this is exactly the piece Bel has also decided not to tour anymore, but to present as a lecture demonstration in festivals and venues who ask for the original piece.

could communicate them in a different format; hence he chose the set-up of what he calls a lecture demonstration.

On the most part, Bel's talk evolved around issues related to the role/death/function of the author and the role/birth/function of the audience, as proposed by Roland Barthes ('The Death of the Author', 1977[1968]) and Michel Foucault ('What is an Author?', 1984[1969]). He also at some point discussed the nature or ontology of performance as an art of (re)presentation which resists reproduction, following Peggy Phelan ('The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction', 1993). He then claimed, contrary perhaps to what one would expect a choreographer to say, that some ideas, such as the above, are better told in words rather than through (choreographed) performance. Unexpectedly, I say, because it is more often that I have heard choreographers arguing about the opposite: that some things are better told in movement or choreography than through words, and that this is precisely the role of dance, to tell things (in dance) that cannot be told otherwise. Even so, I suggest that this is not the only issue at stake here; rather, as Jérôme Bel talks, there are a couple of other things that perhaps we do not become aware of in the first instance, and which are of particular interest here.

Firstly, and although I have only seen *The Last Performance* recorded on video, it does not seem to me that this work was ever *about the theoretical ideas* that Bel discussed in his talk. If I were to describe the piece to someone, I would probably say that it is a piece based on a sequence such as this: performers appear on stage one by one, only to introduce themselves, as Jérôme Bel, Susanne Linke, Andre Agassi, Hamlet or Calvin Klein, for example, and then perform something ranging from a one-minute stillness timed by the performer, or the iteration of the phrase 'to be or not to be', to a short game of tennis, or a short dance, depending on who they have previously introduced themselves as. So, for example, if the performer appears on stage wearing a tennis player's outfit, and tells us 'I am Andre Agassi', then they play a bit of tennis against the back wall of the stage; if they appear wearing a white silk night gown and introduce themselves as Susanne Linke, then they perform a dance by Susanne Linke; and so on and so forth. Costumes, declarations (starting with the phrase 'I am' and followed by a proper name such as the above), and subsequent acted-out sequences of utterances and movements, all gradually get combined in different ways (see 'the combinatorial', as discussed in Section I), so that the audience is given more and more combinations and possible variations of combinations on the existing elements (or variables). It is all a game of establishing and then gradually destabilising what Lepecki

terms as 'layered connections between self and body, identity and body-image, being and its social surface' (Lepecki, 2000 [online]). Given such a framework, it could be claimed that the interplay between names, identities, cultural signs, appearances and actions, provides rich material for discussion, especially alongside Barthes and Foucault's essays on authorship. Similarly, the display of citation, in the form of re-enacted material, whether dance material (Linke) or other (Agassi), as well as its re-appearance in performance, each time in a slightly altered way, certainly foreground issues of copying, difference and repetition – other favourites of Jérôme Bel – and potentially persuade us about the impossibility of reproducing 'the live (performance)', which would bring us back to Phelan as discussed by Bel in his talk.

On the one hand, however, it does not seem to me that *The Last Performance* is a representation of those theoretical ideas on stage; nor is it a translation of theoretical ideas into performance. In other words, this is not a case of a choreographer reading Barthes and then creating a work as a response to the theoretical ideas they found in the text. And, on the other hand, I would like to tentatively suggest that an ordinary (non-theorist or non-academic) audience member might have seen a few more, or less, but certainly to a certain degree *other* things in *The Last Performance*, than those issues brought up by Bel in his talk; or, let us at least say that their experience of the work would have probably been entirely different altogether to one described as an appreciation of particular theoretical thinking, such as the one referred to above, which supposedly inspired the work. Surely, the simplicity of the piece's structure and the humour with which it teases the audience as more and more Linkes and Agassis appear on stage, and even the pure skill involved in playing tennis alone against the back wall of a theatre, or in re-enacting a solo by Susanna Linke with such care and exactitude as it is performed in *The Last Performance*, are only two of the things that struck me when seeing the work on DVD, which Bel, for example, did not choose to touch upon in his lecture. Of course, the lecture performance works for Bel as a format through which to speak about theoretical ideas that have struck him, and which may have influenced his thinking and making process for *The Last Performance*. However, this lecture demonstration does not stand *in place* of the performance; because, in the end, what it achieves is certainly not to tell us what the original piece used to tell us only in another medium, but, rather, to tell something of its own. One could say that this lecture performance operates within its particular field conditions, to echo Massumi, and so, to say that it is just a more appropriate format in which to say what a performance piece failed to say seems to be an amusing, yet very simplifying explanation of its operations and overall purpose.

To come to the second point I would like to make, and to understand what the lecture demonstration might actually be saying or doing, I return to Melrose's writings and, in particular, to her proposition that it is often through the perspective and powerful position of the expert-spectator that academics usually theorise performance work. Could we claim, in this sense, that Bel is assuming a similar kind of position in his talk, despite being the choreographer (expert-practitioner) of the original work? Which is to say, by looking back at his own work, the readings, ideas and thinking processes that informed the creation of *The Last Performance*, is he rehearsing a 'looking back', instead of operating within continuity and futurity? I would suggest that, indeed, this is what he *seems* to be doing. Certainly, this is what he is *staging*: a post-event looking-back, from the point of view of the theorist, or expert-spectator, who attempts to fill in the gaps that were left open or vague, or became confusing, for audiences of the original piece. But notice the emphasis I put on the words 'seems' and 'staging'. What we are being presented with here I would describe more in terms of 'a concealed expert-spectator'. Not only does Bel sell this evening as a lecture performance, rather than an ordinary show; not only does he provide us with convincing arguments as to the reasons he has chosen to do so, which involve a catchy story about an unsuccessful, boring show; what is more, we sit in the auditorium and listen to him speaking about theory in an informative, yet at the same time entertaining way, as if we are invited to discover the magic of certain concepts with him, so that we somehow 'buy into' his proposition that what he is doing is *just* revealing to us theoretical ideas that inspired a 'missing' show – at least, I do.

But look again, and what we see is that the most powerful operation going on here is this: Jérôme Bel taking the stage to perform that specific persona that Bauer has described, the one wearing the pink buttoned down shirt with the orange undershirt, trendy shoes and comfortable loose trousers; the one looking troubled and doing playful gestures, smiling and laughing as if surprised by his own words as he speaks (Bauer, 2008b: 46). And so, while to begin with it seems that this lecture is just the way in which Bel has chosen to articulate the theoretical thinking 'behind' the creation of an older work, in fact he is using this as a different sort of opportunity to perform; he is choreographing a new work. He is still appearing on and creating for the stage, and therefore he is still operating in the modality of *performance-making*. The content of the talk and the decision not to present the work – even though at some point he does present a few excerpts from a performance of the work on video – might trick us into perceiving this event as a non-actualisation, a non-performance, an expert-spectator's

looking-back or thinking on performance. However, as soon as the persona of Jérôme Bel appears so carefully choreographed, *onstage*, we are already dealing with nothing other than, indeed, an actualised instance of performance.

In fact, as mentioned above, it might also appear as if Bel's decision to present a lecture demonstration raises questions concerning the relationship between theory and performance practice, and the (in)capability of one to translate into the other; or, questions regarding the specificity, the aims and the limits of certain thinking or ideas and the way in which they work (or do not work) in practice and in theory. In truth, such issues are certainly raised by Bel, but not from his decision to talk about Barthes and Phelan, instead of performing 'them' (as if this is what he was doing); but, rather, because in the end we see that he cannot escape performance even when he supposedly 'speaks theory'. A pure reference to theoretical material, in other words, does not guarantee a shift into a different mode of operation. Bel's performance seems so carefully thought-through, his stage-persona so purposefully *constructed*, that the whole event of his lecture performance clearly (and consciously) operates within rules of its own and within a complexity that is specific to it. One could name this a kind of knowledge complexity, or an economy of choreographic practice. In any case, it proves Massumi's point about the event operating within its own field conditions, because as soon as Bel takes up the stage, he is producing the evental and is re-affirming his position as an expert-practitioner, rather than an expert-spectator (regardless of the seemingly theoretical-analytical perspective he adopts – or pretends to adopt – as part of his 'looking-back').

One could go even further and propose that what Bel might be doing from within this position of the expert-practitioner could be perceived as a theorising *in performance*. Again, the theorising here does not refer to the content of his lecture (i.e. the discussion of Barthes, Foucault and Phelan, for example), but to his particular expert-performance itself (which might have something to tell us, for example, about the unavoidable sense of purposeful constructed-ness we perceive in the event of something or someone appearing onstage). And yet, on her side, Melrose is very clear in claiming that expert-practitioners indeed 'might *theorise* [her emphasis] in modes and registers of complex practice which operate wholly or in significant part outside of writing', so that in this case 'the term 'theoretical' might be non-identical with the specific registers of writing through which it is widely articulated' (Melrose, 2005b: [online]). And so, although Melrose herself admits that it is not always easy to identify and describe what we might mean by 'the *already-theoretical status of certain expert or*

signature performance practices' [ibid, her emphasis], it is at least clear that this status is to be sought for or traced inside the performance work, rather than in any accounting of it from the outside, whether that is a piece of writing, or, indeed, a lecture or talk which operates in a 'looking-back' mode, analogous to that of the expert-spectator's writing on performance.²⁷

To return to the project of possibilising dance then, and to draw some connections between what has been said so far and the way in which I have felt the practice operating in this project, I would like to initially make the following points: Firstly, I bring up this discussion precisely because I too have experienced most of the performance practice happening as part of this work as also participating in another knowledge complexity, or another market economy, to that of theoretical writing, which is presented here in the form of a written thesis.²⁸ This is a case then of the practice not having been able to enter the writing, as it were, because its 'speaking' has happened in different terms to the ones used here thus far. And, equally, it would be fair to say that theoretical discourse has not entered the performance practice in a clearly discernible way either, at least not in the sense that Jérôme Bel wanted to persuade us that it did (or wanted to do) in the case of *The Last Performance*. Secondly, though, this is not to say that such a mismatch between the two economies, of making and of writing in this case, has led to the development of performance-making and performance-writing as two entirely separate activities, or that one has not somehow informed the other; on the contrary, it is to stress that the relationship between the two has been *of a different nature* to the one often assumed when we speak of an integration of theory and practice, or when we use terms such as incorporation and interconnectedness to describe how performance-making and theoretical discussion become part of what is called a practice-based or practice-led research project. In order to describe the kind of relationship I propose between the two, then, I would like to revisit the concept of 'the event', as it appears in the thinking of Alain Badiou, and to discuss its relationship to what Badiou calls 'the situation' in particular; this, I suggest, will provide not only a model through which to think the relationship between theory

²⁷ It should also be clarified that the point being made here is not one in favour of what has been named 'performative writing'. My sense is that such writing, even if, or precisely as, it takes place on the page, operates in a mode similar to that of Bel when he takes the stage to speak through theory; it attempts to perform on the page. Here, however, we are concerned firstly with the idea that the practitioner can perhaps theorise only *in practice*, and secondly, as I will show later on, with the proposition that, if the practitioner were to write in some sort of relationship to her own practice, then this relationship would be of a different nature to that often pursued by theorists as expert-spectators (even when they exercise performative writing).

²⁸ A detailed description of what my practice has involved and how it has participated in different markets, so as to respond to aims and purposes different from, or additional to, those of theoretical enquiry, is given through the manifold narrations in Section III.

and practice in general, but also a possible solution to our understanding of how actual performance might relate here to the notion of possibilising dance.

Understandably, for those who know the work of the French philosopher, the decision to draw from his writings in order to address issues of methodology in practice-based research might initially seem like a peculiar move; less so, perhaps, for one who has read his 'Theses on Theater' (in 2005a: 72-77). Here, amongst other suggestions, Badiou presents theatre as 'an eternal and incomplete idea' (ibid: 74). What he names as the '*theatre-idea*', which 'cannot be produced in any other place or by any other means' (other than those of *theatre*), is incomplete for Badiou, because 'as long as it remains in its eternal form the theatre-idea is precisely *not yet* itself. The theatre-idea *comes forth* only in the (brief) time of its performance, of its representation' (ibid: 73). Starting from this proposition, I could perhaps draw parallels between Badiou's 'theatre-idea' and the theoretical thinking pursued here, and therefore also between my performance-making practice and Badiou's performance instance (or moment of representation, which comes forth to complete the theatre-idea), so that staging performance in this project would be seen as completing the theoretical idea of possibilising dance. However, I would like to follow Janelle Reinelt in her proposal that it might be more fruitful to return to Badiou's core philosophical thought on situation and the event, truth and ethics, rather than to use his discourse on art (theatre included), in order to arrive at a richer understanding of the implications of his philosophy for theatre (or dance performance).²⁹ In fact, I turn to Badiou with a specific interest in what Adrian Kear has called the 'architecture' of his thought (Kear, 2004: 100), rather than his thought as applied to the arts. This architecture concerns a structure of interruption, which, as Kear suggests, following Walter Benjamin in his [Benjamin's] writings on epic theatre, is in turn not just a stylistic trick, but rather 'an organising function' (Benjamin,

²⁹ Two specific points that Reinelt raises as problematic in the way Badiou encounters theatre, for example, are the following: 1. Badiou speaks through an understanding of theatre as 'universal', or as an 'impersonal production', an approach which clashes with any attempt to situate theatre within a specific spatio-temporal, socio-political or socio-cultural context, and 2. Badiou exhibits in his writings an insistence on the abstract character of politically progressive art, which, in Reinelt's opinion, often allows him to isolate thought, through the use of a language of cognition, from the complications of the materiality that is theatre (see Reinelt, 2004: 87-88). While Reinelt's argument is strong and persuasive, particularly as she is concerned with a tradition of political theatre of resistance that focuses on the body and the concrete gestures of performers *in situ*, as she says, still I see in Badiou's writings on theatre a proposition for a philosophical thinking on and of theatre, if not a proposition of what could be a new understanding of the political *in theatre*, which could indeed inform *situated* performance practice. In fact, despite the problematic that Reinelt unfolds, I find that Badiou's 'Theses on Theater' also relate to earlier discussions about theatrical dance in the Introduction of this thesis, much more, for example, than his essay 'Dance as a Metaphor for Thought' (also in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 2005a: 57-71), where dance is considered more as an activity of the body (pure danc-ing), rather than as an art form which concerns the creation of works to be presented on stage (i.e. within a theatrical set-up). Certainly, this is one of the main reasons why I choose to focus on his propositions on 'situation' and 'the event', rather than include here an examination of his essay on dance.

cited *ibid*: 99); and it is precisely this sort of organising structure that I borrow from Badiou.³⁰

In order to enter the logic or structure of Badiou's thought then, let us initially think of the event here as inextricably linked to the notion of a situation, or, as Badiou calls it, 'what there is' (2001: 41).³¹ Within the situation of 'what there is', which could be thought of as a pre-existing order, the event occurs as something which happens, and which 'cannot be reduced to its ordinary inscription in "what there is"' (*ibid*). It thus 'brings to pass 'something other' than the [pre-existing] situation, opinions, instituted knowledges' (*ibid*: 67). Conceived as 'a hazardous [*hasardeux*], unpredictable supplement' (*ibid*), the event is the first of three dimensions which constitute Badiou's so-called 'truth process'; the other two, to which I will come back later, are '*fidelity*' and '*truth*'. What becomes clear so far is the two-fold way in which this '*evental [événementiel] supplement*' (*ibid*: 41) is described in terms of what Badiou considers its 'ontological' characteristics: the nature of the event, that is, as both *situated* and *supplementary*, which would hence mean that the event is somehow both connected to and in excess of the situation respectively. The new key term that emerges here, and one through which we can understand this relationship of the event to the situation further, is 'the void':

The event is both *situated* – it is the event of this or that situation – and *supplementary*; thus absolutely detached from, or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation.

[...]

³⁰ It is not by chance, I would suggest, that what interests me in Badiou, and what others have noticed too in his writings, is the structural way in which one could depict his theoretical propositions; this does not concern his style of argumentation, but rather the way in which his theoretical thinking is grounded in mathematical set theory, so that there is a sense in which one can visualise spatially the organisation of the terms he uses. While reading his work, I certainly often found myself sketching his arguments, especially with the use of circles and arrows, which aimed to place the notions he uses in spatial configurations and to depict the dynamic relationship between them. Later on, I found out that Badiou himself also uses a lot of diagrams in his lectures (see, for example, Badiou, 2005b [online]); and, although our diagrams are not quite the same, however they are similar with regards to the types of shapes and arrangements they make use of. Perhaps at this point then I should also mention that I was initially drawn to the work of Alain Badiou through his book *On Beckett* (2003), precisely because here Badiou attempts a structural reading of Beckett's work, rather than one prioritising the existential issues he might be raising, in the way that Martin Esslin has analysed Beckett's work, for example, in *The Theatre of the Absurd* (2001[1961]). What Badiou proposes and examines as 'the Beckett method', or Beckett's '*operations* and '*procedures*' (see also Nina Power and Alberto Toscano's 'Introduction' to *On Beckett*, pp. xi-xxxiv), is what, after all, I would describe as his [Beckett's] specific choreographic staging of bodies and words; and, indeed, as a choreographer who claims she has been significantly influenced by Beckett, I think that it is in Badiou that I possibly found a convincing way to understand how such influence entered and manifested itself in my performance-making and overall thinking discussed here (see also Section III, Story #1).

³¹ My primary source here will be Badiou's own *Ethics* (2001), as well as the unpacking of his terminology by Janelle Reinelt (2004: 87-94) and Adrian Kear (2004: 99-110), in their two respective essays for the issue of *Performance Research* 'On Civility', 9(4), where they discuss Badiou's thinking in relation to theatre practice. In fact, these two writings appear a few pages after Badiou's one-page text for the same issue, titled 'Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Arts' (2004a: 86).

You might then ask what it is that makes the connection between the event and that 'for which' it is an event. This connection is the void [*vide*] of the earlier situation. What does this mean? It means that at the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void, around which is organized the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question.

(ibid: 68, his emphasis).

We might imagine then an ordered or organised situation, with its specific rules, as Badiou mentions, 'composed', as he says elsewhere, 'by the knowledges circulating within it' (ibid: 69). But within such situation we must also then imagine a void, in the sense of the 'the not-known of the situation' (ibid: 69); or, in Reinelt's understanding, 'the inconsistency at the heart of a situation which is included in, while never being known or presented within that situation' (2004: 89). Rather than occurring from outside the situation then, the event comes from within that situation, from a site which is located 'at the edge of its [the situation's] void' (Hallward, cited in Reinelt, ibid: 89). It is the void within the situation which guarantees the occurrence of the event, in the same way that it is the event which 'brings into focus', as Kear suggests (2004: 100), the void of the situation. In this way, the event, which is always unprecedented and unexpected (Reinelt, ibid: 89), becomes 'the starting point [...] of the process by which newness enters the world through its disruption and destabilisation' (Kear, ibid: 100). And this is precisely what lies at the core of the 'architecture' of Badiou's thought: the mechanism through which a pre-existing order is interrupted by, or injected with, the new; an operation by which a 'hole' is punched into the knowledges composing a previously known and established situation, demanding therefore its 'powerful reshaping' (Badiou, 2001: 70-71). As Hallward explains, the event finally ensures 'true innovation'; it is something like the promise of 'a chance to begin again from scratch, interrupt the order of continuity and inevitability' (cited in Reinelt, 2004: 89).

If Badiou then offers something like a method or model through which to conceive the production of the new via interruption, then it is precisely at this point where his thinking becomes relevant to the discussion of exhausting dance and the dance-possible. On the one hand, as we have seen, the idea of possibilising dance, as we hover in a state of fatigue, might ensure that dance does not get exhausted, but might also lead us into a state of contemplation (by way of choreo-thinking) which consumes itself in speculation and does not move into actualising dance (so that it somehow withdraws from choreo-graphing, as we shall see in Section IV). On the other hand, however, by conceiving performance-making practice in the terms that Badiou's event has been described above, we are able to assign a new and significant role to actualised dance

here: as an event, it becomes the interruptive mechanism by which the dance-possible (as a situation composed by the knowledges circulating within it, in Badiou's terms) might destabilise and reshape itself, precisely so that it does not exhaust itself in non-actualisation. Most importantly, actual performance-making practice emerges from within what could be imagined as the situation of the dance-possible in choreo-thinking – from within its 'unknown void', that is – both as an interruptive occurrence and as a necessary supplement to choreo-thinking. The way that performance practice might be able to understand itself therefore within a project of possibilising dance is through a relationship of interruption and destabilisation, but also of necessity within the very idea of the dance-possible. Indeed, and to return to the questions posed at the outset of this section, although it might initially seem as if practice as event is incompatible with a choreo-thinking taking place on the page, it subsequently becomes evident that it is only through the interruptive mechanism of such (stage) practice that choreo-thinking might be able to 'keep going'; performance-making practice as event affirms, as Kear says of Badiou's event in relation to the situation, choreo-thinking's 'ongoing affective potency' (2004: 100).

This proposition then takes us back to the idea of practice as event in the way it has been initially proposed by Melrose, following Massumi, and offers a new understanding of the relationship between theoretical writing and performance practice more broadly within practice-led research. If the singular event in Massumi responds to the particular field conditions of its emergence, similarly, Badiou's event occurs from within the void that exists inside the specific situation of which it is an event. What the concept of the void allows for in this latter case is not only the possibility of acknowledging a 'hole' within the specific knowledge economy of theoretical writing, but also of re-imagining that 'hole' as the place of its (the knowledge economy's) potential renewal. Indeed, the notion of the void as imagined within the knowledge complexity of performance-writing, to go back to Melrose's terms, would even render necessary the interruptive occurrence of performance-making. It is as if performance-making comes to 'bring into focus' the not-known of performance-writing; as if we could imagine that the void in performance-writing is the site of performance-making. And this, to go back to Massumi, is the relationship of the singular (performance) event to its general (theoretical) context or field of conditions.

Given all the above, what is the role then that emerges for the practice-based researcher? How does the expert-practitioner meet the expert-spectator? I would argue that since it is the same researcher who engages in performance-making practice and

in theoretical writing, it is also true that the practice-based researcher finds herself operating in two (if not more) knowledge economies. This, however, does not result in a smooth blending of the two economies into one, or in her embodying of two roles at one and the same time. Rather, it allows for an extra unforeseen possibility, which is none other than a constant renewal of her thought through the potentially constant interruption of the economy of theoretical writing by that of performance-making. Within this logic, the practice-based researcher's responsibility could best be described in Badiou's terms again of 'fidelity' and 'truth' (which are the second and third dimensions respectively of his overall 'truth process', as explained earlier). Fidelity here amounts to an acknowledgment of the rupture or break caused by the event, or, as Badiou writes, 'a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself' (2001: 67), which in turn produces 'truth', in the sense of a forcing of 'new' knowledges (ibid: 70):

An evental fidelity is a real break (both thought and practised) in the specific order within which the event took place (be it political, loving, artistic or scientific...).

I shall call 'truth' (a truth) the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation.

[...]

We shall say that the truth *forces* knowledges. The verb *to force* indicates that since the power of a truth is that of a break, it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy [*l'immediat*] of the situation, or reworks that sort of portable encyclopaedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning.

(Badiou, 2001: 42 and 70, his emphasis).

In the same way that Badiou's subject then is required to rethink and reinvent oneself and one's way of being and of acting within the situation, following the latter's interruption by the event (see Kear, 2004: 101), so could the practice-based researcher embrace a similar task of having to retain a sort of fidelity to whatever shifts or destabilisations occur within the theoretical writing from interruptions caused by performance-making processes (both literally and conceptually). Kear understands Badiou's truth process as an ethics of making based on 'obdurate practices of innovation and invention'; within such a process, the subject's responsibility is to develop and sustain the consequences of the event's break with normality, however that might manifest itself (ibid: 100-101). Within this project, too, then, the researcher's responsibility takes the form of a 'commitment to thinking through the implications of the interruptive emergence of the radically new' (Kear, 2006: 150), which appears precisely at those moments when one knowledge economy disrupts the logic (or focus) of the other, and where the complexities of one practice appear from within the site of

the not-known of the other. In fact, as Badiou would argue, the subject does not pre-exist this process (2001: 43); rather, the subject is ‘the bearer [*le support*] of a fidelity’, so that ‘we might say that the process of truth *induces* a subject’ (ibid). In a similar way, we might conceive of the practice-based researcher as the bearer of the mismatch between the two knowledge economies initially introduced by Melrose, and as the one who also therefore appears only through and because of the particular condition of this mismatch within which she finds herself.

To sum up this section then, I would like to propose that performance-making practice features in this project of possibilising dance in three particular ways: firstly, as belonging to a different economy from that of the theoretical writing, so that it will not be a case here of translating one into the other, precisely because, as we have shown, each emerges within its own field conditions and rules of operation; secondly, as an interrupting and destabilising event, which reinforces the idea of the dance-possible within the theoretical discussion, precisely by working against the non-actualisation that the dance-possible (or a practice of thinking) implies; thirdly, as requiring ‘fidelity’, which I perceive here as a sort of acknowledgment and development of whatever break the practice might cause to the ‘situation’ of the dance-possible imagined by choreo-thinking. Hence this whole process has been one of a constant re-configuration (or reshaping) of the ‘situation’ of theoretical writing through performance-making; a process which in turn, we could claim, is the only one that prevents, precisely, exhaustion. The role of practice therefore has been to constantly ‘shake’ the dance-possible, precisely so that it remains a *dance-possible*.

Stumble #2: On the elusiveness of contemporaneity

[T]o be contemporary is, above all, a matter of courage. [...] [I]t is to be on time at a day that we can only miss.

(Abamben, 2007: [online]³²).

If the relationship of the singular event(s) of performance-making practice to the idea of possibilising dance has been described as one based on the principle of interruption, then what remains is to understand how such practice also relates to the idea of the contemporary, given the set of questions outlined in the beginning of this section. With reference to an essay by Bojana Cvejić (2006a), it was suggested in Section I that it

³² From a talk titled ‘On Contemporaneity’, given by Agamben at the European Graduate School (EGS), in Saas-Fee, Switzerland (see also footnote 33, p. 44).

could be the obsession with contemporaneity which seems to be exhausting dance; the question then is whether the notion of possibilising could be put forward not only as a response to exhausting dance, but also, more specifically, as a way in which to think through, or to overcome, dance's struggle with the contemporary. In what follows, I will therefore attempt to draw a parallel between, on the one hand, the obsession with contemporaneity noticed in the field of choreographic practice which is related to the idea of exhausting dance, and, on the other hand, the effect this phenomenon might have had on, or the way in which it might have informed, my own performance-making practice during this project.

However, the contemporary becomes relevant in this work in another sense too: to the extent that we might understand the contemporary as meaning the simultaneous, the coexistent or coincident, it could also then concern that specific moment of performance, thought of as the shared time of the encounter between performer and spectator. This is a proposition made by Kelleher and Ridout, in their 'Introduction' to the book *Contemporary Theatres in Europe* (2006: 3). Here they offer a couple of ways in which we could understand the contemporary. The first is derived in relation to historical time, as they say, and might therefore manifest in a certain relationship that 'today' might have, socially and culturally, to events of the mid-twentieth century, such as the Second World War, for example. The second, however, concerns 'the time around a particular theatrical experience in which you [the spectator, but also the maker, the performer, or any collaborator, perhaps] might be enfolded' (2006: 3). The question that emerges is therefore the following: what if we extend the contemporary so as to refer not only to the time of the encounter between performer and spectator, but also to that of the encounter between performer(s) and choreographer, or the time of the encounter between different kinds of collaborators? The contemporary, then, in the sense of a shared time amongst people, may concern the time of preparation or rehearsal, as well as other sort of activities involved in performance-making practices. Thus, it might entail different sorts of temporalities: a very short contemporary would be the time when the spectator comes 'face to face' with the production, while a contemporary spreading over a longer timeframe would involve all the kinds of activities that inform the thinking and research around a particular event or production; or, it could even refer to the whole lifetime of a performance company, its members and projects, as Kelleher and Ridout note once again (ibid: 3).

Here, then, I will be looking at the contemporary in two ways: firstly, through the notion that seems to prevail in dance, of a sort of obligation or imperative for choreographic

practice to keep producing the new (or, the contemporary, in the sense of the innovative); and, secondly, with particular attention to the idea that performance-making practice rests on different kinds of encounters between people, whereby the contemporary gains a sense of shared time. Examining the notion of practice as event in relation to contemporaneity will thus bring us back to questions of the singular in relation to its context (its field of conditions, as we have seen earlier). Towards the end of this discussion, I will refer to moments from a talk given by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben at the European Graduate School (EGS) in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, titled 'On Contemporaneity'³³. From here, I will particularly borrow a couple of images Agamben proposes in order to enable a further understanding of the contemporary, both in the sense of the current or new, and in the sense of the concurrent or coincident. Finally, given the nature of this project as practice-led, I suggest that the discussion on contemporaneity also provides us here with a new perspective through which to understand practice as it appears within this written thesis.

The attempt to depict the contemporary 'moment' in which the (anomalous or evental) occurrence of my performance-making practice has taken place, leads me back to the problematics of closed terms such as 'conceptual dance'. Before I revisit Cvejić's writings on the topic here, let us examine Lepecki and Allsopp's 'Call for Papers' as editors for the issue of *Performance Research* entitled 'On Choreography' (volume 13, issue 2)³⁴. Here, they suggest that it is since the 1990s that 'choreography' started to shift, both as a term and as a practice. They describe the shift in the following terms:

Stable and historical definitions of choreography as inscriptions of movement characterized through compositional approaches to bodily movement in time and space, have moved towards choreographic approaches that question such normative relationships between movement, composition and the production of dance, and expand the notion of choreography as an art that includes a wider range of conceptual tools, materials and strategies.

(Allsopp and Lepecki, 2007: [email / electronic announcement]).

Lepecki and Allsopp continue by observing that such a conceptualisation of choreography has produced performance work that is often self-reflexive, in the way it explores choreography as a contemporary arts practice which aims to question 'the orthodoxies of contemporary art work and practice' (ibid). The way in which this kind of

³³ This talk can be found in the form of four video clips on YouTube. The quoted sections referred to in my text have been transcribed by myself. At times the transcription might not be quite accurate, because of the poor quality of the sound of the clips; however, I hope that the core meaning of Agamben's arguments has not been altered in any major way.

³⁴ *Performance Research*, 'On Choreography', 13 (2), was published in March 2009. The 'Call for Papers' I refer to here was sent via email on 6 July 2007. It is within this issue that Bauer's writings on Jérôme Bel, referred to in Section I, were published.

contemporary choreographic practice is informed by critical theory is something they are indeed aware of and acknowledge as possibly playing an important role in the way choreography not only 'begins to challenge conceptions of how bodily movement produces dance as an object', but also 'asks a number of questions which challenge assumptions about dance and body-based education' (ibid). Hence, the editors' specific interest lies in the questions of how choreography is positioned in relation to the contexts and discourses of *contemporary culture*, and of 'what choreography might mean *now* as a generative, productive, or even redundant term' (ibid, my emphasis). Choreography, as they characterise it, appears as interwoven with the contemporary moment, precisely at the point when it starts questioning its own mechanisms, conditions of work, processes and products. Such mechanisms, in particular, could arguably be considered as either historical, in the sense of having been inherited from past practice, or contemporary, in the sense of the new that emerged from the 90s onwards; in any case, what prevails as certainly (if not exclusively) contemporary in this proposition is not so much a specific kind of product, but, rather, the self-reflexive questioning which specifically aims to target and undo any assumptions about choreography as the composition of bodily movement in time and space.³⁵

Quite importantly, the conceptualisation of choreography suggested here occurs for Allsopp and Lepecki '[i]n the contexts of European performance arts in particular' (ibid). Therefore, unsurprisingly perhaps, the list of names of the diverse practitioners who engage in such self-reflexive processes and produce the range of questioning work the editors mean includes, as they suggest, Alice Chauchat, Jérôme Bel, Mårten Spångberg, Vera Mantero, Xavier Le Roy, Meg Stuart, Thomas Lehmen, and others, most of whom are based in Central Europe, and particularly Holland, Belgium, France, Germany and Austria. These artists are based in these countries because that is where they find support to develop their work;³⁶ moreover, it would be fair to say that one expects to see their work at established European dance centres, and/or within what are considered as the main European contemporary dance festivals. It is here perhaps that another, more specific version of the contemporary occurs: 'a *particular* contemporary (perhaps a particularly *European* contemporary)', as Kelleher and Ridout indicate once again (2006: 3, my emphasis). Somehow, then, the contemporary proposed by Allsopp and Lepecki also takes on a geographical dimension. Additionally, the suggestion that the now of choreography is taking place in Europe could bring back

³⁵ See also Lepecki's proposition about dance's betrayal of movement, as discussed in Section I.

³⁶ Of course, one could also argue that such support is related both to the preferences of audiences in these countries and to the overall cultural milieu or intellectual approach towards art, particularly in France, for example.

the argument about whether and how the questioning kind of choreographic practice of the 1990s in Europe might differ from the questioning practices of Judson Dance Theater in the 1960s in the United States.³⁷ Is this European contemporary a repeat of an older American (postmodern) contemporary? Or, even, one could ask in a slightly more provocative way, is there anything unique, or *new*, about the European contemporary of choreography *now*?

With these observations and questions in mind, a couple of points that Bojana Cvejić makes are worth exploring here. In her essay titled 'Learning by making and making by learning how to learn' (2006a: [online]), she tackles another term, '*education*', by which she means the educational activities happening in the professional dance scene, rather than those taking place in vocational dance schools or university departments. This allows her to unpack the issue of critical questioning by tracing its particular relation to the dance market – a *particularly European* dance market, we could add. Cvejić firstly observes that in the 1990s quite a few major dance venues and centres in Europe started including in their programmes not only performances but also different sorts of activities which were thought of as promoting 'education', such as conferences, artists' talks, laboratories and research projects, many of which focused on the topics of collectivity and collaboration (Cvejić, 2006a: [online]). Secondly, though, she suggests that this 'event of "education"', as she names it, 'does confirm again the curatorial logic of exhausting and replacing one promise of the critical and inventive with another' (ibid). Hence the contemporary appears in Europe both as a demand that choreography reconsiders dance – its mechanisms, ways of production, processes and products, as seen earlier – but also as a demand that the dance market sets up platforms for such activities of education or self-reflexive critical practice to take place. Furthermore, it transpires that the contemporary European questioning of

³⁷ Sally Banes, for example, the dance historian and analyst who has comprehensively dealt with postmodern American dance and the Judson Church group in particular, has argued that their experiments too aimed to expand and challenge the purpose, materials, motivations, structures, and styles in/of dance (1980: 15). Similarly, she has observed that the post-modern choreographers of the 1960s were claiming as one of dance's purposes the formulation or illustration of a theory of dance through performance, 'as in Rainer's *Some Thoughts on Improvisation*, in which her taped voice posed questions about the choreographic process and the nature of "spontaneous determination" of movement design, while she in fact improvised; or as in Douglas Dunn's *101*, which proposed that stillness can constitute a dance' (Banes, 1980: 15-16). This was a time, then, when questions about how a dance is made or what it means to create a dance seemed to have generated choreography and/or were actually being presented to the audience in the performance of the work itself. '[I]s writing a score (as Simone Forti has done) an act of choreography? Is dance-making an act of construction and craft or a process of decision making?' (Banes, 1980: 15-16); these are only some examples of the enquiries posed by many of the Judson choreographers through the creation of dances, questions which, one could undoubtedly argue, seem to have re-appeared in some sort of way in the contemporary European dance scene today.

choreography seems to have created a whole new discourse for dance, one which is shared amongst theorists, curators, dramaturgs and artists:

The venues for dance in the 1990s established themselves with the understanding that if they were going to promote choreography then they should [...] instigate research and collaborative frames of production even if such orientation mainly results in a new aesthetic (the 'look') of research and small-scale work. In absorbing poststructuralist and art theory in order to 'catch' up with visual art and cinema's contemporaneity and reflect its proper discipline theoretically, the field of choreography and dance in Europe developed sometimes oblique ways of forming and operating discourses. How concepts like 'research' or 'knowledge production' [...] gained power in diffusing performance practices cannot be traced back to autonomous territories of criticism, curatorial practice, artists' self-reflexive discourse or academic dance scholarship. With authors [...] occupying more than one role at a time and shifting between the positions of critic, theoretician, dramaturg and, occasionally, also performer [...] [t]he discourses in European contemporary dance are thus still produced out of the 'meshworks' of criticism, dramaturgy, theory and curatorship [...].

(Cvejić, 2006a: [online]).

On the one hand, then, Cvejić acknowledges, similarly to Lepecki and Allsopp, that since the 1990s contemporary choreographic practice has been developing through activities focusing on 'research' or 'knowledge production', so that a theoretical, self-reflexive discourse on dance is formulated and currently circulates amongst makers, critics, curators and programmers. On the other hand, it is within this context that the choreographer and the programmer both resist any kind of terminology (such as 'conceptual') to describe contemporary dance. As Cvejić explains, '[a] denomination of a current dance practice is undesirable because it can only reiterate the protocols of exhaustion and reaction whereby dance refuses historicity in order to entertain the prestige of contemporaneity that society assigns to it' (ibid). It would seem then as if it is the desire to work against exhaustion which has shifted the focus of the contemporary European dance scene from making and presenting work towards processes of theoretical self-reflection and the development of different modes of exchange within and in-between the fields of choreography, criticism, dramaturgy, theory and curatorship. And yet, the question of whether this kind of self-reflexive discourse escapes the pressure to be new, inventive, and in this sense contemporary, remains open. I would propose, rather, that self-reflexivity, in the sense of an examination of dance's own operating mechanisms, seems to be coming forward here, in both choreographic practice and theoretical discourse, precisely as the new feature of the contemporary in Europe. In this way, self-reflexivity could be seen as participating in the struggle for the original or ground-breaking, so that it, too, it could be argued, might exhaust itself, be done with, and be replaced by a new tendency (or trend) in dance.

Following on from these observations, then, a new set of questions emerges: Whereas it is considered that exhausted and exhaustive dance led to a self-reflexive critical approach towards choreography, could we not claim that at the same time it is this kind of self-reflexive practice which somehow keeps confirming and sustains the notion of exhaustion and exhaustiveness in dance? Does the 'new look' of dance, that of small-scale research work, not participate, emerge from, and eventually build on dance's obsession with contemporaneity? In other words, is it not the case that in contemporary European choreography the pressure to reinvent bodily movement has been replaced by a pressure to work towards a reinvention of modes of production and presentation? How do we know – or, *do we know?* – that the desire to reinvent modes of production and presentation will not ultimately exhaust itself as well, and us too on the way?

What I am hinting towards at this stage is the possibility that (European) choreography might be currently facing a new type of struggle with the contemporary; most importantly, that this struggle too, is prone to exhaustion – and, surely, also capable of leading to exhaustiveness – just as any struggle for the contemporary has always been for dance. Hence, to begin with, it could be imagined that the project of possibilising dance, in the sense of claiming a space of possibility for dance, responds not only to 'exhausting dance' as a specifically contemporary European phenomenon, but also, more broadly, to the notion of dance's obsession with contemporaneity itself. The project, therefore, seeks to respond to the contemporary in two ways: firstly, in the sense of the con-current, i.e. the context of what is happening at the same time with this project (although in a different place, something on which I will focus later); and, secondly, in the sense of the contemporary as a condition which implies a certain desire to always be new, or a sort of demand for innovation, so that one always somehow manages to (re-)occupy or to keep within the space of the original and the inventive.³⁸

In fact, to the extent that the developments I have been examining also reflect 'the freelance lifestyle and flexible subjectivity as contemporary forms of life and work that performance artists in Western Europe endorse' (Cvejić, 2006a: [online]), we can return to a point raised earlier and claim that evidently the current moment differs significantly from the self-reflexive moment of the Judson Dance Theatre and the Grand Union,

³⁸ For a discussion on the particular relevance of the concept of originality in practice-based research, see Pakes (2003), where the author examines, amongst other issues, whether the original in practice-based arts projects is to be sought for in the processes, in the theoretical propositions of the researcher and/or in the art works (as products) themselves.

purely because that emerged out of its own distinct and specific socio-political conditions. In particular, it was collectivity that operated as ‘the engine of experiment and critique’ in the 1960s and 70s, whereas today’s exchange projects take place between choreographers, curators, dramaturgs and critics, as individual authors, and are quite often set-up and supported by established institutions. On the one hand then, as Marten Spångberg has proposed, such research activities could be seen to have led to ‘the institutionalisation of performance practices’, rather than an emancipation of the arts from established organisations (cited in Hardy, 2009: 166). The authors undertaking such research activities, on the other hand, might share a collective discourse, as Cvejić points out, so that occasionally collaborations might occur, but they – choreographers, dramaturgs, curators – remain, nevertheless, single and independent or free-lance authors.³⁹ And so, the sort of collectivism of the American 1960s and 70s seems to have been replaced in contemporary Europe by a desire to sustain the heterogeneity and separateness of practices and works within and with the support of the institution. The search for the new now often happens within and through activities which still operate on the basis of a common shared discourse, in order to enable a self-reflexive approach in critical thinking on dance and performance, but which are considered as gatherings of distinct individual authors under the organisation of an institution, and not as aiming towards the formation of independent groups or collectives.⁴⁰

³⁹ See, for example, the work *Xavier Le Roy* (2000), a solo Xavier Le Roy choreographed following a request by Jérôme Bel that he (Xavier Le Roy) choreographs a piece that Jérôme Bel would sign as an author. The work raised issues of authorship, something which becomes clear even as one read the credits for the performance:

Title of the work: *Xavier Le Roy*

A performance by Jérôme Bel

Conception: Xavier Le Roy

⁴⁰ See Tim Etchells’ opening polemic for the SPILL Symposium (Soho Theatre, 12 April 2007), which has been published in *The Live Art Almanac* (2008: 7-15), for an amusing, very telling and quite provocative account of what it might be like for an artist to be part of a community of people working in theatre, live art and performance, particularly in the UK. Here, the director of Forced Entertainment starts by explaining that ‘you find yourself in a room, or a festival, with a group of other people’, and that ‘[t]his [...] is the kind of situation that if you’re lucky you can find yourself in quite often and over time you can find some interesting variations too, like you’re not just in a room or a festival with these people, you’re on a panel with them in Warsaw or you’re drunk in a hotel room with them in Aberystwyth or Bergen or Sao Paolo’; he then goes on to admit that ‘before you know it you’re part of a community you can’t even imagine the edges of, let alone understand’ (2008: 10-11), and ends up arguing in favour of ‘a kind of resolute and obstinate private plugging away at something, a kind of mono-focus’, given that perhaps working in isolation needs to be reclaimed here: ‘I’m not sure that it’s good to be too much a part of anything’ (ibid: 12-13). There is a sense then here of a community which is certainly not aiming towards the formation of a collective, but which is formed of individual artists and groups. Indeed, the occasions that Etchells speaks of might remind us of specific organisations or institutions – such as the Centre for Performance Research (CPR) in Aberystwyth, or even the SPILL Festival itself, as part of which Etchells gave this talk – where we could imagine or might have even experienced (if we have been lucky, as Etchells says) activities of exchange taking place. It might also be useful, however, to note Etchells’ final point here, when he claims that ‘the work comes from artists, singular and disconnected as much as connected’ (ibid: 13); this, I suggest, reflects quite accurately the current moment in the performing arts, not just in the UK but also in Europe.

Where does the practice of this project sit, then, in relation to these developments? How does it relate to *this* contemporary (context)? And, is what has been presented as the current *European* contemporary the same as my own practice's contemporary?

Given that I am a practising choreographer, operating within a professional context with its own rules and specific demands towards the (emerging) expert-artist, as Melrose would argue, it is undeniable that I, too, am somehow working towards the new or the innovative in the way this is sought for within the contemporary dance and performance market. On the one hand, then, I am responding to 'performance-making problems' as I create work – those usually linked to the creative work that takes place in the studio or the theatre – and, on the other hand, I am following 'the logics of professional performance production and production values' (Melrose, 2005a: [online]), as I attempt to construct a freelance professional career as a performance maker. Needless to say, I seek the original here in terms of the contribution to knowledge that any doctoral research project is required to make as well, so that we could go on to argue that, while developing my choreographic work (as an expert-practitioner), I am at the same time negotiating my place within the academic terrain and constructing my profile as an emerging scholar. In this way, and by contextualising my practice both within the art market and within the academy, I experience the contemporary of my own practice as shared between the two fields. I find myself, then, in a constant process of trying to catch up with the contemporary developments in both those two fields – contemporary, that is, in the sense of the concurrent which frames my project.

Within this context, my artistic practice expands, so as to include not only the activities that are typically understood as part of a performance-making practice – such as rehearsals and performances, or even meetings with promoters, programmers and collaborators – but also other types of activities that take place in the professional dance scene as well as within the context of the university. These are the types of activities that Cvejić refers to under the term 'education', as we have seen earlier, and which I would like to think of here as a series of *encounters*; in this sense, I could propose those as activities of the contemporary par excellence, if we are to follow the proposition of Kelleher and Ridout and to conceive of the contemporary as the shared time of encounter. Thus, to think of laboratories, dialogue projects, symposiums, post-show talks, lectures, as well as rehearsals and performances, but also potentially of articles, artists' notebooks, online platforms and forums, as setting up spaces for an encounter suggests that these activities are already implicated in the contemporary; this contemporary, then, becomes the time that we share with the artist, collaborator,

spectator, theorist, curator, writer; the time in which we (embodying the role of one or more of the above) are enfolded; the time when we meet the other. To take this idea further, what this written thesis attempts to do, then, parallel to its other aims, is to somehow (re)stage those moments of encounter, or to find ways in which to respond to what has felt like a practice of encounters. The staging of citations, in other words, as well as any references made to performances and other kinds of events, talks and discussions, which I attended or whose recordings I heard, all make up the particular way in which this thesis participates in its own contemporary; and so, this strategy of writing through (and as a response to) a practice of encounters discloses my choreographic practice's relationship both to its (con-)current context and to the demands of the contemporary.

Overall, then, the sort of self-reflexive critical thinking discussed earlier, which has been taking place in all the sorts of encounters framing this project, finds its place in my own performance-making practice in a two-fold way: firstly, it appears in the thinking surrounding my choreographic work, because of its prominence in the contemporary choreographic practices which in turn frame the context in which I am embedded as a professional dance maker; and, secondly, it operates as a way through which I return to the theoretical proposition of possibilising dance – in other words, a way through which I return to choreo-thinking – following the interruptive occurrence of my own practice. In fact, the interplay between a performance-making practice and a writing project, as well as between a singular practice and the various general contexts with which the singular is in dialogue, seems to unfold within that 'intermix of continuity with futurity' discussed in the beginning of this section (following Melrose, 2006: 126). In other words, the series of encounters framing this project, supporting and constructing reflective thinking towards, around and within practice, not only operates within the contemporary, but also gains an added dimension of continuousness and futurity; in this way, one could claim, it offers an alternative to the idea of a potential exhaustion of, and through, the struggle with (or against) the contemporary.

The final questions that have been put aside until now and need to be tackled finally are the following: In geographical terms, how does this project stand in relation to the *particularly European* contemporary mentioned earlier? Where do the encounters take place and how does self-reflexivity circulate across Europe, or between central European countries and the UK?

In response to these questions, I initially offer what might read as anecdotal information, but is actually quite telling of the situation in which I have often found myself 'geographically' in this project: based in London and usually interested in work that has been taking place in central Europe since the late 1980s / early 1990s as seen earlier. First, it should be noted how revealing it felt when, in 2004, I discovered books (such as Helmut Ploebst's *No wind no word. New choreography in the society of the spectacle*, 2001) and online platforms for critical writing (such as *Sarma*, <http://www.sarma.be/homepage.htm>), which focus on artists working in central Europe. The peculiar feeling of being in London and yet being so attracted to such sources consisted of both a sense of excitement and a kind of anxiety: the former because my task then became something like a hunting game to track down more and more of this kind of material, and the latter because at times it felt as if 'the action' was nevertheless always happening elsewhere. Secondly, then, I soon noticed how the work that interested me and that I wanted to write about or speak back to, so to say, with my own practice, was not coming to London;⁴¹ and so, I started to travel in order to see work or to meet artists and participate in workshops and projects with them.

Only a few years later, in 2009, I note how visibly and rapidly the scene seems to have changed. In 2008 London had its showcase season of Jérôme Bel, while in 2009 Xavier Le Roy visited with three of his works; such performances, as well as talks and other types of events presented alongside their works were all supported by prominent venues such as Sadler's Wells and Tate Modern, or also the Siobhan Davies Studies (through *Parallel Voices* in 2007).⁴² On the one hand, of course, these developments could be discussed in relation to the marketing strategies of producers and institutions and the politics taking place within the performing arts scene in the UK – or, even, in relation to what could arguably be perceived as a shift in dance studies within the UK, given that the academy has also had to catch up with the interest of both artists and theorists towards European work. An expanded discussion of such issues, however, falls outside the scope of this project, and so I will not engage in it, even though traces of it might be found in further sections of my writing. On the other hand, though, what is relevant here is the effect this particular situation has had on my own research: in

⁴¹ One could note, for example, that, on the one hand, major UK dance festivals, such as Dance Umbrella, and established dance venues, such as The Place, have not usually been sympathetic towards and/or interested in such work, but have more often supported work with a formalistic dance aesthetic (which has been promoted, after all, by UK arts funders and educational institutions as well). And, on the other hand, festivals which have been inviting work from continental Europe to the UK, such as nottdance, a festival of experimental dance and performance in Nottingham, organised by Dance4, have not always received very positive reviews (see, for example, Birringer, 2005: 10-27).

⁴² One could mention here, as well, other important ways in which what we have described as the European contemporary started to appear in the UK. Alongside nottdance, it is important to mention Live Art UK, and its strong presence in the London experimental performance scene.

particular, the sensation it has often given me, which has been that of an outsider, as if I have been standing outside my object of study, yet at the same time feeling very close and somehow absolutely immersed in it, even from that outsider's position. Finally, then, I would like to bring back the notion of the contemporary and, as promised, to tackle it this time through a couple of related images Giorgio Agamben uses to explain his understanding of the contemporary (2007).

Agamben starts his lecture 'On Contemporaneity' by referring to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* (1876), where the German philosopher 'tries to settle the score with his time and to define his positions to the present', as Agamben himself explains. Through his reading of Nietzsche, Agamben therefore arrives at the following propositions:

Only he who does not perfectly coincide with his time truly belongs to it. Only he who does not turn, conform to the rules and demands of his time, can be its contemporary. This disconnection or discrepancy does not mean that contemporary is the one who lives in another time. [...] Contemporary in that sense is a peculiar relationship to one's own time [...] It is in other words a relationship to time which claims to it true a disjunction and an anachronism. Those who fully coincide with the epoch are not contemporary because they cannot see, they cannot fix their eyes on it.

(Agamben, 2007: [online]).

This ability of one to be able to look at their own epoch, to fix their eyes on their own contemporary, is then developed by Agamben into a new image. After talking through a strong metaphor-reflection on contemporaneity, found in Osip Mandelstam's 1923 poem *The Century*, which is in turn analysed by Alain Badiou in the latter's homonymous book (2007[2005]: 11-22), Agamben moves on to propose the following: firstly, that truly contemporary is the one who does not get blinded by the lights of the century, but who rather stares at his time only to perceive its 'inner darkness', as Agamben calls it; and, secondly, that the braveness of remaining contemporary lies in one's constant attempt to see, within this darkness, a sort of light that is discernible in the shadow (the darkness), and which is directed towards us, yet always runs away from us.

Indeed, and despite the highly philosophical and poetical nature of these phrases, I can easily relate the sensation these images communicate to my specific experience of trying to locate and to deal with the contemporary of this project as described throughout this section. The pressure to keep up with the current and to produce the new and the original, the tracing of a journey that has been conducted through dispersed encounters, as well as the constant travelling, literally and metaphorically,

between fields of knowledge, countries, practices and thoughts, all this has certainly felt as if I have been trying throughout the project to stare at my own epoch – an attempt to try to ‘settle the score’ with my time perhaps, as Agamben says about Nietzsche. It would be fair to say, as well, that at times I have felt blinded by ‘my century’; in fact, maybe this has been the case especially when I have come too close to the seemingly distant European contemporary. And yet, the constant attempt has been to find that inner darkness within the contemporary, and even perhaps to try to grasp the light of knowledge that although directed towards me has been withdrawing and often escaping me from within the shadow of my own epoch. In fact, this relationship to the contemporary could be proposed as another aspect of possibilising dance, and one to which I will return through the concept of withdrawal that will be developed in more depth later in relation to choreo-thinking (see Section IV).

Paraphrasing Agamben’s propositions, then, it seems appropriate for me at this stage to summarise what has been written in this section on my experience of placing this project in relationship to its context in the following lines: to be contemporary has felt like going back to a present in which it seems I have never been; it has meant trying to be present at days that I could only have missed. This does sound like a place of struggle; but it has also been one of privilege, the place from where I hope to have been able to look back and ‘see’ the present.

III. Like a post-event pro-logue

Telling practice, losing the thread

I can say what I remember.

I can't say that it is what happened. It is what I remember.

And what I remember is not just what I remember. There is more to it.

There is what I want to remember.

This is what I remember.

(Read, 2007: 104)

Story #1, as if from Beckett onwards⁴³

In December 2003, I embark on a PhD project, a practice-based research project in choreography, whose aim I describe in terms of constructing 'something like a "dance-philosophy"', which is meant here as an exploration – in dance terms and through performance practice – of issues of fact and the real, representation and meaning' (Protopapa, 2004a: 5).

In truth, one could have suspected all along that the reason I ever undertook the project was because I had initially believed that it would provide me with a framework in which to create choreographic work informed by my reflections on Samuel Beckett's theatre, something which I had already pursued during my MA studies the previous year, and through various other projects even before that. In fact, regardless of the direction my research took, I remained a Beckett enthusiast throughout the project – indeed, I still am a Beckett fan – and created three choreographic works between 2004 and 2006, not exactly with reference to or influenced by Beckett's plays, but certainly in a way that still allowed me to imagine them as such for quite some time. The

⁴³ A version of parts of this writing appeared as an introduction to an article I wrote on Beckett's influence on contemporary European choreographers for an issue of *Performance Research* titled 'On Beckett' (see Protopapa, 2007: 20-34).

choreographic works got titled *QUADish-ish* (presented in 2005-06), *Umm... I... and uh...* (presented between 2004-06) and $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ (presented in 2006) respectively.

What follows then is the telling of a journey, from the making of *QUADish-ish* to $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ and beyond. This journey could also be described as the process through which my obsession with Beckett gradually transformed into a preoccupation with certain kinds of choreographic (as well as theatrical) structures; or, more specifically, with the ability of such structures to hold together a series of seemingly arbitrary actions in a meaningful way each time they got played out live onstage. The reader is therefore invited to read the following story in connection to DVD 1, which contains documentation of the works referred to henceforth. What is possibly evidenced here is a change in the focus of my choreographic work too: from representations of structures whose 'playing-out' had been rehearsed and got presented as a solved system in front of the audience, I increasingly became interested in the unfolding of structures (and the gradual revealing of the rules holding such structures together) in the actual moment of performance.

At this point, then, and before moving on to my first telling of the practice, I should also note that, while DVD 1 does not offer a full video recording of each of the abovementioned works, in the chronological order in which they were actually made and/or performed, my aim has been to structure the different types of documentation material on it in a playful and intriguing way for the viewer, that might also reflect the nature of the practice as it is narrated in the content of this thesis. Hence, *QUADish-ish*, which was chronologically the first work that was performed out of the three, has been divided into three sections, in-between which the reader may watch documentation from the other two works. In this way, not only does *QUADish-ish* seem to 'frame' the rest of the material, but it also keeps returning through to the end of the DVD; what recurs here, I suggest, is both my obsessive interest in Beckett's structures, as well as my proposition towards the viewer of the DVD to consider this work as a reference point for the other two works, which were created precisely as a response to, and as an attempt to escape from, the insistent structure of *QUADish-ish*. If *Umm... I... and uh...*, on the one hand, achieved such an escape to some extent, then it is only perhaps in its 'revisited' version a few years later that it clearly shifted away from any evident reference to Beckett.⁴⁴ $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$, on the other hand, which is presented on the DVD through a slideshow of photographs accompanied by sound and spoken text used in the performance, could be seen as clearly breaking away from the aesthetic and

⁴⁴ See *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]...* on DVD2, and the way in which this type of work connects to the 'choreographic' tasks undertaken in writing in the second part of Section V.

creative questions of both *Umm... I... and uh...* and *QUADish-ish*. Here, the reader might find the seeds for the kind of thinking practice that grew following my Beckett-inspired work, and which led to the pursuit of the idea of possibilising and the creation of *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]*, which was presented live towards the end of this project and as part of my PhD examination.

To return to Alan Read's words, then, I offer this first story as that which I can say I remember, even if it is not exactly what happened and even if there is more to it; this is what I remember...

QUADish-ish was a reworking and development of my older work *QUADish* (2002), which in turn was created in response to my experience of translating Beckett's play for television *Quad* (1984) from English to Greek.⁴⁵ Both *QUADish* and *QUADish-ish* took place on theatre stages where fluorescent tape was used to mark out four-sided shapes and their diagonals. Groups of performers exercised all sorts of 'walks' – that is, ways of proceeding in space and on the lines – to conduct their individual journeys within the marked space. For *QUADish*, I had composed a rigid system of geometrical possibilities for such journeys to be executed. Once the possibilities within that piece got exhausted, I created *QUADish-ish*, where I adopted the principle of adding one more four-sided shape with its diagonals marked with tape on the floor, plus new performers on stage as the work progressed – by repeatedly multiplying the number of the existing performers on stage times two – so that the system was constantly adjusted and re-created, in order for the performers to have new spatial rules by which to proceed in a continually changing stage/spatial situation. At the time, then, the work seemed to suggest the possibility of an endless multiplying process.⁴⁶ And, somehow, this echoed Beckett to me much more than the visual effect of the four-sided shapes on the floor, which I had initially 'extracted' or 'copied' directly from *QUAD*. Hence, at this stage, I started to suspect that maybe my work did not really have to do with influences from specific Beckett plays, or with specific images and words associated with Beckett. Maybe my way of approaching Beckett could be articulated more precisely in terms of an interest in what one would call Beckett's structural processes – *the Beckett method*, perhaps? – or, an interest in something underlying the whole of his theatre; something to do with Beckett's *ways of theatre*.

⁴⁵ For more information and the text for *QUAD*, see Beckett, 1984: 289-294. The translation was based on this script published by Faber and Faber, and was completed in November 2000, for a project by the Athens-based street-theatre group of Titina Halmantzi.

⁴⁶ Or, as critic Donald Hutera wrote in his review of *QUADish-ish*, it could also be seen as a staged situation which makes possible '[a]ll sorts of metaphorical readings about repeated historical patterns and new social orders' (see Hutera, 2005: [online]).

Later on, in *Umm... I... and uh...*, a solo female performer wearing a t-shirt which said 'performer' moved to the sound of three recorded monologues. These were recordings of women speaking, whom I had asked to narrate a memory they did not remember well. What I was aiming for with the recordings was those moments of hesitation, ambiguity and uncertainty in the narrators' speaking, when it became full of 'thinking hums' or 'remembering sounds', such as 'umm', 'uh' and 'er'. The solo performer would explore similar notions in movement, while executing a number of different tasks in relation to the sound score: she would mimic bodily words and phrases heard in the recordings, usually by translating verbs into actions and nouns into still images; she would change her body posture and facial expression to represent the attitude she 'heard' the narrators expressing; she would breathe with them and pause with them; and, towards the end of the piece, she would give herself time to think and decide her actions on stage, not only in response to the content and sound of the recorded monologue, but also in relation to what she thought she had been doing in the immediately preceding moments of the piece; finally, she would incorporate her own remembering process into the piece, by recalling moments from rehearsals and from previous performances of the piece, weeks or even months ago.

Undeniably, at the time of creating it, I could see how *Umm... I... and uh...* could be compared to *Not I* (1972)⁴⁷ and *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958)⁴⁸, as regards the ways in which operations of memory and structures of thought got revealed through language. Indeed, there was still something of my Beckettian obsession in *Umm... I... and uh...* But this time the work was truly not a response to my reading of any specific play by Beckett, and so, contrary to the case of *QUADish-ish*, and an older work of mine, *Waiting for Audi-Audi* (presented in 2003-04), this time neither the title of the work, nor the programme notes distributed for the work's performance, made a direct reference to any of Beckett's plays. *Umm... I... and uh...* was therefore presented as an independent work, despite the fact that it could be viewed as exploring physically - through the human body and its movement (and stillness) - qualities and processes which Beckett's 'characters' often explore in language (and silence).

The last of the three abovementioned works - called $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ - featured two main parts. One was a reduced version of *QUADish-ish* - hence q_{ish} - as my preoccupation with infinite multiplying processes expanded to include an equal interest in other

⁴⁷ For *Not I*, see Beckett, 1984: 213-223.

⁴⁸ For *Krapp's Last Tape*, see Beckett, 1984: 53-63.

combinatorial procedures within the four-sided shapes marked with tape on the floor, as well as processes of reduction, elimination and eventual erasure. The other part of $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ was composed of a number of short diverse scenes. These almost autonomous small performances – acts, one could say – were created through a process of devising movement scores based on answers gathered from a public who were asked ‘What would you like to see on stage?’.⁴⁹ The scenes were then presented next to the remaining version of *QUADish-ish*, as performances someone could have wished for - hence w^{ish} - in proposing an alternative to the ultimate but exhausted (and exhaustive) performance of *QUADish-ish*. During the post-show talk for the performance of this work, I heard myself explaining how in $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ I had probably thematised my own desire finally to be able to escape from Beckett, or at least from my tendency to relate and discuss my work in relation to Beckett. So that maybe the ‘appearance’ of Beckett in my works was receding – or, perhaps, its nature was changing. And, even though it had never been a case of making adaptations of Beckett’s plays by translating them into dance performance, nor even a case of extracting textual, scenic and/or movement elements from his theatrical works and recomposing them into a new form, rather, what I was perceiving now were elements of Beckett’s ‘theatre thinking’ in my overall ‘choreographic thinking’. My obsession with Beckett had now become an imagined relation with the playwright on the level of methodology: through reflections on means and modes of composing the theatrical; through a testing of the limits of words, images and actions on stage; through an understanding of the ways in which the theatrical operates in performance.

But then again, what did all this mean? What was to be made of my obsession with Beckett’s theatre? Where was Beckett to be found now? How was he to (dis)appear in my work from this point onwards?

Such questions soon became tiring; I stopped discussing Beckett in relation to my choreographic thinking and kept developing work based on ideas I had initially explored in the w^{ish} part of $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$. It is particularly worth mentioning here those that had to do with the devising of semi-set / semi-improvised short scenes through the use of scores

⁴⁹ Rather than the movement scores including instructions whose aim would be to recreate exactly what the public would have requested to see on stage, the responses to the questions were translated into instructions in much more arbitrary and often playful ways. For example, if someone interviewed replied that they would like to see someone in a red dress dancing in front of a mirror, then a performer would be given the task to wear a red dress and dance as if they were dancing in front of a mirror; or, if someone asked to see *Macbeth*, then a performer’s score would include the instruction to speak out a line from Shakespeare’s play with a pompous accent, etc. (see Recchia & Protopapa, 2006; see also the slideshow of $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ on DVD 1, where images are included both of some of these scores, and from the creative process and performance piece they resulted in).

containing precisely written movement or action instructions, collected and listed in arbitrary or chance-based ways. Movement or action scores gradually arose as the new method I would pursue in the structuring of my work, one that would persist and result in the construction of whole performance events, not just short scenes. In fact, scores seemed to hold a double promise at this point: Firstly, they seemed to take away the burden of having to structure material in a meaningful way, given that the only thing needed was to collect material and find a simple, often arbitrary rule, through which to structure the instructions into scores; somehow, then, these instructions for action would either be grouped naturally according to the rule, or would be structured in chance-based ways, creating the impression that I did not have much responsibility or control over the performance. Secondly, though, the same feeling would emerge for the performers: although the scores would sometimes be very detailed in terms of the actions they would require the performer to do, they would still leave a significant amount of freedom to the performer, who would be able to interpret the instructions in many different ways, and/or add extra layers to their performance of the instructions, as well as qualities to their action which the score could not have possibly excluded. It would seem, then, as if the performance had somehow structured itself alone, according to some arbitrary rules; moreover, within this context, both choreographer and performers would somehow appear as players of a game, whose sole responsibility is to play by the rules; meanwhile, the creator of the game would seem to remain unidentified.

The next invitation I got to present work concerned the creation of a piece which would take place inside and around Jeppe Hein's fountain installation *Appearing Rooms*⁵⁰; funnily enough, I had been approached to do this because of my previous works' relation to (obsession with?) Beckett's *QUAD*, which made the organisers invite me to create a piece for/in/on a multi-square shaped fountain. Despite the fact that, due to technical reasons, the piece *(Dis)Appearing Acts (in Jeppe Hein's Appearing Rooms)* never got performed, during the short preparation and rehearsals for it, however, I realised how different this piece would have been in its conception and performance from all *QUAD*-based pieces I had ever worked on previously. The nature of these squares – since they were essentially waterfalls rising and falling, and not taped

⁵⁰ Jeppe Hein is a Danish artist born in 1974. His 2004 work *Appearing Rooms* 'stood' outside the Queen Elizabeth Hall at the South Bank in October 2006 (and during the following three summers, 2007, 2008 and 2009). It has been described as 'a programmed water pavilion that comes across as a labyrinth composed of four outer water falls in the shape of a square sub-divided into smaller spaces by four independent [water] walls within the structure' (unknown author, 2006a: [online]); a clearly square shaped fountain, in other words, which however constantly changes shape and appearance as each of the water walls that forms its exterior shape, as well as the interior ones subdividing it into four smaller squares, all rise and fall randomly, creating different spaces which the visitor is allowed to enter, exit and move in.

shapes on the floor – would have required the performers to conduct their journeys not on the lines, but precisely off them, in the empty spaces inside and outside the ‘water walls’; that is, of course, if they were to ‘play’ as any visitor would, trying not to get wet, and so inhabiting or exiting the ‘rooms’, rather than standing in/on the ‘walls’. Additionally, because of the randomness of the way in which the waterfalls would rise and fall, the whole piece, even if a fixed/set piece, would have had to allow for some freedom on the part of the performers, so that they would be able to react to the reality of the situation (i.e. the spatial configuration) which would randomly change.⁵¹ Once again, the idea of creating a rigid structure, which would be based on set and precise instructions, but would also allow for a degree of freedom in order for the performers to react to something random, non-fixed and really affecting them as part of the performance, crept into my practice and reinforced my new obsession.

Hence, my next four projects – *(Dis)Appearing Acts (in cities of Appearance): LAB1_Athens*, a residency / laboratory at the Isadora and Raymond Duncan Dance Research Centre in Athens (2007); *(Dis)Appearing Acts (in Nottingham and Leicester)*, a performance in two bars in Nottingham and Leicester respectively (2007); *(Dis)Appearing Acts (in Rooms made of Theatre)*, a commissioned work for sixteen third-year Laban students, which was to be performed in theatres, both on stage and in the auditorium (2007-08); *(Dis)Appearing Acts*, a site-specific piece, which took place in the area of the central bar of the Royal Festival Hall (2008) – were quite diverse in terms of the sites and contexts where they took place and/or were presented, but all focused on exploring this particular idea further. In fact, they were all created with the use of movement scores, and they all followed an overall seemingly-rigid structure, in which the performers were free to play and adjust depending on various parameters (including the spatial configuration of each one of those settings and the reactions of the audience in each performance). And, indeed, through their titles, all such projects and performances kept some reference to that fountain piece that was never realised.

As for Beckett’s (dis)appearance in my work, strangely enough, I understood more about it only when I looked at other choreographers’ works, who also mentioned Beckett’s influence on their practice. As soon as I published a text on their work – in particular, the works of Vera Mantero, Maguy Marin, Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy – and on their thoughts on Beckett, and as soon as I had realised and claimed that, in

⁵¹ The installation is programmed so as to change every 10 seconds; however, what is random is which ‘water walls’ will rise and which will fall each time there is a change (or which will keep appearing and which will keep disappearing, depending on how the configuration was set before the change).

fact, Beckett seemed to be everywhere, without anyone being able to define in what precise ways this was so, I sort of 'got over it' and left that narrative thread behind. From *QUADish-ish* to $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$, and further on to the *(Dis)Appearing Acts* series, Beckett had opened out a path leading to a method of practice which involved: movement or action scores; structures able to hold together a performance without necessarily predetermining its precise outcome; and, a kind of performance presence based on the playful engagement with (and interpretation of) simple, often arbitrary instructions for movement. My inquiry into the influence of Beckett in contemporary choreographers' thinking and practice, then, ended with a proposition that his presence resembled that of a ghost, a phantom, a spectre; a kind of presence, which, in my own practice too, had not yet appeared, but at the same time could not cease appearing.⁵²

Story #2, as if from research questions onwards

In December 2003, I embark on a PhD project, a practice-based research project in choreography, whose aim I describe in terms of constructing 'something like a "dance-philosophy"', which is meant here as an exploration – in dance terms and through performance practice – of issues of fact and the real, representation and meaning' (Protopapa, 2004a: 5).

In fact, I had hoped that this way of framing the project would have helped me deal with one of my biggest anxieties at the time, which was that dance did not seem like the obvious thing for me to do anymore – as if I needed to search for the meaning or purpose of movement and performance, to re-create it all anew through my practice. Even if there was no one way of imagining then what I might have meant by 'dance-philosophy', after describing the project in such terms, it sounded sensible to at least start from a point zero and address basic questions which would lead me to a rethinking of choreography in terms of what I considered as its 'basic functions': its mechanisms/operations as a (creative?) process, but also its possibilities in/as performance, its nature as (an art of?) (re)presentation, and its ability to critically involve both artist and audience in what it (re)presents. After all, whenever I had been asked to frame my project in relation to what was going on in the dance scene at the time, I had often aligned myself with the thinking of certain contemporary European choreographers who seemed to share with me a similar desire to reflect on their own

⁵² In Hurtzig and Hochleicher's terms, 'not living, not dead, not yet born or incapable of dying, neither present nor absent - they [ghosts, avatars, phantoms, the undead, zombies] put reality on hold, and rob it of matter and provability' (cited in Protopapa, 2007: 33).

art form through their work; amongst them, I most frequently cited Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy, but also Vera Mantero, whose work I had never seen, but whose thinking sounded quite appealing to me, particularly as it unfolded in a book by Helmut Ploebst (2001) on contemporary choreography in Europe.

At the time, actually, I had even articulated a method, which I would follow in my practical choreographic experimentations, in order to engage with notions such as 'fact' and 'the real' that would underpin her 'dance-philosophy'. This method I described as 'based on the idea of constructing situations by abstracting fragments of reality and bringing them into the studio' (Protopapa, 2004a: 5), and so it would entail, initially, an ex-tracting / ab-stracting of elements of the ordinary or the everyday from their natural environment (the world of reality?), and, subsequently, their placement – and, hence, displacement – into the creative process, in a studio, on stage, in front of an audience. I imagined that, eventually, the everyday, the ordinary, would enter into my choreographic work and operate in a double way: firstly, it would point towards an outside-the-performance-event reality, which operates with its specific referential structures and conventions; and, secondly, it would participate in the setting-up of a present-on-stage reality with its own rules and meaningful mechanisms. In this way, I would be able to re-address and deal with two of my initial anxieties: on the one hand, my feeling that dance had lost its meaning, so to speak, or did not seem to mean anything anymore and did not seem to have anything to say anymore about what I considered as 'the real world out there'; and, secondly, my primary (and actually quite practical) question as a practising choreographer of why and how one should go about making performances today in the first place. In other words, by working with those reality fragments I would revisit issues of reference and representation, in order to then re-trace the meaning and purpose of my own practice.

It could be argued that to some extent I really followed through the method I had initially proposed in my creative processes. From 2004 to 2008, I worked on different kinds of pieces, all of which somehow contained reality fragments, or elements extracted from the everyday; amongst them, habitually used objects, the sound of human voice, language and texts of ordinary speech, physical structures, material costumes, but also the human body, processes of narrating, of expressing ordinary thoughts, of embodying everyday postures and gestures; eventually, people, doing ordinary, recognisable 'stuff' on stage. Had this idea then led me to a better or new understanding of choreography, or of the relationship between dance and the real world? Had it participated in the renewal of my practice? Or, had it helped me find a

reason for practising choreography to begin with? Maybe it had. But maybe at the same time all this had not much to do with processes of incorporating the everyday on stage. Reality, or 'the real', did not seem to be bound to the idea of particular fragments or objects of the everyday operating through representation. The real was emerging as a sort of *situation*, or a kind of overall sensation, that I would imagine appearing from time to time, not necessarily through specific representations (of the everyday), but perhaps more acutely in the way things got arranged and were held together within such a (theatrical, should we say?) situation. It seemed then that this 'real' wasn't even to be explored through practical processes of creating choreographed pieces to be performed on stage. In fact, the theatre stage was creating confusion. I needed a new way of searching for and then articulating the renewal occurring in my thinking; in effect, I needed a new practice, other sort of processes, in which I would engage with my thinking in different sort of ways. I needed to re-imagine the theatre stage anew. Suddenly, it was as if I myself had become the reality fragment and needed to be extracted from the reality of my choreographic practice and be re-placed (displaced?) somewhere new; away from the stage and into new processes – namely, those of reading and writing.

It is at this stage then that my writing started to develop independently from my choreographic practice. The issue was whether my primary questions on the meaning and purpose of choreography could be thought through in words (rather than be practised, or acted out, in/through choreographic practice). What kind of words would those be, or what type of writerly voice did I need to rehearse in order to articulate the kind of thinking that was happening aside the studio or stage practice? The story that follows on from here is one that runs parallel to the one concerning choreographic practice and indeed narrates a journey through different kinds of writing strategies. From pieces attempting to engage with a telling of history, to pure descriptions of choreographic processes and instances of what we would call performative writing, I eventually arrived at the idea of addressing my research questions through the practice of responding to writing tasks; in fact, I would tackle these tasks with a directness and simplicity that resembled the approach I was exploring towards movement instructions and action scores, making the whole process quite choreographic in the relationship it created between myself as a writer and the act of thinking in (and through) writing itself.

Firstly then, throughout 2004 and 2005, I wrote texts which could be described as collections of copied extracts from texts of others. Sometimes I wrote responses to such extracts, just after copying them, just beneath them, while other times through the

act of copying them alone I would realise whether and how such words related (or not) to my own thinking and so I would stop there. I found myself writing and re-writing sentences and phrases that spoke about the intelligence of bodies that are not expressing themselves, that are empty or hollow, free from psychological depth, bodies that are just demonstrating actions, rather than representing them, bodies that are just doing, bodies as figures, as individuals, as independent personalities. I copied texts that made me think about movement as statement and movement as question, and imagined what might have been meant by all the different characterisations of movement I encountered, such as literal, symbolic, abstract, meaningful, technical and pedestrian. I wondered what could have been meant by phrases such as 'narrative structures' or 'processes of recognition'. I wrote statements on the ordinary, the everyday, the obvious and the inconspicuous, and then on the spectacular, the virtuosic, the extraordinary and the impressive. I discovered texts on the ideas of repetition and of the list as a structuring principle; I wrote lists and repeated structures of writing. I often got trapped in labels and definitions, in terms such as dance, concept dance, non-dance and anti-dance, theatre, dance theatre, performance and live art. I thought others' thoughts on the notion of rules and structures in performance and on the aesthetics of games, as fictitious constructions and real situations at the same time.

Otherwise put, I discovered texts that had been written recently about works that were being made at the time. I merged myself into what I considered to be recent thinking or thinking that was happening concurrently to my own. I 'met' the thinking of – in random order here – Jonathan Burrows, Jan Ritsema, Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Meg Stuart, Vera Mantero, La Ribot, Raimund Hoghe, Thomas Lehmen, Helmut Ploebst, André Lepecki, Bojana Cvejić, Dorothea von Hantelmann, Pirkko Husemann, Joroen Peeters, Mårten Spånberg, Gerald Siegmund, Johannes Birringer, Ramsay Burt, Bock & Vincenzi, Martin Hargreaves, Adrian Heathfield, Matthew Goulsh, Tim Etchells, and many more. It is with such writers that I therefore entered the thinking taking place aside contemporary European choreography, and started to form my own questions around the contemporary moment for dance in Europe, the circulation of exhausted (and exhausting) labels in history and in theory, as well as the potential of choreographic thinking to escape exhaustion and open out towards new possibilities.

Later on, still in quest for my own questions, I found myself looking at past dance and choreographic practices, and subsequently writing long texts on and through this activity of looking at the past; this happened twice, once in 2005 and then again in 2007. Initially, I had thought of this gesture as analogous to that of Hal Foster in *The*

Return of the Real, where the author attempts 'to approach actuality' by asking the question: 'what produces a present as different, and how does a present focus a past in turn?' (Foster, 1996: xiii). Whereas in that book Foster looks at the concept of the real in contemporary art, as it returns from the neo-avant-garde, which in turn originates in the avant-garde of the first three decades of the 20th century, I had thought that a similar task or process would have enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the (my own?) choreographic present. In fact, I believed that by addressing the past I would find a new way to relate to my own contemporaries, whether choreographers, other kinds of artists, theorists or writers.

On the first occasion, what triggered my interest in revisiting the past were contemporary discussions on the appropriateness of terms such as 'conceptual dance', 'non-dance', 'anti-dance', 'minimal dance', or even 'New Choreography'; these were used to describe a contemporary trend in European choreographic practice that seemed to be bringing back some of the thinking and creative strategies employed both in Conceptual (visual) art of the late 1960s and early '70s, and in some of the choreographic experiments of members of the Judson Dance Theatre movement during the same decades. While my text ended up as not more than a tracing of similarities primarily, and only secondarily of differences, between those specific historical moments, my discussion however luckily stretched out and expanded quite unexpectedly, to include a consideration of a range of issues I was becoming more and more interested in: from the problem of definitions and labels in art, and from the concept of self-reflexivity or self-consciousness in art, and its revealing through the art works themselves, to ideas concerning the roles of the author and the audience, as well as those of the curator, the producer, the critic, the writer, the scholar or the dramaturg, both within practices of performance, but also within projects of theoretical dialogue and discursive exchange.

On the second occasion, it was an invitation to write the entry for 'Choreography' in an encyclopaedia on dance⁵³ that led me to revisit sources on past choreographers and their practices, their works, as well as their thoughts on their creative methods. The invitation here was to describe or explain what choreography is by examining what choreography has already been; in other words, to address the past in order to conceive of the present of choreography, one which would not be partial, or exclusive, but would rather occur as evolving from its own past (including that past too). During

⁵³ See Protopapa, 2009: [forthcoming publication].

this attempt, I selected what seemed like my favourite moments from what I had been taught as dance history, in order to then re-compose the development of choreography as I had always imagined it. Here, though, I caught myself misrepresenting or misinterpreting moments, tendencies and trends. More than anything else, I was telling a history of choreography that was most probably my own past as a choreographer. In essence, through this writing I was projecting the journey my practice had followed, starting from the very first pieces I ever choreographed as part of my early dance studies, and up until my recent works as a professional choreographer. The writing told the story of the dancer, or dance student, who becomes a choreographer when realising her need to differentiate between dance and choreography, who attempts to free her body from all the movement languages which have been inscribed on it through dance training, who then explores form and composition through her own and others' bodies, both through set movement and through improvisation, who wonders what meaning her choreographed works might carry for audiences and who hopes that they (the works) might also be capable of activating some sort of thinking (political or ethical maybe?); finally, the story of the choreographer who is interested in presenting work on stage at a strange moment when it seems that everything on stage is allowed, so that on the one hand it feels as if a great number of possibilities have been opened up her, but at the same time, precisely because of this vastness of possibilities, the only way in which she imagines making work is by creating systems and rules, which will inform her methods of choreographing by guiding her decision-making processes as a choreographer (what she would call her performance-making practice).

For one thing then, both these two tasks of 'writing history', or, rather, of constructing my own version of dance history, provided me with an opportunity to elaborate further on some of the issues I had already been thinking through in my previous writings, as mentioned above, and to attempt an understanding of my place within the histories and pasts of such issues. These concerned, amongst others, definitions and trends in dance, the significance of movement in dance as an art form and movement's potential as a meaning-making mechanism within dance performance, the notion of work that displays self-reflexivity, as well as the ways in which choreographers themselves speak or write about their intentions, needs and curiosities when making work. Some of my interests then had found their place within a genealogy of twentieth-century art, or at least within the history of a field of performance and thinking on performance. Perhaps most importantly, though, I also understood that such discussions were not exactly leading me to a direct engagement with the basic questions I had started off with, at least not with regards to a re-thinking or renewal of my own practice; rather, in such

writings I was adopting a voice that tended to narrate the past as if history was outside of me, infallible and undeniable; what is more, this voice often felt slightly disengaged, sometimes quite monotonous, even tedious in fact. Therefore, and while my interests were indeed becoming clearer through such writings, this (historical) way of thinking through my interests was not producing anything close to what I could have started imagining as a 'dance-philosophy'. I needed to write in a different way, so as to conceive of something new perhaps; something of a time that would feel more like 'now', rather than a piece of writing that would aim to understand or repeat something pre-existing. Hence the notion of performative writing crept into my practice and led me to new tasks, and new explorations in writing.

In fact, already in 2005 I had given myself a writing task, for the completion of which I needed to follow a number of rules, and so I had almost designed a choreographic task to be performed by myself, in writing. The attempt was to talk around the experience of three art works, to write *from*, *around* and *in between* the works, and not necessarily *about* them. The art works were Alighiero e Boetti's *Ping Pong* (1966), La Ribot's *40 Espontáneos* (2004) and Forced Entertainment's *Exquisite Pain* (2005), all of which I had experienced in London within a period of two months.⁵⁴ On this occasion, I took the page as a stage, and thought of my task as one of choreographing the word, composing ways of presenting thought, finding forms that would accommodate the mess⁵⁵. The additional rule was to create ten instances with writing, each of which would unfold within the space of one page only. These instances would recall and reflect on moments of experience; moments of spectatorship and performance, of reading, or writing, of thought, imagination and feeling, of reflection, of control or ignorance. Whatever the font and font size, whatever the alignment, the direction and the spacing of the text, each instance would spread on one page only.

I performed the writing task and what I produced was a performative text that almost 'spoke my thoughts'; a text that seemed to develop around the themes of questioning, opposition, contradiction and gaps, repetition, duration and exhaustion; solipsism and obsession, creativity and skill; the relationship between performance and spectator, artist and audience. Not an easy text to follow necessarily, but certainly a text that seemed alive, the task of writing it became an experience that I would subsequently

⁵⁴ I saw *Ping Pong* in September 2005, as part of the exhibition 'Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970' at Tate Modern (see also De Salvo, 2005), *40 Espontáneos* in October 2005 at Greenwich Dance Agency, as part of Dance Umbrella (see also Task #5, Section V of this thesis), and *Exquisite Pain* in November 2005 at Riverside Studios.

⁵⁵ This phrase is a reference to the following statement by Samuel Beckett: 'To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now' (Beckett, cited in Fletcher, 2003: 67).

refer back to in my following attempts to articulate what was becoming my 'dance-philosophy'. The idea of giving myself writing tasks with rules and/or parameters to follow while writing, almost like composing a choreographic score through which to unfold my thinking, was the one thing that would keep coming back to my mind as the only way which showed promise and which would haunt my future writings. In fact, this approach to writing seemed very much aligned to the methods of scoring movement instructions which I had been exploring at the same time in my choreographic work. And hence the notion of writing tasks felt extremely choreographic as I engaged with them, and offered me the sensation of a freedom (in and through writing), similar to the one I had been experiencing in the studio when structuring action through written scores; as if the responsibility to produce ideas in writing was suddenly less daunting, as if the system of the writing task would take care of everything.

I worked on two more types of writings in 2006, before finding a series of writing tasks that I would stick to for good. The first kind attempted to speak directly from my experience of creating works, and usually took the form of edited collections of my memories from creative processes, notes the performers and I had made in rehearsals, and some more recent reflections on the thinking that I remembered taking place in the studio during rehearsals. The second type consisted of attempts to understand through writing some of the concepts and thinking of specific philosophers that had attracted my attention throughout the previous three years – particularly Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière – and usually resulted in diagrams that would depict in a sketchy way arguments found within individual texts of such authors. Even through the former kind of texts would foreground more clearly my recurring creative obsessions, while writing those, I would not discover or understand anything impressively new or significantly different from what I already knew or sensed about my making processes. Similarly, what I thought I was developing through the latter kind of texts was not so much an expertise on the specific philosophers' works, but primarily an interest in the structures themselves of thinking and argumentation that each one of them seemed to follow. And somewhere there, between obsessions that returned in pure descriptions of choreographic processes and the sketching of structures of thought, quite independently from the specificity both of creative experiments and of theoretical arguments, rather in the space (or gap) between them, I would start conceiving of another series of writing tasks: a series of choreographic tasks, I would suggest, structured around the imagining of a new space: a space for thinking, a space that would make my thinking travel, that would transport me from the theatre stage to the board of a board game.

Story #3, as if from market imperatives onwards

In December 2003, I embark on a PhD project, a practice-based research project in choreography, whose aim I describe in terms of constructing ‘something like a “dance-philosophy”, which is meant here as an exploration – in dance terms and through performance practice – of issues of fact and the real, representation and meaning’ (Protopapa, 2004a: 5).

Admittedly, the parameters that would frame such an exploration, in the sense of the contexts (markets?) in which the project would take place and the conditions that would need to be ensured in order for the performance practice to develop, at first seemed quite secondary, especially compared to the broader aims of the project, which were always at stake, whatever the task and the progress of my research. However, given the fact that during this project I was also making my first steps as a professional choreographer in London, and trying to establish a performance group – ensuring funding, applying to festivals, booking venues, and promoting my work in the contemporary dance market – it seemed that there was a whole other side to what I was doing, which could have easily been considered as not part of my research, but which was actually becoming inseparable from the practical research activities I was undertaking; undoubtedly, this part of the project at times took over more of my time and energy than the time I spent in the studio and in theatres working on my practice, or in libraries and in front of computers developing my writing. In what follows, I narrate two occasions when those other kind of issues involved in the project – those to do with the market, with practicalities, with the whole economy within which this research was participating in many ways – suddenly got fore-grounded and appeared as important to the project as any other kind of research question. In fact, it was through these two instances that I became particularly aware of the way in which some of the issues at the core of this project, such as exhaustion and the contemporary, were inevitably linked to the way in which my practice had always been participating in the prevailing systems of curation and production within the UK arts market.

First, in 2005 I became ‘The Artist’ – recipient of a letter published by Helen Cole in *The Doubt Guardian* (see Cole, 2005: 8).⁵⁶ In this text, Cole lists a series of requests

⁵⁶ Žižek (1992: 12) explains: ‘This is the reason why a letter always reaches its addressee: because one becomes its addressee when one is reached’. Following Žižek’s argument, I became the addressee of

towards 'the artist', a series of promises she would like the artist to make; in response, she promises in turn to exhibit certain audience behaviour, 'to reach her part of the bargain' as she writes. Hence, the letter I drafted as a response to Cole, was in its most part an exact repetition – or, more precisely, a rewriting – of her text, in the form of a list of promises I would be willing to make as an artist (to fulfil her request). Among other things, I promised to effect change, be that small and subtle, to be curious and fearless, a bit impressive, strange and special, clever and full of charm, alive to risk and difficulty, incongruity, intrigue and doubt. I promised to hold a magnifying glass to uncertainty, contradiction and ambiguity, to disrupt and reshape, to possess good timing, humour and skill, to open up the doors between worlds and to navigate the gaps in-between, to be ordinary and extraordinary, real and unreal, familiar and wild. Following this, I also thanked Helen Cole for agreeing to be attentive in the dark, to react with interest and a suspension of disbelief to anything I would throw at her, to be awake to any possibility, especially the untested and untried, to be active and open-minded, brave and loyal, challenging and intrigued, generous, responsive, intelligent and pleased (which were all listed as part of Cole's promises).

Additionally, though, there were other kinds of promises I requested that she made, those that would offer another kind of support to the one she was already promising. I wrote: 'will you [...] give me some good audience members' quotes to put in my publicity? Will you make sure that your applause will make funders give me money for my next show? Will you make sure your applause influences critics? Will you subscribe to my mail list? Will you take some time to fill in my audience questionnaire? Will you resist folding my flyer or throwing it away? Deleting my e-flyer because your mail box was full? Will you give £2.00 to buy my programme? [...] Will you tell the theatre programmer how much you enjoyed my work? Will you remember me in a few months?'. And then I admitted, characteristically, 'I'm sorry Helen. I am a believer. But I'm also a survivor'. In truth, this was not meant as a complaint; it wasn't a protesting gesture or a gesture expressing regret or bitterness about the place I had found myself in either. It was, however, certainly, an expression of the realisation of everything else that ideally needed to be guaranteed in order for the 'believing' to happen. It was surely becoming clear to me that as much as my research was about constructing a 'dance-philosophy', it would equally need to address issues of market-ability; in fact, such issues needed perhaps to become part of, or leave their traces within, my 'dance-philosophy'. Firstly, then, my need to renew my choreographic practice – which I

Helen Cole's letter the moment I recognised myself in it. (This letter also appears in *The Live Art Almanac*, see Brine & Minton, 2008: 125-126).

somehow felt connected to that of other choreographers working at the same time with me in Europe – was linked to market imperatives, to the demands of audiences and to those of programmers and producers; and, secondly, the construction of my so-called ‘dance-philosophy’ could also be imagined as a process of finding out a way of dealing precisely with such imperatives, and therefore as responding to artistic as well as professional needs more generally.

The second instance in which the contemporary market appeared as a prominent notion occurred in 2006, when I created a solo performance card-game, designed for one player, namely for myself as a choreographer. I would play this game as a choreographer-researcher who would use the game to understand more about my practice and my thinking on practice. In particular, while performing the game I would investigate physically and by speaking my thoughts out loud in front of an audience what my artistic practice actually consisted of, where my choreographic work derived from and what was doing. I wondered whether there were recurring themes in my practice and how they had come about, whether I was aware of the particular methodologies I developed in pursuing such themes, whether I was searching for an artistic identity through this whole project, and whether the need for the construction of a ‘dance-philosophy’, or of an artistic identity for that matter, was in fact a research or a market imperative. What is more, I wondered if all my doubt and uncertainties would ever find a place in the ‘market’, or whether it was really useless to attempt to challenge the orthodoxies of the ‘market’ where usually self-belief and positive assertion prevail. All this I explored by looking back at instances of my practice through writings and images, which were spread on large cards on the floor. I created something like a landscape then, in which I improvised physically and mentally, in order to gradually unravel the links between the diverse landmarks of my past practice.

The one card I had included more than once on the floor-scape, said: ‘Name 10 things that you do as part of your practice as a choreographer’. Every time I played the game, I tried to answer in a different way, and every time there would be a few things (out of the ten) that would always come out the same. I heard myself repeating that part of my practice was writing about writing-up budgets and funding applications, finding collaborators, creating rehearsal schedules, making phone calls to venue managers and programmers, rushing to buy costumes and being late for rehearsals, sending out e-flyers and editing videos for promoters; and every time these responses would come up, I would wonder where the producer met the choreographer, whether they were one and the same thing, and whether this had anything to do with my ‘dance-philosophy’.

Was my experiencing of producing work and trying to promote it in the dance market getting in my way, when all I needed was to find appropriate tasks that would lead me to a new conception of choreography? Or was producing and promoting my work, in fact, participating and informing my choreographic thinking?

It seemed as if the game or system I really needed to create was not one that would allow me to bypass the experience of the producer, as I had initially expected, but one that would allow me to think of my practice as somehow interlinked with the rules of the contemporary market. The question of the relationship between my research and the prevailing economies of the spectacle was one that would indeed always remain in my mind. But, at the same time, I would need to keep my promises to Helen, to remain a 'believer', in order to construct my 'dance-philosophy', and possibly also find ten new things that I would be able to present as included in my practice whenever performing the solo card-game again; arguably, this would help me refine and constantly redefine my relationship to contemporary economies, as well as to find my place within discussions about contemporary dance's specific relationship to such economies. In this way, rather than feeling that the demands of the market are restricting, I would use them to create new possibilities for my practice. After all, I was to experience myself a few changes in the dance market very soon: the kind of self-reflexive practice I was interested in, the one that seeks to question its own mechanisms, conditions and ways of producing, would start to gain support not only from festivals but also through other types of events set-up by established organisations, aiming at an exchange of thinking between choreographers, producers and theorists. In effect, such developments would influence my project and would significantly inform how I perceived myself within what could broadly be termed as the European contemporary dance scene.

Story #4, as if it can all be told through anecdotes

In December 2003, I embark on a PhD project, a practice-based research project in choreography, whose aim I describe in terms of constructing 'something like a "dance-philosophy"', which is meant here as an exploration – in dance terms and through performance practice – of issues of fact and the real, representation and meaning' (Protopapa, 2004a: 5).

This is indeed the way I kept presenting the project to various people on different occasions almost up until the time the project was finished. And, strangely enough, I

probably did not even change one word in the above statement, whatever the context in which I spoke about the project. Somehow, it seemed that this way of introducing it would make all sorts of people, in all these different kinds of settings, interested in what I had to say. And maybe all those contexts and all those people would be of interest to my research too. Consequently, as soon as I embarked on the project I started appearing in all sorts of settings, chasing all the possible events that I could attend, participating in workshops, keeping notes from people's dialogues and monologues, seeing shows, staying at the post-show talks, collecting more and more experiences, and on some occasions printed documents, that would somehow participate and become helpful in my attempt to construct my 'dance-philosophy'. Of course, what these experiences produced was a sensation of excess as well as exhaustion. If, as a contemporary artist, I often found myself scattered in many different types of activities, constantly on-the-run, in order to catch all events that seemed possibly linked to my project, then it is perhaps this type of 'practical research' more than anything else that informed my experience of the contemporary phenomenon of exhaustion. In fact, the way in which the short anecdotes I am about to narrate appear in the following pages not only evidences the excessive and scattered nature of the encounters that formed my practice, but also suggests the need for a space of withdrawal where thinking as practice can happen, which is precisely the way in which choreo-thinking is introduced throughout this thesis and is particularly explored in Section IV that follows.

December 2003: I have just embarked on the project and am attending a conference on practice-based research. I hear people speaking of different kinds of knowledges, different kinds of ways of knowing, problems of funding, evaluation, assessment and dissemination. I hear Ross Cameron, a lighting designer for dance, saying: 'you've got a long way ahead of you; dance is still a baby'. I get anxious when I realise how 'practice-based' presentations do not always convince me as much as the conventional reading-out of an academic paper. Indeed, I've got a long way ahead of me in figuring out how I will pursue new knowledge and how I will present my research outcome to the academic community.

March 2004: I am in Glasgow, attending a one-week intensive performance lab, which focuses on dance for the camera and is led by Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie. I run around the city and record clips of not more than three seconds. I edit while filming and get absorbed in one-minute wonders. I have this impression that all my work is inspired by the so-called 'Theatre of the Absurd' and so I try to force some text by Ionesco into the filmic wonders. It doesn't work. The digital images indeed produce absurdity, but this is

not like Ionesco. Or, is it just form that inspires me in the scripts of Beckett and Ionesco? It might be that absurdity doesn't mean anything to me anymore. People tell me I have an eye for the camera; that I have a very particular way of structuring form inside the frame so that, as the video unfolds in time, formal matter gets constantly re-arranged in the frame in order to produce meaning. I leave Ionesco in Glasgow. This is the last time I'll try to make work based on a play. But then again, even if I never get to work with theatre scripts again, I will soon discover a fascination with written instructions for action in the form of what I will call movement scores.

July 2004: I take two choreographic workshops which will change my way of thinking on dance and choreography radically. One is with Jonathan Burrows and the other with Xavier Le Roy. During the first workshop I fill up a whole notebook in one week, with thoughts and questions on performance, composition, recognition, the role of the audience in performance and the notion of 'accepting what comes without trying to be clever or beautiful', as Burrows proposed. During the second one, I write about twenty scores for performance in one week, and watch them being performed by other participants. These are not theatre scripts; these are movement or action scores. And I discover something very liberating in the act itself of writing together with others inside a studio. I hear myself reading out my written response to the question of 'why dance?', which is essentially that dance is a fundamentally flawed art form, and that this is why I'm still interested in practising it. This statement impresses people. A few days later I make a four-minute solo using only six movements (what Jonathan Burrows calls 'things'), and everyone who sees it (including myself) is quite surprised at how much sense this piece makes. Even though it hasn't been scored, it really seems like a 'written' piece. Its simple structure and clear composition allows me to engage in a process of thinking and remembering while I perform it; and this seems to be something unique in relation to the performative presence produced by scored pieces.

November 2004: I find myself at Riverside Studios, for the start of Forced Entertainment's *Marathon Lexicon*, which will last for twelve hours and which will start from the letter 'A'; I remember the word 'Audience'. At some point, when they reach the letter 'K', I shall have to leave for work. I finish work early and think I might be able to make it for the letter 'Z'. I take the fastest route of transportation from The Old Operating Theatre Museum in London Bridge to Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, and travel from one side of London to the other in less than thirty minutes. I enter Studio 2 at Riverside Studios just a few minutes before the time when the performance

is programmed to finish, and stand on the side of the auditorium, sweaty and out of breath. I hear a text on 'Zero'. The marathon is over. Time's up.

May 2005: A close friend and collaborator is leaving the country. She says London is over for her. We have just presented all our past pieces in a triple bill and will probably never work on them again. They're gone. A new phase is about to start. More travelling will happen. Will I ever leave London? How does the city you live in affect your work? Why does everyone tell me I should go to Berlin? Should I have never left Amsterdam? Months later I will hear someone saying that everyone is a foreigner in London. Maybe that's why I'm still here. Here, in this city, in my work, I will remain a foreigner. I like this tension. It allows me to stand beside myself, to position myself just outside my practice, but also to remotely participate in the contemporary developments in central Europe, which starts to feel all too familiar the more my work goes on.

July 2005: I am now in Aberystwyth, working – actually, moving around in a dark studio theatre – for five whole days with one single question in mind. This is Deborah Hay's question: 'What if my body has the ability to surrender both front and back at once?'. I am tired and cannot focus on this anymore. I write: 'I can't find a reason to move any longer'. One week later, still in Aberystwyth, I watch a Spanish woman draw maps on the floor and speak information about the places she marks and the relationships between them. Soon, a whole room's floor is covered with chalk, and a tour around the whole world has been performed in less than two hours. I am thrilled and feel empowered. This is movement. This is reason. From now onwards, my last words towards performers before a show will always be: 'Find a reason, and enjoy it'. Perhaps the issue of whether and how movement will occur is actually secondary to my work.

January 2006: Past mid-night, on a coach back from Coventry, I will play *Quizoola!* with three friends, after watching the homonymous durational performance by Forced Entertainment. We will spend the whole journey asking questions, devising answers, remembering and recreating strategies of interrogation and response. I recreate this game for performers, for students, for participants in auditions and for some friends in Greece. I hear someone saying that the most difficult thing is not to lie in a way that sounds truthful, but to say the truth so that it sounds like fiction. And this, I realise a few months later, is also the key to a convincing piece of performative writing.

March 2006: In a bright room in Dartington, I hear Emily Claid proposing that collaboration does not necessarily mean collectivity, and that a collaborative artist can

work through their own expertise in order to meet the other's expertise. Artists from different disciplines have gathered at Dartington College to explore issues of making work in an interdisciplinary way, and somehow they stumble upon collectivity every single time they try to make something. It feels as if I don't want to dance or make decisions about music or do any filming; eventually, though, I end up doing all of that. This is not my expertise. But then again, what is the expertise of someone who calls themselves a choreographer? Months later I will hear Jonathan Burrows, Siobhan Davies and Matteo Fargion agreeing that choreography has to do with ordering things and arranging them in space and time. Is that all?

April 2006: I am about to leave for Ireland, where I am flying only to watch a performance by Jérôme Bel, when André Lepecki's *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (2006) arrives through the post. I take the book with me and read it throughout my trip, as if it is the accompanying programme notes to Jérôme Bel's performance. After the show, I speak to the choreographer, and he tells me how excited he is that a new book has come out that includes a chapter on his work. While in Dublin, I also realise that the whole city is full of posters with Samuel Beckett's face on them. Beckett is everywhere, even in the book. A very strange feeling emerges that all these choreographers that Lepecki discusses in his book might somehow be related to Beckett's theatre. No one says that of course, but I am sure I'll be able to develop this argument further one day.

August 2006: In Warsaw, I am sitting in a café asking Xavier Le Roy if he thinks his work is influenced by the work of Beckett. He will refer to the idea of structuring as few elements as possible in as many ways as possible; we will speak about combinatorial mathematics and systems of exhausting possibilities. This is all part of my research for the writing of an article on Beckett and European Choreography, which will get neglected when the writings of Jacques Rancière will fall into my hands. A few days later, following a proposition by Bojana Cvejić and Jan Ritsema, I will find myself creating imaginary shows for the radio, by recording and broadcasting speech and other soundings inside a dark theatre, as if aiming to create a 'redistribution of the sensible', following Rancière. We watch a lot of Godard. And, although I cannot exactly explain how such redistribution happens, I know I can feel it when it occurs. Coming back from Poland, it's as if the whole of me has been shaken – and, redistributed.

November 2006: I have finally found an answer to the question of why I feel uncomfortable when people ask me if what I do is dance theatre. Teaching a subject

called 'Dance and Theatre', at the University of Peloponnese in Greece, I refer to examples of dance, of theatre, of dance theatre and physical theatre, and, finally, of what is neither dance nor theatre. Or, is it all theatre in the end? I smile when reading the sentence 'Theatre, of course, is rubbish'⁵⁷. From now on I tell people that what I do is something like organising activity for the stage. As for dance theatre, a student of mine tells me two and a half years later, that he feels it is quite passé in its themes and aesthetic. That same day, a few hours later, I will receive a text message: 'Hello my dear, Pina Bausch has died today...'

May 2007: I find myself in a library in Sheffield, reading books on theatre architecture and downloading information from the internet on board games such as chess, Go, and Snakes and Ladders. I look at images of empty theatre spaces and then at images of game boards. I don't really know or remember how I might have got here, but I am certainly reminded of the kind of football-like games Xavier Le Roy explores in his work. Maybe this is where the tension lies for me; where possibility lies. This is where I want to be: somewhere between theatre stages and the boards of board games. I will have to do something with this thinking.

October 2007: I invite a long-term collaborator of mine and performer, a trained actor, to lead a workshop for a group of students that I am making a piece for. It has been very hard to explain to them exactly how they are supposed to be engaged in the work and to appear on stage. And, suddenly, I hear this collaborator of mine telling them that my work is not about acting or role-playing, but about 'having fun, just being whoever you want to be in that moment'. A few weeks later I will collect writings from the students, where they will confess that our collaboration changed the way they perceived themselves and made them believe in the power of performance again. Maybe it's more about this: pleasure and having fun, by allowing oneself to become not something unreal, but that other real that only performance might put up with.

February 2008: At Sadler's Wells, Jérôme Bel proposes that the problem in Britain is that there is something called 'Live Art', which in other countries of Europe is still called 'dance'. I admit that for some reason I feel a sense of awe every time I hear the term 'Live Art'. Of course, it sounds quite appealing to be able to align yourself with a movement that perceives itself in terms of the strategies it pursues, rather than the

⁵⁷ This is how Nicholas Ridout opens an essay titled 'Art and Theatre' in *TATE ETC.* (2007: 104-107). The same essay appears under the title 'You, the Spectator' in *The Live Art Almanac* (Brine & Minton, 2008: 17-20).

outcomes it produces. In fact, I might not know what kind of art I produce, but it seems that the way in which I want my own creative strategies to be perceived is as those of a choreographer.

Stop.

Why a choreographer? Or, else, how does all this relate to wanting to think of oneself as a choreographer? What about the construction of the 'dance-philosophy'? Where is 'fact and the real' to be found now? Or, what about 'representation and meaning'?

As if too much has been unfolded through my stories, the journeys feel too long.

This is not about anecdotes anymore, is it?

This is about that moment in Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*⁵⁸ when the one who listens places their hand on the one who speaks to stop them from speaking. We've heard enough. Time's up. In Alan Read's words again,

I want to let it go.

I want a word to fall from my mouth. I want to hold it. Then, I want to leave it behind.

I want to hear it said. No more than that.

I can't stand this other body. Its hands are on me. It is too quiet.

(Read, 2007: 106).

And so, I let go and leave all this behind. It all goes quiet as I return...

Storytelling as a catching net

It is much harder to tell than to invent. Inventing is easy.

[...]

You are always after something, in service to something that is already happening, listening to the feedback and telling it exactly.

[...]

⁵⁸ See Beckett, 1984: 283-288.

Listening to the feedback and telling it, whatever 'it' is.

[...]

Telling something exactly, with loyalty and disinterest.

(Cameron and Hay, 2005: [my notes])

If a prologue is a short part before the entrance of the chorus in ancient tragedy, a speech before a play, a short paragraph before a poem, an opening or preface to a piece of text or an event, then I too have offered here what I consider as a sort of second opening to (the rest of) this thesis – or, more precisely, as the 'pre-logue', in the sense of an account, in words, of what preceded the tightening up of this piece of writing in the form of an organised research outcome. And, prior to the production of this outcome, or during its creation, as it were, what happened was *practice*, both in the sense of professional choreographic activity, which often resulted in the creation and presentation of performance works, and in the sense of writing which resulted in pieces of text, sections of which have found their way into this outcome, and some of which have been published.

In my telling I deployed the principles from the quoted passage above, which were offered by Margaret Cameron and Deborah Hay to participants in a workshop the two of them led at the Centre for Performance Research (Aberystwyth, July 2005): telling exactly, rather than inventing, and doing so 'with loyalty and disinterest', as they say. Telling, as opposed to inventing, supposedly suggests a task of sticking to pure description, stating facts, and speaking directly from one's experience – without additions, without alterations, without amplifications, and without the necessity for a particular kind of interpretation of the experience. And so, what I hope to have performed is indeed a listening to and of the past, through writing and as if in the form of a remembering. The question occurs, of course, whether this might be a real remembering, in the sense of a recollection of as much truth from the past as I can draw up. How would the reader be able to know if this is the truth, anyway? 'With loyalty and disinterest' is the extra little bit which is added to the principle of telling, in order to almost liberate it from having to arrive at something which is, or at least feels like, the truth; as if to say, perhaps, that exactitude does not necessarily mean correctness or factuality, not even a sort of fidelity in reconstructing the past, as it were; or, perhaps, this is not the point here. Like the two ends of a magnet, loyalty and disinterest operate here as mutually exclusive terms, so that, as Deborah Hay proposed on the same occasion in Aberystwyth, this impossibility itself offers an open space, which is neither the space of a truth nor that of a lie. Therefore, within such a

process of remembering, forgetting has been embraced as much as the generating of a certain kind of fiction, which is however quite different to invention.⁵⁹

More specifically, I have narrated four different stories as if they are different versions a single story I could tell to account for my past practice. One of the purposes of this telling has been to reveal to the reader the messiness of practice, which is quite rarely depicted in organised documents such as this one. It is important to stress, then, that concepts and issues, such as exhausting dance and possibilising dance, the (interruptive) singularity of performance practice within the context of the contemporary, the necessity for a space for thinking in choreography, the tension between thinking, doing (dance) and writing, or the re-imagining of the theatre stage as the board of a board game, which form the cornerstones of this project, were not invented at the start of the process, but have rather been arrived at through practice; in fact, I would propose that the nature of scattered-ness and multilayered-ness that arises from these stories, as well as their specificity in terms of the contexts in which they took place, or the way in which they involved the researcher-practitioner in each case, are all central to the nature of the particular research interests I have referred to here (as these have been explored up until this point and will unfold further later on), and to the particular writing strategies I often adopt in tackling them (the multiple stories of this section, for example, or the series of tasks that appear in Section V).

Hence, I see my storytelling operating as a catching net, through which the reader might have similarly been able to trace the scattered roots of the various issues I discuss, but might have also gained a sensation of the practice that was developed alongside the theoretical enquiry pursued here. I would suggest, then, that the catching net of the storytelling has allowed me to foreground two more issues: first, the nature of contemporary practice as scattered activity which is almost always in a process of discovery, and yet might still provide a clear framework for a series of research questions to be articulated and examined alongside each other; and, second, the way I am implicated as a practitioner within a landscape of multiple activities (and have formulated in this way a sense of my own self as a practitioner from within the project), so that my writing becomes a discovery tool and at the same time an artistic or creative outcome – indeed, an outcome *of practice*.

⁵⁹ In fact, I suggest that this approach to the telling of the past, which allows for both truth and fiction to emerge, and which is a practising of loyalty and disinterest, is precisely what provided a base for the solo *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]*, in which Susanna Recchia attempts to remember moments of past practice that I describe to her in pieces of paper she reads on stage during the solo. (See also DVD 2 and Section VII of the thesis).

At this point, one could surely argue that an attempt to refold the multiple experiences of this practice towards a kind of centre, or to find and establish the sense-logic which holds together the practice that preceded this written outcome, as well as the writing of this outcome as a form of practice itself, might be a pointless task. Certainly, the nature of my practice has been such that the centre, its sense-logic, remains multiple, constantly destabilised (and constantly destabilising), in the form of dispersed and scattered experience, constantly on the move, constantly in exile from itself. However, we might be able to re-trace and articulate here a nexus of questions or concerns that have emerged through the storytelling, and which the reader will similarly find underlying the thinking which unfolds throughout this thesis, and/or in the documented performance work on the attached DVDs.

The first group of issues, then, might concern basic questions which I seem to share with several choreographers making work at the current time – questions which feel very particular and pressing from within one's own practice, despite the fact that they may sound slightly simplistic here, or too generalising perhaps: What are the imperatives that lead performance-making practice, and what is such practice's purpose or meaning for the choreographer herself? How does one go about making dance performance? Or, more specifically, how does one structure movement or action in a meaningful way? What possibilities does the contemporary moment offer to the choreographer, and what is the responsibility of the choreographer towards constructing something which 'makes sense' in the contemporary moment? The second group of issues then would concern what has been described as 'a composing of the theatrical': What are the implications of the particular theatre set-up for dance performance? And what is the role, or what are the expectations, of the spectator who sits in the theatre to watch a dance performance? Finally, a series of questions which concern the thinking of the choreographer herself: Where and how can the choreographer practice thinking? What would be the outcome of such activity, and how would this process differ from a self-reflexive questioning on one's own practice? If these are some of the questions that have emerged through a dispersed and interruptive kind of practice, then it is the process of thinking through them that has fed into the conception of possibilising dance; and this in turn operates as a concept through which questions such as the above can be reconsidered. In this sense, then, choreo-thinking as a way of possibilising dance will be (re)introduced and practiced in what follows as an alternative way to (re-)approach such questions (other than through choreographic practice, that is).

Before that, though, let us make one last observation, to do with the way the practising self is embedded in the sort of practice described through my narrations. In engaging with the task of storytelling so as to trace the routes of some of my core questions, and in doing so 'with loyalty and disinterest', not only has my telling remained to some extent autobiographical, but it has also pointed at a sense of a dispersed self; indeed, this has been a telling of multiple stories, and therefore also the autobiographical writing of a multiple scattered self. What is at stake here is not only the question of what lies at the heart of the storytelling, not even a question about the issues that the storytelling has brought forward; rather, it is one that concerns the nature of the writing subject herself that is being spoken. Adrian Heathfield poses a relevant question and Deborah Hay and Margaret Cameron provide an answer, which seems similar to the one Heathfield finds in Maurice Blanchot:

Of what does the text speak when its writing subject is spoken rather than the text speaking of its object?

(Heathfield, 2006: 180).

Whatever you wrote is not you. Take the weight out of it.

(Cameron and Hay, 2005: [my notes]).

A writer in spite of himself: it is not a matter of writing despite or against oneself in a relation of contradiction – indeed, of compatibility – with oneself, or with life, or with writing [...]. Rather, it is a matter of writing *in another relation*, from which the other dismisses himself and has always dismissed us, even in the movement of attraction.

(Blanchot, cited in Heathfield, 2006: 180, Heathfield's emphasis).

Hence in my storytelling, too, as the utterer, or the writing subject, I am the one being spoken, but somehow also it is me that is being dismissed; one could say that my aim here has been to meet my writerly voice *in spite of* or *beside* myself, as Heathfield proposes (ibid: 180). And if, as he explains, the failure to deliver one's self through writing makes such writing operate as a 'counter-mythology' to 'the bolstering of the stories the self tells itself about itself', then already here, through a narrative account of past practice, I have attempted to appear scattered and beside myself, already in relation to the other of myself – already failing, already weightless, to go back to Cameron and Hay.

Following on from this, I would like to finally refer to a text by Estelle Barrett (2006: [online]), where the writer engages with ongoing debates on practice-based research and the role of the artist as researcher, and deploys Foucault's notions of the function

of the author and of the dispersed selves of an author in particular, in order to consider the way the practitioner-researcher appears within, operates and produces work. On the one hand, then, and following on from Michel Foucault's 1969 essay 'What is an Author?' (in Rapinbow, 1984: 101-120), Barrett stresses the fact that Foucault's conception of discourse refers not only to language, but to practices as well; hence, in practice-led research both the artist-researcher and their work become situated within a diversity of 'apparatuses', 'operations', or 'procedures of production', which in turn consist of various 'materials, methods *and* theoretical ideas and paradigms' from within which the research emerges as a whole (Barrett, *ibid*, her emphasis). On the other hand, though, when it comes to considering the artist-researcher through the concept of the dispersed selves of an author, Barrett clearly divides practice-based research into two distinct strands – namely, that of the artistic practice and that of the 'reporting the writing up of the studio process and its outcomes' – and furthermore applies the notion of the dispersed selves almost exclusively to the researcher as a writer. Hence she proposes Foucault's conception of the author 'as an instrument for developing a more distanced and crucial approach to research *writing*', so that the artist-researcher manages 'to articulate *objectively*, methods, processes, and conclusions that emerge from *an alternative logic of practice* and the intrinsically *subjective dimension of artistic production*' (Barrett, *ibid*, my emphasis).

It seems to me, then, that in her proposition Barrett tends to restrict the ideas of dispersal and the plurality of the self to fit a supposed duality of artistic practice versus theoretical exegesis, while it is also assumed here that the artist-researcher is in a position to distinguish between the two and, in particular, to objectively write on subjective art-making. Going back to the telling of my own practice, however, I would suggest that the understanding of the specific scattered nature of practice that emerged through my storytelling necessitates an expansion of the notion of the plural self, so as to include and refer to all the kinds of activities the practice-based researcher engages in. Those can hardly be limited to fit the two categories of artistic creation and research writing, but rather exceed and transgress both. I would therefore take the totality and multiplicity of the author as 'dispersed selves' to refer not only to the author who writes versus the one who creates, but to all kinds of authors which I have possibly embodied during and while I practiced all the kinds of activities involved in my project (including that of writing). Hence, the potential trans-discursivity of a self, which Barrett refers to as well, applies not only to different discourses within writing or language, but also to discourses of different natures and processes altogether (what I have called economies or fields in Section II); such discourses are not just two,

antithetical ones, placed in opposition to each other, but rather multiple ones, multi-layered ones, placed beside and in spite of each other. It is not then a matter of a singular self and its singular other which I am presenting here, but one of multiple selves (and hence multiple mythologies) that I have allowed to appear through the telling of past practice.

It would be fair to admit, then, that this project seems to have had aims and objectives which might sound quite separable from, additional to, and perhaps different in their nature from those posed by the initial enquiry into the construction of a 'dance-philosophy' – whether those were related to artistic obsessions, such as a constant interest in the theatre of Samuel Beckett, or to my efforts to develop and establish myself as a young choreographer in a particular geographical context and time, and within certain artistic communities. Certainly, I see this whole project, as well as my role within it, as participating in a number of different economies, as Susan Melrose would say (and as I have argued in Section II), which might overlap at some places, but which often seem as if they do not quite coincide. However, this belonging both of the work and of myself to different contexts (and markets) appears in my storytelling as embedded critically in the project of possibilising dance once again. Perhaps, then, for the one who practices what had been conceived originally as a 'dance-philosophy', the hyphen suggests precisely this: the impossibility of refolding their several selves into a single author, a single text, or a single practice. In this way, dance-philosophy potentially comes to refer to a process or method more than a specific content or substance of thought, a way of practising thinking more than an examination (through thinking) of particular issues. Consequently, possibilising dance emerges from within parallel and overlapping discourses that keep the choreographer 'in another relation' to herself, as described by Blanchot (and further explored by Heathfield). And, finally, I would suggest that such a relation of beside-ness is interlinked with the concept and practice of choreo-thinking; this is because choreo-thinking, too, as we shall see hereafter, requires a sort of displacement, a relocation or withdrawal, and, in this sense, a relationship of outside-ness or beside-ness to oneself and to one's usual choreographic practice.

IV. What calls for choreo-thinking?

Properly understood, the question asks what it is that commands us to enter into thought, that calls on us to think. [...] It means: What is it that directs us into thought and gives us directives for thinking?

[...]

That which directs us to think gives us directives in such a way that we first become capable of thinking, and thus *are* as thinkers, only by virtue of its directive.

(Heidegger, 1993[1954]: 384, his emphasis).

(Re)introducing the choreographer as writer

Let me (re)introduce you to the choreographer who is here to write. To write as she has always been doing, one could add, given the etymological analysis of the word 'choreographer', which suggests that she (the choreographer) has always been a writer, the one who writes... dance. And yet, the question remains: what kind of writing is this? In fact, let us return to André Lepecki's *Exhausting Dance* (2006), in order to focus this time on the relationship between dance and writing (even when, or precisely when, the dance that is being written starts to be something 'other than dance'). And let us think, subsequently, of the kind of writing the choreographer might find herself engaging in when her task becomes one of possibilising dance; or, let us think of how the task of possibilising dance leads to a writing of thinking. What sort of thinking might that be then?

First of all, it is interesting how in his writings Lepecki consistently returns to certain moments in the history of dance and writing, when the two were initially linked to produce the concept of choreography.⁶⁰ Lepecki asserts that such a concept first appeared in 1589, through the term 'orchestographie' – 'orchesto-graphy' we could say, or the writing of 'orchesis', of dance. This is the title that was given to a book-guide on court dances by its writer, Thoinot Arbeau, who was a mathematician, a priest and a master-teacher of court dances. In *Orchestographie* then, it occurs that Arbeau decided to engage in 'orchestography' following the request of Capriol, a lawyer and student of his, that dance becomes not just teachable to the dancer from a master, like Arbeau,

⁶⁰ See also Lepecki, 2004, and Allsopp & Lepecki, 2008.

but in the long run transmittable from one generation to the other, even in the absence of a teacher or master:

CAPRIOL

[...] Set these things down in writing to enable me to learn this art [...] In truth, your method of writing is such that a pupil, by following your theory and precepts, even in your absence, could teach himself in the seclusion of his own chamber.

(Arbeau, 1967[1589]: 15).

In this sense, 'orchesography' would ensure that dance becomes re-workable, representable and, eventually, reproducible by a pupil who would follow written guidelines on how the dance is to be performed. Such guidelines, as displayed in Arbeau's book, consist of a description of the steps of each dance, an explanation of the way in which such steps are to be executed in relation to the accompanying music, as well as a reference to the social manners the dancer needs to follow when entering the dance hall, especially towards his 'damsel'. It is therefore something like a manual that launches an overall project of notating dances and guiding the dancer, which continues, for example, with Raoul Auger Feuillet's book *Choreographie, ou l'art de décrire la danse* (1968[1700]). This concerns, once again, the writing down of steps, movements, and configurations that dancers are to make in space during the dance, this time perhaps in a slightly more detailed and codified way. It is, after all, an amalgamation of previous essays by the maîtres de ballet of the 15th century on how court dances are to be performed. Hence, the notation system which becomes formulated from this time onwards becomes used extensively in 18th century Europe, and choreography establishes itself as that which today we might call dance notation, a descriptive writing down of dances (or the writing of a description of dances), to be used by dancers who might want to learn or re-vive and perform those dances in the absence of their masters.

Lepecki's interest in such historical occurrences lies, on the one hand, as he points out (2006: 6-7), in the fact that it is in sources such as the abovementioned ones, that not only the concepts of dance and writing are linked for the first time, but also those of two subjects – that of the one who dances (the student-dancer) and that of the one who writes dance (the teacher-choreographer). And, on the other hand, it is here that choreography starts to emerge as the codification and transcription of movement which is performed in a specific disciplined way (Lepecki, 2006: 25). What becomes notable, therefore, is not just the appearance of the concept of choreography as writing and/or teaching, but also the emergence of a kind of writing of dance whose purpose is to

function in the absence of its author; a kind of writing which will itself become the tutor. The objective seems to be that the dancer develops an ability to perform specific dances in a particular way, through a process of learning, training and disciplining to specific rules. The choreographer writes in order for that writing to become a means of transferring such knowledge even in the former's absence; and, as Lepecki argues, choreography, 'the project of dancing-writing', establishes itself through 'a spectral-technological promise', that of becoming the vehicle, the system, through which the knowledge of the master-choreographer will become transmittable over distance and over time (2006: 26). Simultaneously, and as soon as choreography becomes such writing, it apparently presupposes (and promotes) precisely that ability of the human body (the student-dancer's) to discipline itself, in order to succeed in executing movement repeatedly in exactly the same way, in another place and at another time.

This is how Lepecki then goes on to claim that already in the configuration of the word 'orchestographie', as well as in that of the contemporary term 'choreography', 'the fusing of dance and writing names a practice whose programmatic, technical, discursive, ideological, and symbolic forces remain active today' (2006: 132); and those have to do with the emergence of the modern body '[revealing] itself fully as a linguistic entity', once 'the subject who moves and the subject who writes [...] [become] one and the same' (Lepecki, 2006: 7). Hence, he argues that it is language which mobilises, and that 'choreography, as a technology that produces bodies and subjectivities disciplined to keep moving according to the commands of writing, is the emblematic technology of this modernist being-toward-movement' (2006: 49). And next, Lepecki's project takes the form of a critical discussion of certain contemporary choreographic practices, as we have seen in Section I, which, he claims, criticise and destabilise this modern subjectivity – though also generating it, as they are anyway at the same time already haunted by it – through a series of 'still acts' that occur at the moment when all movement has been exhausted.

If Lepecki's project looks at choreographic writings as technologies of a being-toward-slowness or being-toward-stillness, then I would like to also consider here an essay by Martin Hargreaves (2004), in which the latter comes across another kind of choreographic writing: one which operates as a technology of being-toward-absence. Hargreaves's essay concerns his collaboration with Bock & Vincenzi in their project *invisible dances...* (1999-2006), and attempts to discuss their 2003 work *invisible dances... from afar: a show that will never be shown* in particular, with reference to

notions of presence, disappearance and the trace. This work⁶¹ was presented in a 'dark' theatre in London's West End, as Bock & Vincenzi describe it (2004: 7), and involved: two people in the auditorium, one describing to an absent audience her experience of watching a show that nobody else was watching ('The Watcher'), and one 'ghostly figure' who was invited to check whether there were any other spirits in the auditorium during the show ('The Medium'); nine performers moving onstage, in response to recorded texts they got on cassette tapes, minidisks, monitors or stethoscope; and one person ('The Witness'), who could hear but not see the performance, and who wrote about her experience throughout the show.⁶² In fact, another 'performance' was then produced, consisting of an audio-description of the initial show by 'The Watcher', which audiences were invited to listen to over the phone a few months after that first show had taken place.⁶³ Similarly, the work *Here, As If They Hadn't Been, As If They Are Not* (2006a), which is the epilogue to the whole project *invisible dances...*, has been described as 'a play with no plot, no beginning and no end', during which '[t]hirteen performers, both blind and sighted, present different "states" created and guided by different rules and interpretations of representation', a piece which returns to notions of appearance and disappearance and which 'questions whether all is ever visible' (unknown author, 2006b: [online Dance4 programme]). Indeed, and although it would be quite difficult to describe what I saw onstage in that piece,⁶⁴ I can say that the performers seemed to be responding with their actions to different sorts of stimuli they were being offered onstage: sound or text through headphones, for example, or image from a monitor facing away from the audience, playing some sort of film perhaps – all kept mysteriously unknown to us, so that we would have a sense that something was prompting the performers to enter into the states they did and to perform the actions they did, but so that, at the same time, we would be left to guess or imagine what exactly was going on.

In his essay, therefore, Hargreaves embraces the task of examining a series of dances, which he heard Fiona Templeton (as 'The Watcher') describing over the telephone wire, and which are proposed by Bock & Vincenzi not as presences, but rather as absences, or invisibilities, what the dramaturg will then describe as choreographic

⁶¹ See Bock & Vincenzi, 2003a.

⁶² See Bock & Vincenzi (2004: 7) for a more detailed description of the precise way in which the relationship between the external (moving) body, communication technologies and the notion of absence was explored as part of the piece *invisible dances... from afar: a show that will never be shown* (2003). See also Fleming (2004), for a discussion between Martha Fleming, Frank Bock and Simon Vincenzi on the issues of representation, repetition, translation and reconstruction, as these were explored throughout the *invisible dances...* project.

⁶³ See Bock & Vincenzi, 2003b.

⁶⁴ I saw the work performed in May 2006 at the Laban Theatre.

marks or traces. In order to consider this kind of choreographic writing then, Hargreaves turns to Derrida and approaches choreography through the latter's notion of writing as a productive machine. In particular, Hargreaves quotes a passage where Derrida describes writing – which, as Hargreaves notes, 'he does not restrict to alphabetical marks on a page' – as the production of a mark 'that will constitute a sort of machine that is productive in turn' (Derrida, cited Hargreaves, 2004: 127), so that such mark 'necessarily functions [as a repeat] in the absence of both an author and a reader' (Hargreaves, 2004: 127). It could be argued then, that these dances, these choreographic marks, appear as functioning productively too; and they do so while disappearing, leaving the spectators to negotiate the spectres or phantoms of what they think was once performed. Here, choreography becomes a writing towards repetition, or towards the eternal trace. One is faced with a sort of productive machine of eternal tracing, which operates precisely through dance's absence. And, therefore, one can also imagine at this point choreography as a constant act of transmission working with and through absence.

Whereas choreography might be testing its limits, then, through processes of writing not only towards movement, but also towards stillness or absence, my question however would be this: How different actually is writing as a technology which commands a 'being-toward-movement' from a technology which is (or might be) commanding a being-toward-stillness or a being-towards-invisibility? Even if the kind of dance each writing produces onstage (or off the stage, even in the form of sound) is significantly different from the other, and so regardless of whether what is produced is the modernist being-toward-presence or the more recent being-toward-absence, isn't the technology of choreographic writing as telecommunication, as a kind of machine, to borrow Derrida's terminology (1995 [1972]: 8), still the same in its nature and function? Regardless of whether or not the contemporary choreographer is working through and after that moment when all movement has been exhausted, isn't s/he still always engaging in an act of writing – often metaphorically, but also quite literally on many occasions⁶⁵ – which ensures a kind of future, and so becomes a means of transference and transmission towards that future?

⁶⁵ I am referring again here to the use of scores as a tool that quite a few choreographers are currently using in order to make work (for example, Deborah Hay, Jonathan Burrows, Xavier Le Roy). For a different understanding and use of the score in contemporary dance performance, see, for example, Groves et al, in Gehm et al (2007: 91-100), where Rebecca Groves, Norah Zuniga Shaw and Scott deLahunta discuss the development of an interactive score for the work of William Forsythe; this concerns the creation of 'a new kind of "dance literature" for a wide, interactive readership', as the authors explain (ibid: 91), rather than the writing of instructions to be used by dancers during the creation (or in the actual performance) of a work. However, this kind of 'scoring', too, seems to be aimed at ensuring a kind of future for dance, or in any case its transference into another form to be accessed by future 'readers'.

To pursue this point even further, and if Arbeau's notational writing was developed in order to enable Capriol 'to learn this art', then it could also be argued that current 'writing' enables the (un)learning of another kind of art. It attempts to write down (and secure) a new approach towards movement, or perhaps the exhaustion of movement through its very absence. This writing's potential lies once again in its ability to transfer and preserve a certain kind of (body) knowledge or (body) presence/absence. And, if Arbeau's was a writing which guaranteed the possibility for future generations to keep dancing, then perhaps current choreo-writings ensure the possibility for future generations to either keep slowing down, or to remain still, following Lepecki's proposal, or to become invisible, as in the case of Bock & Vincenzi, or perhaps to keep *doing* anything else apart from movement, in order to start appearing (dancing perhaps?) again, following new commands and new propensities. Eventually, regardless of how it appears, the nature and aim of the choreographer's writing has always been the same since it first appeared with Arbeau: it is a writing that temporally precedes (dis)appearance, a writing that enables or commands certain (non-)action to be realised after or as a response to it, a writing towards (a) future (dance) event(s).

Would it be possible, however, to imagine a writing (-graphing) towards the dance-possible, rather than towards a specific (dis)appearance of dance? Would it be possible, to imagine, or to actually pursue, a choreography which is not geared towards performance in the sense of an actualisation of the moment of performance? What kind of writing would this be and towards what (and/or for whom)? In other words, how could we imagine a choreo-technology which would transmit pure possibility?

That other kind of writing (thinking perhaps?)

Let me introduce you once again to the choreographer who is here to write; not again, but anew; to write not towards, about or of performance, but to write in order to possibilise. On the one hand, then, I am not to write for the stage, not to write in order to transfer body knowledge or to command future action, which could in turn mean a writing of movement scores to be performed, or a writing of manuals to be followed by fellow choreographers in future. And, on the other hand, I am not to write as a spectator of my own work either, and so not to look back at choreography, not to explain, respond to, justify or reflect upon practice, not to try to preserve or translate body or practitioner knowledge through/into writing. If this is therefore going to be a

writing which does not aim to facilitate neither a learning nor an unlearning of 'this art', if there were nothing to learn or unlearn, nothing to produce, reproduce, produce differently or un-produce, then this already seems to be a sort of withdrawal I am attempting from my usual 'doing'; or, to frame it another way, maybe this is a different sort of doing, one that perhaps encompasses the notion of a sort of 'pause and withdraw'. What if, then, I were to connect the project of possibilising dance to this idea of withdrawal?

I first turn to the writings of Hannah Arendt, in order to look at her approach to the activity of thinking, precisely because she proposes that a 'withdrawal from the world of appearances is the only essential precondition [for thinking]' (Arendt, 1978[1971]: 78)⁶⁶. There are a couple of important points then that Arendt raises in her introduction to the idea of thinking, before she arrives at the concepts of 'invisibility' and 'withdrawal', as seen in the above proposition. Firstly, following Immanuel Kant, Arendt clarifies that thinking has nothing to do with our 'desire to know'; thinking is not inspired by the quest for truth, as she says, in the way that processes of knowledge and cognition are, for example, but by the quest for meaning (ibid: 15). Hence all human beings have an ability to think and feel the urgency to think, whether 'erudite or ignorant, intelligent or stupid' (ibid: 13); in fact, as Arendt claims, since humans are thinking beings, they 'have an inclination, perhaps a need, to think beyond the limitations of knowledge, to do more with this ability [their ability to think] than use it as an instrument for knowing and doing' (ibid: 11-12). Secondly, though, what this process of thinking requires is that one distances oneself from others and stays by him/herself. Hence, once Arendt accepts Cato's proposition that 'never is a man more active than when he does nothing,⁶⁷ never is he less alone than when he is by himself', she raises the following questions: 'What are we "doing" when we do nothing but think? Where are we when we, normally always surrounded by our fellow-men, are together with no one but ourselves?' (ibid: 7-8).

⁶⁶ This proposition is made in the first section of the volume *The Life of the Mind* (1978[1971]), where Arendt examines the ethical potential of mental activities such as thinking. Her overall questions then, as articulated in the 'Introduction' to this section are: 'Could the activity of thinking of such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually "condition" them against it?' (Arendt, 1978[1971]: 5). Hence what interests her here is a contemplative way of life, versus one that is based on Action (*vita activa*), as she says, and which has more often been the concern of political theory (see ibid: 6). In this sense, one could argue that Arendt's distinction between a contemplative and an active way of life is not that different from Deleuze's distinction between the one who engages in the combinatorial (but never actualises anything) and the one who acts (so as to realise and potentially exhaust all possibilities), as we have seen in Section I.

⁶⁷ This statement, too, might remind the reader of Deleuze's proposition that 'those who do nothing tire themselves most' (1994: 98, also cited in Lepecki, 2005: 130, see Section I, p. 22).

It is through the notions of invisibility and withdrawal therefore that Arendt tackles such questions. Firstly, in relation to the idea of being with oneself in order to think, she looks at thinking as 'the soundless dialogue of the I with itself'; hence, she argues that there is a sense of duality in the reflexive nature of mental activities such as thinking (ibid: 74-75), which in turn means that we can speak of a sort of 'solitude' in thinking, but not of 'loneliness' (ibid: 74-75). In fact, 'the thinking ego' with which one might be in dialogue as long as the thinking activity lasts, 'will disappear as though it were a mere mirage when the real world asserts itself again' (ibid: 75). Secondly, then, such thinking remains invisible, just like all mental activities, and is thus rendered as latent, 'a mere potentiality', to use Arendt's phrasing, 'non-manifest in full actuality' (ibid: 71-72). And yet, given that mental activities occur to us, who are indeed part of a world of appearances, what they require is that we withdraw from this world of appearances. In fact, whereas most mental activities urge us to withdraw not from the world altogether, but from the world as it becomes present to the senses, thought, however, often tends to withdraw from the world altogether, especially when it is concerned with the general as opposed to the particular, i.e. with processes of generalisation (ibid: 75). Or, thought takes the form of a process of imagining, during which the mind is concerned with the invisible, provided that it has 'withdrawn from the present and the urgencies of everyday life' (ibid, 76). In fact, it is imagination which helps the mind locate this invisible, described by Arendt as a 'thought-object', that which the mind somehow recollects, remembers and selects from its storehouse of memory and which arouses its (the mind's) interest sufficiently to induce concentration (ibid: 77). Hence thinking could emerge as 'a mode of "de-sensing"', or as a kind of 'limbo', as Kelleher describes it, following Steve McQueen (Kelleher, 2006: 128), between past and future, or between here and there. Finally, then, it becomes evident that, in order to arrive here, in this land of thinking, the human is required to 'stop-and-think' (Arendt, 1978[1971]: 78, her emphasis); and this in itself makes one appear as slightly un-natural, or 'out of order', as Arendt explains, using a phrase by Martin Heidegger⁶⁸ (ibid: her emphasis).

At this stage then, I would like to propose that the kind of writing I am about to engage in here, in order to enable a possibilising of dance, rather than in order to actualise dance, is one that resembles the activity of thinking as described by Arendt. I call this practice of thinking a choreo-thinking, which requires that I temporarily withdraw from the world of practising as a doing whose aim is to write dance as a future event (i.e. choreography), and move into a land of imagining, where the aim is to find and

⁶⁸ In fact, Arendt was one of Heidegger's pupils and, indeed, one can see his influence in her writings, especially on thought.

concentrate on a thought-object through a dialogue with oneself. Choreo-thinking then emerges here as a need for reflexive contemplation, a shift towards mere potentiality (as Arendt proposes). Hence it is not geared towards a learning of how to create dance, nor is it driven by a desire for knowledge in the sense of an understanding of how to do choreography. It is however driven by a quest for meaning, and in this sense might respond to some of my questions set at the outset of this project, such as ‘why dance?’, or ‘what is the reason, purpose or meaning of choreography?’ (as expressed towards the end of Section III).

Finally, then, let us turn to Martin Heidegger, and, in particular, to his 1954 essay ‘What calls for thinking?’. Here, the philosopher starts by asking questions such as ‘What do we call thinking?’ and ‘What does “thinking” mean?’, in order to arrive at proposing that the alternative question one might want to consider, instead, is rather ‘What calls for thinking?’; in fact, Heidegger suggests that it is by engaging with this latter question that we might begin to understand what we call ‘thinking’ (1993[1954]: 383-384). Initially, then, Heidegger points out that one becomes capable of thinking once something draws their attention; this reminds us of Arendt’s ‘thought-object’ and, indeed, Heidegger describes what appeals to us in order to think it precisely as something that constantly withdraws from us: ‘what properly must be thought keeps itself turned away from man’ (ibid: 373). Hence we are required to perform a leap into thinking – or, rather, ‘into the neighborhood where thinking resides’, in Heidegger’s terms (ibid: 377) – in order to participate in this withdrawal, which for the philosopher is itself an ‘event’ (ibid: 374). What happens to us when we think then is that we get ‘caught in the draft of what draws, attracts us by its withdrawal’ (ibid: 374). In this way, what calls for thinking is that which directs us to thinking; in fact, Heidegger proposes that what calls on us to think is precisely what we call for in order to think, and in this sense it is what makes us capable of thinking, or what makes us *be* as thinkers, as seen in the quoted passage opening this section.

Within a project of possibilising dance, then, choreo-thinking might appear as a practice of thinking in which the choreographer engages as she withdraws from her usual ‘doing’. Following Heidegger and Arendt, I propose that there is indeed a sense of withdrawal that is being performed in the pursuit of choreo-thinking. What remains now, however, is to understand what form this withdrawal might take. What could a writing of choreo-thinking be concerned with? Or, through what kind of writing could the choreographer *be* (or appear on the page) as a thinker?

A new place needed: somewhere to relocate

As the choreographer who is here to write, I imagine that I have now moved into that land of thinking. I have withdrawn in order to think choreography in writing, in order to do thinking in writing. And, if this is a sort of suspended time, a suspended place, inside the nowhere of thought, I also feel slightly homeless, in a no man's land. My doing needs to hold on to a sense of place, a new space perhaps, where thinking can happen. Or, rather, it could be that the process itself of relocating could generate thinking. And so, as soon as I withdraw from my usual 'doing', so does my doing withdraw from its natural environment, which has often been that of the stage or the studio. It is imagined then that the process of relocation is that which will facilitate my thinking. Following Arendt's question of where we might be when we think, I wonder (as a choreo-writer) where choreo-thinking might take me as I attempt to think.

It is at this point that the doing of choreography might need to leave the stage and the doing of thinking to produce a new kind of space. In the same way that Derrida describes the process of 'spacing' ('espacement'), in his essay on Antonin Artaud and the theatre of cruelty (1978[1967]: 299), as the process of producing a space through experience – a space that will not exist elsewhere or prior to the present, but will host a 'being-present-to-itself' – so the choreographer's thinking, perhaps, could produce a space for further thinking. In fact, maybe it is my imagination which is called for here, in order for my thought-object to appear, as that sought-for space of the dance-possible.

I imagine the board of a board game.

I imagine any board game, as the place where choreography might travel to re-think itself, far from and besides the commands of the stage. From the theatre stage, to the board of the board game: this will be the journey that will direct me towards thinking. Choreography itself then will travel in the form of thinking. A new sense of choreography might appear *in* thinking the theatre stage 'as' the board of a board game. Through choreo-thinking, the theatre stage might be thought of anew; or, the game board might become the space of the dance-possible, where thought is rehearsed, so as to facilitate my return to a renewed practice, from the page, or from that nowhere of thought, back to the theatre stage.

V. A task-based navigation: choreo-thinking in practice

Two meditations on space, through photographs

The English language introduces the notion of place in this formulation: for an event to occur, it must 'take place', that is, be located somewhere.

(McAuley, 2000: 2).

My writing – my choreo-thinking, as it were – is indeed an event, and takes place here, on the page. I am here then to *do* thinking as writing *on* the page. My practice of thinking though takes the form of a transportation of thought, from one place to another, from the theatre stage to the board of a board game; or, to come at it another way, it is as if the game board could temporarily map itself onto the theatre stage, not so that the two become one, or dissolve into one another, but so that the tension between them is retained and kept alive producing a sort of in-between space, and so that this in-between space is where the practice of thinking itself 'takes place'. I start with two tasks then, each of which takes the form of a written meditation, on the theatre stage and on the board of a board game respectively. Following the contemplative, action will then be brought into the discussion through a set of new tasks the choreographer would need to follow if she were to sustain her thinking practice, in and through this imagined spatial journey.

Task #1: Take the theatre stage.

I immediately think of the theatre stages encountered in books on theatre architecture; it is the photographs of empty stages I am thinking of mostly, rather than the architectural plans or designs. I also think of specific photographs of empty theatre stages I have seen, such as those by Hugo Gledinning as part of his photography project *Empty Stages*, a collaboration with Tim Etchells, of Forced Entertainment; or else, Herman Sorgeloos's photograph of an empty stage on the cover of Lepecki's book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement* (2006).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ A selection of images from the ones I discuss in this section is offered in Appendix III. It should be noted, however, that I have not included them in the main text of the thesis, as I do not feel it is necessary for the reader to know these images particularly well in order to follow my writing, or to actually be looking at them alongside reading. Indeed, I would invite the reader who might be even slightly familiar with these images,

Apparently, as the caption of this latter image informs us (Lepecki, 2006: vii), this is a photograph from Jérôme Bel's *The Last Performance* (1998), and I am sure I have seen this same image accompany various essays on this and other works by the same choreographer. And then it strikes me that, despite the familiarity I feel with this image, I have never really paid enough attention to its caption – nor to the captions of any of the other photographs mentioned above, for that matter – so that I do not necessarily associate the photograph to any specific space or theatre stage; as if these photographs do not belong to any one artist, any one performance, or any instance of performance, after all.

I decide to spend some more time with these images, in an attempt to describe what exactly I might be seeing in them – ‘them’, as if there are no differences between them, or as if they constitute one ‘model image’; as if they are examples of one ‘token image’, which I will now go on to describe. Already here I feel that I am performing two shifts. From the idea of theatre, or the practice of theatre and performance-making, in which I am involved, I shift to a notion of the space of theatre only – the theatre stage – hoping perhaps that my engagement with such a space might be enough to reveal to me all the questions and interests I might have about and in theatre performance (in the sense of performance taking place in the theatre). Not only this, but, rather than focusing on the theatre, or on the theatre stage as I say, I choose an *image* of theatre, and, more precisely, the image of the stage. I thus reduce the whole of what theatre might mean (to me, us, you, the spectator) to the image of the theatre stage, which in turn becomes a-historical, or an image appearing here out of time and out of place (even though, we could argue, it still remains the image of a specific kind of space).

If the artefact of the photograph is the one that will lead the way into the discussion that follows, then I imagine it serves two purposes here. Firstly, it puts emphasis on pure appearance, since it is used as an image appearing *instead of*, or *in place of*, the ‘real thing’ (the theatre stage I want to talk about). In this way, what the choice of the photograph probably reveals is my concern about whether I could ever speak about what theatre really is, or whether the only thing I can actually do is to restrict myself to speaking about how theatre *appears* – admitting that theatre is nothing but appearance perhaps, and that it can therefore only be talked about *as* and *through* (its) pure appearance, through a photograph. Moreover, I choose the theatre stage, because this is the one thing that surely appears when – or even before – theatre appears. And, if

to allow memory and imagination to work for them here, rather than to read this section as a commentary on or analysis of specific images, which would require that we observe them in further detail.

the photograph is an artefact suggesting nothing but appearance, then this is also an appearance organised in a clear and tight two-dimensional frame, an appearance which seems to have been condensed in one single moment⁷⁰. Secondly, then, the photograph also positions me clearly outside of it, outside 'its appearance'. The rectangular frame acts as a reminder of the fact that I am not in the depicted space; I am only an external viewer, the spectator of an organised appearance. And this realisation only doubles what is already present in the photograph, the actuality of the theatre stage which appears clearly separated from the auditorium, clearly framed by the proscenium arch – or whatever stands in place of the proscenium arch – so as to retain its distinctive-ness or 'distance' from the auditorium. The photograph, therefore, might act as a constant reminder here both of the notion of appearance (on the visual plane) and of the boundaries or tension between inside and outside, or on- and off-stage, as they are both encountered within theatre.

I return to that 'token image', I look, and my attention is firstly drawn to the stage floor, which seems to appear quite boldly in that bottom middle part of the image, even in cases when it does not take up much of the two-dimensional surface of the image itself. Not only frontal shots, but also, most of the photographs I am thinking of have been shot from a point (or seat) in the auditorium which is at least a few inches above the level of the stage floor; in this way, I have a sense of being able to oversee the stage floor, which now appears as a spread surface, a flat horizontal plane, seemingly homogeneous in terms of its look and texture.

My initial questions are hence the following: Would it be sufficient to say that this floor, this flat horizontal plane, *is* 'the theatre stage'? Why is it, then, that the first thing that comes to my mind when I think 'theatre stage' is this two-dimensional image which I look at as if it has been placed in front of me on a vertical (rather than a horizontal) plane? And, how much am I now influenced by the perspective that these images offer me (their viewer), as my whole attention is firstly driven to this specific part of the picture, the floor?

A possible response to such questions is offered by the information provided in books on theatre architecture. Marvin Carlson explains, for example:

Perhaps the most important single feature of the Renaissance theatre was the enormous symbolic influence of perspective in it. [...] the first perspective

⁷⁰ See also the way my discussion of Hiroshi Sugimoto's project 'Theaters' (1975-2001) later on.

theatre drawings, by Serlio and others, were oriented for a far higher ideal spectator, clearly removed from the performance area. Similarly, Sabbioneta's designer, Vincenzo Scamozzi, and his followers moved the privileged audience space to an elevated central positioning in the auditorium, where the sponsoring prince could look down upon his assembled subjects as well as provide a visual anchor for the stage perspective.

The one-point system of perspective became increasingly established in the theatre along with the spatial commitment to a single privileged spectator, the prince.

[...] the prince's space became almost literally the center of the audience space.

(Carlson, 1989: 137-140).

Perhaps then, the floor of the stage alone does not stand for what we think of (and what I imagine or see) as 'the theatre stage'. But certainly, it is my perspective as that single privileged spectator – the prince perhaps? – that determines where the central point is in these images. That horizontal plane is the part of the image in relation to which I, the viewer of this image, have a privileged position. And, vice versa, my position is that of the single privileged spectator, the prince perhaps, precisely because I have been placed slightly above that horizontal plane.

It is worth pausing here for a moment then, to examine how else the perspective of the prince might be functioning in these images of the theatre stage. And more specifically, how such function is served by and at the same time establishes a specific relationship between horizontality and verticality in the way that particular seat in the auditorium 'sits' in front of, and above, the theatre stage.

As Iain Mackintosh (1993) explains in his study on theatre architecture, and the way it affects – and is affected by – the relationship between audience and actor, there are two topographical questions, as he calls them, which occur with regards to the physical relationship between audience and actor. The first concerns the plane of horizontality, and usually takes the form of a debate about when it is more appropriate for audiences to sit 'out-front' and watch a show from one side of the stage only, the front, when it is more appropriate for them to watch a show from 'all-around', when from three sides of the acting area, like in a thrust stage, when from two sides of the stage, and so on and so forth (Mackintosh, 1993: 134-135). The second question, then, which as Mackintosh argues has been given less attention in books on theatre architecture, concerns the vertical plane; he phrases it as follows: 'Should the audience be positioned below or above the actor's eyeline, which is generally regarded as 5 degrees above the horizontal measured from the standing actor of average size?' (ibid: 135). In fact, Macintosh argues that considering this latter question might allow for a reappraisal of

the first one on horizontality. What is interesting here then, in relation to the particular position of the prince as described above, is the way Mackintosh proposes that

[w]hen an audience looks down on the actor it is more likely that its attention will have been precisely predetermined by a director who has organised the pattern of production. The audience looking down will then be contemplating the performer critically as did the director at the rehearsal. If the attention of the audience wavers the actor is in a weak position.

(ibid: 135).

And, on the other hand,

[i]f [...] the audience looks up at the actor, the actor is in control, can elicit responses and can manage the audience because he or she is, quite simply, in the dominant physical position. Actors as well as stand-up comedians generally prefer this.

(ibid: 135).

I suddenly think of theatre stages for dance in particular, and realise that those are almost always designed so as to offer the prince-spectator an *over-view* of the stage, so that he 'looks down' at the dancer. And, although as Mackintosh himself suggests when speaking about opera and dance stages, such a positioning of the spectator in relation to the dance spectacle also serves the purpose of the spectators being able to see the whole of the dancers' bodies, including their feet (ibid: 153), still, the image of the prince critically looking down at the dancer persists here, and makes the dancer appear to me in a weak position, unable to gain control, as it were, to manage or to play with audiences' responses as a stand-up comedian would, for example. To add to this image further, one can also think of the eighteenth century operating theatre, which Mackintosh refers to as well, like the one that survives at Guy's Hospital in London Bridge. Here, '[e]ach row rises steeply above the one in front and hence the sightlines are perfect to the operating table where lies the 'performer': a corpse laid out for dissection by the surgeon' (ibid: 135). In this case, the spectacle seems to belong to the prince; it is his – or could it also be hers? – to inspect or dissect. And his perspective gives him a certain kind of power *over* the stage, over the performer, or over the spectacle.⁷¹

⁷¹ One could argue that what echoes here is Henri Lefebvre's argument on the construction of social spaces in relation to power (1991[1974]: 116). This would mean here that the theatre stage too appears 'according to the dictates of Power', and that this is why and how the prince emerges as the command-er and/or demand-er of the spectacle. Demand and command, which are the terms Lefebvre uses, as well as ownership and control, we could add, would hence appear here as directly linked to the particular seat or perspective of the prince.

And then I stop and wonder whether I could re-imagine the prince as a director or choreographer in rehearsal. In fact, following Mackintosh's argument above, the prince, that single privileged spectator, the one whose viewpoint is adopted by the photographer of my image of the theatre stage, could indeed be replaced by no other but the director or choreographer. And hence I imagine it might also be he (or she), the director or choreographer, who determines (from above) where the centre point of this image lies. Once again, whether it is a prince or the director/choreographer sitting in that seat from where the photograph has been shot, that centre point of the image appears on the stage floor, on that horizontal plane where the performance will possibly 'lie' for inspection. The attention of the viewer of the photograph is bound to be driven immediately to that stage floor; and this in itself guarantees that the viewer here takes the position of the prince – director, or choreographer.

Back to my description. As if zooming out my gaze slightly, I allow 'the theatre stage' to also possibly include what is usually pictured along the two vertical sides of the images I am looking at. Here, two possibilities emerge: I either see a built structure which purposefully frames the front opening of the stage space into the auditorium and so moves along both the two vertical side edges of the photograph and its top horizontal edge – this is the proscenium arch. Or, I see sections of what theatre people call the 'legs' or 'drapes', which are often fabric curtains hanging parallel to each other on the two sides of the stage, so as to divide the off-stage side areas into smaller sections – which, in turn, are used as spaces where to hide side-lights or as stand-by spaces for the performers, the 'wings'. And on the top part of the photograph, then, I possibly see more fabric hanging parallel to the legs, but covering only the top part of my picture, and leaving the stage 'open', as it were, for me to look 'down upon' it.

Having described all four edges of the photograph, curiously enough, it is only now that I notice the surface of the picture which is being framed by those 'edges': the back 'wall' – often a back drop curtain or just a built wall. I say 'curiously enough', because in most cases this back wall takes up the biggest part of the surface of the picture. And still, for some reason, it did not seem as crucial to my imagining of the theatre stage as all the other elements described above. As if this back wall is not a constitutive element of the theatre stage, but something more like a consequence, an aftermath; an unavoidable result of the way in which this photograph has been shot, or of the way in which those 'edges' of the space have been set up in relation to my viewpoint. Or is it my viewpoint, once again, that makes those edges appear as edges and that back wall

appear as a consequence of the set-up of the edges, in a similar way that it (my viewpoint) made the floor part of the stage appear as the centre of the image?

What is more, if I, the prince, have become so important to this description, then why am I not included in the photograph? What's on the other side of the border? Why can't I see a part of the auditorium, for example? An 'either/or' situation arises. The photograph makes me aware of the kind of border that divides the prince (or auditorium) from the theatre stage. One sees the other, but without being able to see oneself at the same time. I, too, can only see the theatre stage from here, but not myself and not the auditorium. The photograph may 'see' only one side.

Suddenly, the memory kicks in of another occasion in which the nature of a photograph could have revealed something particular about the nature of the 'thing' being depicted – even if it actually did not. I am reminded of Alighiero e Boetti's *Ping Pong* (1966), which I saw live, but which also appears photographed in the catalogue for the 2005 'Open Systems' exhibition at Tate Modern (see De Salvo, 2005: 86-87). As 'PING' and 'PONG' lit up alternating, next to each other on the wall of the museum where they had been placed, I had imagined that if someone were to photograph this work, they would only manage to capture either 'PING' or 'PONG' lit. I had also then thought that this could be read perhaps as the defeat of photography. In fact, it is precisely this sort of potential defeat of photography that has stayed in my memory and still underpins my understanding of that work; what becomes evident here is the 'either/or-ness' of a depicted situation in a particular moment, which could be no other in this case than the moment of a photographer's 'click'. And yet, in this photograph that I am looking at in the catalogue, both 'PING' and 'PONG' are lit. Or, rather, I now notice that these are actually two separate photographs; they have been placed very close to each other, so that one almost touches the other, and so that it seems as if it was initially one photograph split into two, whereas it is in fact two photographs I am looking at here, clearly placed on two separate pages of the catalogue. I can now look at the open book, take in both photographs, and see both 'PING' and 'PONG' lit. Back in the museum, though, things were different; while looking at the lit 'PING', my awareness was drawn even more to the unlit/dark 'PONG', and vice versa. Either here, or there, this was the only way in which my eyes could follow the ping-pong ball, so to speak; and this is the specific nature of the game I 'saw' taking place in that particular art work.

Back in the theatre – or, rather, in the photograph of the theatre stage – a similar game seems to be taking place: when I am the prince, I become excluded from the theatre

stage, which I can only stand in front of and look at. And, if I were to take a place *on stage*, then I would equally be excluded from the auditorium; or, at least, I would certainly lose my position as the prince. Unless...

After referring to Peter Brook's famous claim that he can transform any empty space into a theatre space, by having a man walk across that space and someone else look at him (Brook, 1990[1968]: 11), Gay MacAulay describes the director as the one 'who perhaps becomes a kind of originary spectator, calling forth the theatrical moment by his presence, watching both the man who walks and the person who watches' (2000: 2). If I were to become such a director then – or, a choreographer, whose role would be described in this sense like that of the director McAuley refers to – I could presumably see both the theatre stage and the auditorium; I would no longer be the prince, as imagined above, but I could oversee both the spectacle *and* the prince; I could observe the observer and the one being observed; I could observe the observing itself.

I keep this idea in mind and return to the photograph of the theatre stage and my positioning in the auditorium from where it has been shot. It is my strong awareness of the absence of that major part of the auditorium from the photograph that constantly brings my attention back to myself. In other words, this space which unfolds as an extension of the stage just in front of it, and my (in)ability to imagine this space just by looking at an image from which it is obviously missing, now point at myself as the observer, the onlooker, a spectator; not a prince anymore though, as I imagine I could be sitting anywhere in the auditorium. Admittedly, the position of the photographer corresponds quite accurately to that of the privileged audience member or prince. But if I were to look from the other side, if I were to picture not just the photographer of this image, but the spectators taking up the seats of the auditorium, then perhaps a sense of equality or same-ness would emerge amongst the various seats. Could I possibly feel as a prince anywhere I sat? Or, would it be more accurate to speak of a multiplicity of individuals here? Indeed, it seems more useful now to think of the central point of the image as shifting, or rather as dispersing and multiplying. That central point is not on that stage floor anymore, or anywhere on the image, for that matter, but neither does it correspond to the 'eye' of the photographer's camera, or the seat of the prince; rather, the centre of the image is now myself, any one's self, who might be looking at the stage (or the image of the stage) from any seat of that auditorium, from any point of view.

On the one hand, then, it is the looking itself that becomes the centre of attention here. By missing out the auditorium and asking me to imagine it, the photograph of the

theatre stage has led me to an understanding of theatre as a place where looking happens. In McAuley's words (2001: 1), 'theatre is perhaps the only art form in which the name given to the place where the artistic event occurs, or where the art object is displayed, is the same as that of the art form itself', and, as Carlson states, the word 'theatre' itself means 'a place where one observes' (Carlson: 128). This whole art form as well as the place where the art form occurs, seems to be defined by such 'observing', so that, even in a photograph of 'the space', what I 'see' is myself looking, myself as the observer who potentially defines or makes possible the art form of theatre or theatre as an event.

On the other hand, though, a sense of homogenising equality emerges as I imagine the auditorium from the other side of what I see on the photograph. Same seats are spread throughout the auditorium, and not a prince, but a public now arrives to take their place in those seats. I turn to Simon Bayly's writings here, and in particular to his examination of Alain Badiou's propositions about the role of the spectator in theatre. As Bayly explains, Badiou differentiates between two kinds of theatres: The first he writes with a small 't' and considers the art of the State. This is a theatre that 'denotes the art of the state of things as a closed set of relations, a status quo governed by power grounded in a specific set of knowledges' (Bayly, 2006: 204); a theatre, therefore, that could also possibly be considered as censored or controlled by the power of the state. The second kind of theatre, which Badiou writes with a capital 'T', he considers as an event which would interrupt the State; a specific and situated event. In Bayly's words, Badiou's Theatre (capital 'T') 'is thus a rare and anomalous phenomenon that can be encompassed by neither a political programme nor a theatrical style' (ibid: 204). Furthermore, what is of interest is how the audience appears in each case. 'Theatre (small "t") demands a spectator whom it can address as a citizen-subject, someone who consents to being, as it were, put in his or her place', whereas 'Theatre [capital "t"] is a momentary but momentous event for the spectator equipped with a sensibility that is primed for such occurrences', so that the spectator who witnesses it engages in what Badiou names an act of fidelity which then leads to his 'becoming-subject' (see also Bayly, 2006: 204-205). While a deeper examination of such notions would certainly be necessary in order for us to further understand Badiou's specific thinking on theatre, what is of interest here is the fact that the public Badiou imagines is, or ought to be, as Bayly points out, 'an inconsistent, heterogeneous collection of *spectators*' (ibid: 205, his emphasis). Bayly also turns to philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot, in order to discuss the idea of an heterogeneous community in relation to the audience as public, and then to Jacques Rancière, in order to discuss the latter's

notion of the emancipated spectator as belonging to a community of active interpreters, storytellers or translators, each of whom invents their own translation so as to appropriate the story for themselves or to make their own story out of what they see on stage (Bayly, 2007: [unpublished essay], see also Rancière, 2007). However, and as much as one would like to think of theatre audiences as an heterogeneous public of emancipated spectators, Bayly poses a couple of interesting and valid questions:

If theatre (small 't') only 'says' the state and is only rendered eventful through its rare and unwitting perforation by uncanny theatre-events, then is its continued function to simply remind the spectator of what it feels to be put in one's place by taking one's allotted seat? [...] [I]s the theatre's purpose to convoke the possibly eventful assembly of a generic multiplicity of spectators *but at the same time to symbolize their moribund constitution as 'the public'* – before continuing with business as usual and getting on with the show?
(Bayly, 2007: [unpublished essay], his emphasis).

Coming back, then, to that image of myself on the other side of what is depicted in the photograph, could I simply accept my being put in my (ticketed) place? Would it be acceptable for me to just consent to becoming one more spectator, who might be absent from the photograph, but whose three-dimensional view is now being given back to them in a two-dimensional form, that of the photograph?

Since the other side of the photograph is missing, I can imagine the auditorium and myself in it in any way possible; I am no longer the prince. I am not even the director or choreographer. I have become a member of that public, people spread in their allocated seats, a community who have nothing in common, but who remain resolutely in their seats, connected through their common participatory act of non participation, as Bayly suggests (ibid). In fact, this is how I like being here now, as a spectator from whom nothing more is demanded, other than to stay put in their allocated seat.

Back to my description. Most of the photographs I see or imagine picture what we would call for the most part bare stages, i.e. stages with no set or props, but most importantly with no people or any other kind of live presence on them. Even when the stages are not completely bare, what has been placed there – a microphone, a loudspeaker, a reading desk, a table, a chair, a mask – seems to me to be out of order, out of action, dead, not quite *performing*. Despite any captions accompanying such images, in essence, these photographs of theatre stages do not seem to belong to any particular moment of performance, any particular live event; they return from a no-place and a no-time. Glendinning himself writes in relation to his project that 'although the stages are not being used for their usual purpose – containing/showing performance –

they are far from “empty” and always seem to contain evidence/possibilities of uses beyond the expected show, performance or play’ (Glendinning, n.d.: [online]). One could say that, rather than photographs of a performance, these are photographs of *the possibility of performance*. To put it more accurately, they appear here as photographs of the possibility of a performance which is either past or future, but never present in the actual moment of the photograph. They hold within them an unrealised temporality, one which does not coincide with the momentary temporality of the photograph, but which is somehow that of performance, or the live event.

I am guided to another group of photographs now, those of Hiroshi Sugimoto, as part of his project ‘Theaters’ (1975-2001). The photographer has taken pictures of old cinema theatres, or cinema palaces, by leaving the shutter open for the whole duration of the screening of a film. In the first instance, the resulting images seem quite similar to the photographs of theatre stages I have been looking at, as they picture the ornate interiors of cinema theatres from that privileged spectator’s position. However, instead of the ‘back wall’, what we have here is a white screen, light reflecting off the cinematic screen, ‘a single, iconic, white rectangle that speaks of many things’, including, ultimately, and ‘in light of the film’s absence’, as Brougher and Elliott suggest, ‘the disappearance of classic cinema and the decline of these grand twentieth-century cathedrals’ (2005: 23). Is it the film’s absence, though, one sees in the white screen reflecting the cinematic light? Or is it rather an accumulation of all the light from all the frames of the film? I look again, and the film is not absent; it is rather *too* present. Too much of it is on there, so that the cinema screen might appear as empty, but, like with Glendinning’s ‘Empty Stages’, it is far from empty, containing evidence and promise at the same time of the film we cannot see.

Indeed, as Brougher and Elliott suggest, Sugimoto has captured here, or has possibly created, the intangible, the ephemeral, or, even, the nonexistent. They argue that the way he achieves this is by photographing the ‘truth’, yet at the same time undermining that truth somehow, as ‘the image inhabits a space between the thing depicted and the photograph itself’ (2005: 23). And yet, in the case of ‘Theaters’, where does such truth lie? Those white rectangles in Sugimoto’s photographs, similarly to the stages I have been looking at, hold within them space and time that has once really existed. What I see, in this sense, seems to be real, or at least depicts truthfully what happened (or what existed) at a certain moment in time. And yet, both space and time have been condensed here so that they feel nonexistent. The more those screens become white, and the more those theatre stages are emptied out of live presence so as for the ‘dead’

materials to stand out more clearly, as Glendinning observed with his images, the more they all seem to become detached from the present and from specific instances of performance (whether filmic/cinematic or theatrical). And at the same time, strangely enough, the more they become seemingly empty, the more they appear to enclose evidence or possibilities of performance. As photographs, it is almost as if in this way they exceed that real moment in which they were shot, in order to reinstate their photographic nature; they transform into two-dimensional material canvases of a three-dimensional possibility, already gone or yet to be realised.

In this way, my experience of looking at these photographs of empty stages (or Sugimoto's cinema theatres) brings me back to theatre architecture and, more specifically, to a point made by Dorita Hannah, that the 'black-box theatre', which 'became the major spatial paradigm for twentieth century theatre' – and which, I would add, remains the performance space par excellence for contemporary dance – is anything but empty or abstract, contrary to how it is usually considered (Hannah, 2003: 23). Interestingly, an important part of Hannah's argument is based on a reconsideration of the back wall of the 'black-box', which had almost escaped my attention a few pages ago when I was looking at photographs of 'empty' theatre stages. And yet, in her analysis, Hannah suggests that in the seemingly empty black-box the walls appear as 'phantasmatic borders, denying surface and suggesting infinite depth' (ibid: 29). Hence, and against Carlson's view of the black-box theatre as a 'featureless box filled with light and abstract figures' (Carlson, 1989: 196-197), Hannah shows that 'a paucity of visible features [in the theatre] does not necessarily imply an absence of substance', but might rather represent a sort of excess (Hannah, 2003: 23-25), what we could imagine as that three-dimensional possibility that could emerge any moment now perhaps 'out of' the theatre's back wall. In this way, even in the absence of what Hannah calls the 'well-established architectural elements in theatres', which include proscenium arch, box seating, galleries, chandeliers, décor, stage, and auditorium, the back black wall remains and constantly reminds us of theatre as an 'empty space of limitless potentiality' (ibid: 26).⁷²

If the 'empty stage', or the idea of a seemingly empty space, has now started to haunt me, I return to that vertical plane – the one of the back wall, indeed – and bring into the discussion two more book covers, which do not look like the other images I have listed

⁷² See also Castellucci et al (2007), a book to which I will refer again later, for a discussion of the theatre space, where Kelleher proposes an image of the stage as 'the mouth of a large animal that consumes and disgorges the figures [of the actors and everything else]' (Kelleher, cited in Castellucci et al, 2007: 206).

above, but still somehow seem like an appropriate pictorial response to my task, 'take the theatre stage'. The first is that of *Certain Fragments* (1999) by Tim Etchells, and the other is the cover of *Space in Performance: Making meaning in the Theatre* (2000) by Gay McAuley. What I see in these images has nothing to do with an empty stage; it is rather a person appearing between two fabric curtains. No stage floor, no auditorium, no such borders or apparent 'edges' of the space, no 'emptiness', as it were. Just this new plane now: the one constituted by the curtain from behind which a person starts to appear; or, the one established by a live presence as it appears from behind the curtain, this 'emblem of the theatre', as McAuley suggests, whose function is no other but to provoke anticipation, or to tantalizingly indicate that there is a threshold before us, something to be revealed (2000: 75).

By arriving at this threshold, we have almost reached the moment of performance now. These images have frozen time just as this moment arrives, so that it feels as if something might happen, but almost nothing has happened yet – 'a situation which is essentially anarchic', as Mackintosh states (1993: 2), or a reminder of what Italian director Romeo Castellucci describes as the most important thing in theatre, 'the promise that anything can happen' (n.d.: [unpublished essay])⁷³. The theatre stage still haunts me, with its history, its memories, its reference to social structure and power, and, certainly, its promise. If, as Claudia Castellucci admits, a theatre space always reflects 'the convention of people coming together in a space dedicated to spectacle', and therefore also appears as highly codified at times, or as full of memory, then there might also be a need sometimes (for the director, the choreographer, but also the spectator perhaps) to forget all that and to rethink the theatre as a volume, as Claudia and Romeo Castellucci propose, so that indeed anything *can* happen (Castellucci et al, 2007: 204-205). This does not mean that theatre becomes a-historical, but rather that it remains neutral, and therefore full of potential. In Romeo Castellucci's words:

The theatre, understood as a volume, must pursue its own neutrality. I don't mean neutrality in the sense of a 'nothing in particular', but in the sense of a potentiality, as in chemistry: like the neutrality of an exposed field, ready to receive, waiting; a neutrality which can be conjugated an infinite number of times, according to the essences, and which catches fire through them.
(Castellucci, n.d.: [unpublished essay]).

⁷³ In fact, this statement comes at the end of this unpublished essay, where Castellucci argues that [t]he stage should be a well-tempered instrument, erotically arranged for welcome and incarnation, ready to accept the challenges of a language that is in a perpetual state of flight'; it is for this reason, he suggests, that the most important task of the theatre architect today should be understood not in terms of studying ancient theatre technology, or of fitting as many lifts and electrical equipments as possible in the theatre, but as one of making sure that what isn't lost is precisely this, 'the promise that anything can happen'.

As soon as that person appears from behind the curtain, it is as though the catalyst appears in the exposed field, as though we are about to catch fire, as though the whole photograph of the theatre stage might break out and into the present. The image reflects this 'active neutrality', and here everything indeed might happen.

I therefore recall those moments of the first encounter with a new stage I have been invited to perform in; moments of envisaging, imagining, planning, projecting; moments of living perhaps – even for a short while – in that space of potentiality. Then I realise it has not always been a stage; it has also been a bar, a gallery space, a studio, a lecture room. Still, this has nothing to do with the actual architectonic space; this has to do with the feeling of theatre, the sensation of the spectacle approaching. The theatre stage is always there – it is here – haunting all those other spaces. Going back to the writings of Romeo and Claudia Castellucci, I too feel that in any case '[e]ntering a theatre means entering the environment of the spectacle' (Castellucci, 2007: 205). And so, as soon as I glance back at the photograph of the spectacle, no matter how empty the stage, I can feel the moment of performance arriving now. This is not a photograph anymore. I can see the audience. I take the theatre stage.

Task #2: Take the board of a board game

I immediately recall the 'Monopoly' board, as well as those of chess, backgammon – or, rather, the latter's Greek version, which is called 'Tavli'. Then, I imagine colourful pathways on two-dimensional boards, boards which can fit on a table and allow me to observe them as I look from above. I also know that I can fold the board and pack it away with all the other elements that are needed to play the game; I can then put the box away in a drawer, a shelf, a cupboard. I remember playing 'Hotel', 'Cluedo' and 'Risk', and developing strategies of being someone else, of setting someone else's goals, and winning over, as if this is not for real; I remember entering different worlds – those of investments, of the real estate market, of murder crimes, of warfare – and exercising my understanding of concepts such as 'negotiating', 'expected value', 'diplomacy' and 'making deals'; as if this is me, but, then again, not really me.

Today, I find myself googling 'board games' and suddenly becoming interested in the boards of games from non-western cultures as well. I am intrigued by the geometry, the shapes, the pathways, the spatial units and all the hidden rules by which something happens on the board. There is less representation here and what seems more

important is the understanding of patterns and how one operates within them. Or is there in fact more representation here, a representation of the most basic patterns and our understanding of them, perhaps? I find out that most board games have been created by mathematicians, and then I meet a mathematician who seems to win in every board game he plays. I observe him in a game of 'Carcassonne' and notice his ability to anticipate situations, to plan and to act efficiently within given parameters.

Back to the google pages, and it is clear that the images I am looking at, those of boards of different board games, have been lifted from their horizontal plane to the vertical plane of the computer screen. Suddenly, they have been given a down and an up, a right and a left, even though we know that these boards have sides – for two players, or four, or more – that are placed on the same horizontal plane. I therefore retain a sense of looking at them from slightly above, as though the boards are laid on a flat surface – a table most possibly – and wonder whether it would ever be possible for a single viewer of these photographs to look at them as images that have no particular orientation.

An unexpected detour here, by way of cultural background: The term 'board game' is translated in Greek as 'epitrapezio paignidi'. The word 'paignidi' means 'game', while the word 'epitrapezio' comes from the preposition 'epi-' which means 'on top (of)', and the word 'trapezi' which means 'surface', or, in everyday language, 'table'. Here, then, the board game is conceived as the game which is played on a surface, if not a table in particular. I think of the function of this surface – or table – which is there to support the board on which the game will be played. It is also there, though, as a plane which extends from one player to another, connecting them, and providing them with a common ground, the 'place' on which their 'representations' – game pieces, tokens, bits – will appear, will walk, pause, proceed, meet, negotiate, conquer or capture, jump or bypass each other. This board then, which is laid on the table (or the floor, or the beach, I imagine) provides a ground which initially seems equally shared amongst players; before the game has begun, that is. Or, perhaps it does not belong to anyone – not yet. In this sense, the board appears as an empty space, until that moment arrives when its markings might start to mean something, make something happen, given the particular rules and conventions, which will determine how the players will appear here, how they will participate and/or relate to each other; hence it could be imagined that the board awaits for the rules to be set forth, in order for any relation or interaction between players to occur. And this is how the game starts.

Go one step back. Take the board of a board game – re-imagine it. I am still looking from slightly above, and I can now almost see people sitting around the board. I see only the tops of their heads, not their faces; their bodies are just a shapeless volume under the tops of their heads. In truth, it does not really matter how they look, it just matters that they are there. In this sense, they have become to me quite similar to the game pieces or tokens, only in bigger scale. The pieces act as an extension of them, or perhaps as their representatives on the board. The board remains there to mark the space of play, to disclose it and to close it off, a constant reminder of the border between inside and outside. Yet who are these people? Are they players or are they spectators of the game?

I turn here to a talk given by Steven Connor at the Bartlett School of Architecture as part of the 'International Lecture Series' (February 2008), where the theorist examines spaces where play occurs, such as playgrounds, arenas and stadiums, and focuses on the way people (and particularly players) appear here. Connor suggests that

in any game played before a crowd of spectators, the game is always suffused from top to bottom with this condition of *being-for* its spectators, which can be emphasised or overlooked, but can never be minimised. [...] To play is to be inside and outside the game, to be player and spectator at once. The space of play thus begins to put the space between it and the space outside it into play.

(Connor, 2008: [online]).

I could propose then a new way to think of the people sitting around the table over the board game: as both players and spectators, as both forming the game, and observing it. The board transforms: from a place which makes clear the division between inside and outside, it now appears as a space which contains or reflects that very ambiguity or play between player and spectator.

Moreover, if I look again, I notice that there also seems to be no clear orientation here, apart from this sense of a general ground, a gravity provided by the board, and a sense of all-round-ness perhaps, which emerges especially when I imagine people playing. In fact, Connor proposes the environment of the stadium in particular as tending 'towards the dome or the globe, in which there is no priority of viewpoint; here, orientation gives way to the omniscpectivity and opacity is purged in ostentatious appearance', so that [t]he promise of the dome is that one can be everywhere at once' (Connor, 2008).⁷⁴ And this tendency towards 'placelessness' and 'everywhere-ness' at once, the laterality

⁷⁴ It should also be noted that in this, as well as in other writings of his, Connor often references Peter Sloterdijk, and especially his views on space and movement in relation to modernity (as seen in Section I).

or equality, the apparent uniformity of the space, is what strikes me most as I look at the game board. Whether I look at the board which has just been set up for a game, or at an image apparently showing a moment from a game, there seems to be a sensation of everywhere-ness at once. I could be anywhere, playing or observing, participating or spectating, and still all would be possible; in Connor's terms again, I would find myself in 'the condition of absolute openness', the real 'archi-tecture'.

Finally, the google engine takes me to a single image, that of the chess problem. Also called a chess composition, this resembles a quiz or puzzle, which is composed by somebody called a composer, who uses the chess pieces on the board so as to present the solver with a particular task to be achieved. I subsequently find out that in a chess problem, firstly, the position of the pieces on the board is composed for the specific purpose of devising a problem; and, although it could have been arrived at in an actual game, it should rarely – if ever – arise in over-the-board play. Secondly, in every chess problem there is a specific stipulation, and therefore a specific goal to be achieved; and this is what the player should aim at while studying the problem. Thirdly, that there is a sense of a *theme* arising from the composition of the problem; and, in order to clearly illustrate and stay within this theme, the problem also exhibits *economy* in its construction. This means that only the minimum number of pieces is employed to compose the problem, and, as a result, the intended solution to the problem is only one (rather than few, with one of them being the most efficient or sophisticated). And, finally, because of all the above, it is considered that the problem has *aesthetic value*; and aesthetic value is here closely related to the fact that the problem is organized in a way that exhibits clear ideas in as economical a manner as possible.

I immediately think performance, once again. I think efficiency on stage; I think of Jonathan Burrows' notion of 'the rule of necessity' (2004: [my notes]), whereby one performs whatever action seems necessary in relation to the one performed just before it. I then come up with the following questions for the choreographer: Could there be a way to compose or construct a performance problem, one with a specific theme, displaying economy in its construction, and proposing a specific way of recognising aesthetic value? Moreover, what would be the criteria for constructing such a 'problem'? Could I use the board game in order to rethink the theatre stage? Or, how could the set-up of the game board inform choreographic practice as I return to the theatre stage?

I take the boards of board games and put them back in the storeroom.

Action, or 'Think, pig!'

ESTRAGON: What's he waiting for?
 POZZO: Stand back! [VLADIMIR and ESTRAGON move away from LUCKY.
 POZZO jerks the rope. LUCKY looks at POZZO.] Think, pig! [Pause. LUCKY
 begins to dance.] Stop! [LUCKY stops.] Forward! [LUCKY advances.] Stop!
 [LUCKY stops.] Think!
 [Silence.]

(Beckett, 1965[1956]: 35).

Up until here, I have imagined the space of the dance possible as a theatre stage which is rethought of as the board of a board game. That is to say, I have proposed that a consideration of the theatre stage (which is, after all, the space of performance par excellence) as a game board might lead to that place where it is possible to *make* performance, at a time when it feels impossible to do so, as dance seems to be exhausted (or perhaps has exhausted me, as well as the context within which I often place myself). In order to approach this proposition, I firstly gave myself two tasks, two written meditation exercises, one on each of these two spaces respectively. Now then, I am to think through the idea of the theatre stage as the game board *in practice, in choreographic terms* one could say. This is what calls for a new practice of choreo-thinking, a practice of doing some sort of thinking (still through writing), which could potentially lead me towards the making of a piece, but which for the time being remains withdrawn from the studio (or the stage). I am now asking: How would I proceed if I was to make a piece now? What implications would the proposition of considering the stage as the board of a board game have for a performance-making practice *now*?

Let us imagine then that I am about to make a piece for the theatre stage and with one performer.⁷⁵ In fact, this solo too, just as some of my previous works, could be based on a score which prompts the performer to do a series of things (movements or actions) on stage. On the one hand, then, I would construct the score and therefore decide on the kinds of instructions the score would include, the order in which it would ask the performer to do things, how long each would take, and so on and so forth; I would devise a system, in other words, that would hold together the series of actions to be performed. On the other hand, though, there would also be what I would describe as

⁷⁵ The reader who will have seen *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]* live might relate that performance to the solo I refer to here. Whereas the piece was not created in response to my writing, and neither does this section of the thesis offer an explanation for the solo, the reader who has not seen the work live is invited to watch the piece on DVD 2 at this point, in order to further understand some of the principles of making I go on to discuss in the following pages.

certain accompanying 'principles of performance' to the score, those which usually do not make it to the page, at least not in the way the instruction of a written score might, but which nevertheless exist, somewhere between choreographer, performer and audience perhaps. Such principles, I suggest, are usually built within the process of making or rehearsing a piece, as well as during the period of time it is being performed. In fact, sometimes they do not even become articulated by the maker and/or the performer, as if they remain somewhat unclaimed, in the air, supporting the score, plan or system, which appears to be holding the show together. In the case of this solo, then, such principles could be thought of as containing that shared understanding between choreographer and performer, of the relationship between them and between them and the audience; a set of unspoken 'rules', which could result from the familiarity between them – if we were to imagine, for example, that the two of them have worked together for a long time – and which determines the way in which the audience is invited to observe, participate, and/or somehow relate to the piece.

I am reminded of a conversation between Jonathan Burrows, Matteo Fargion and Siobhan Davies, during which Burrows explained that Fargion and himself had a principle when performing their *Both Sitting Duet* (2002) that would determine to what extent the two performers (Burrows and Fargion) would think of their piece as involving a narrative sort of content or as being a completely abstract composition piece. The principle, as described by Burrows, went something like this: 'how the audience sits is how we must sit' (Burrows et al, 2008: 68), which I thought meant for the two performers that, if during the show they suspected that the audience were registering a narrative in their performance, then they would acknowledge that narrative as it developed; and, equally, if they felt that the audience were following the work as an abstract piece, then they would perform it focusing on the pure abstract compositional aspects of the work. One can imagine of course that this is all more easily said than done. But Burrows and Fargion seem to both know what their principle means or implies in relation to their performance. That is to say, they are able to use the principle in a clearly motivating and meaningful way (certainly for them, but also for the spectator, as far as my experience goes); or, even if there is an element of misunderstanding between the two performers as to how they are to possibly interpret this principle, then it could surely be argued that this is part of the nature of the principle itself, if not one of its major goals (i.e. to confuse the performers).

Indeed, I am probably thinking of *Both Sitting Duet* here because this work too is based on a written score, and so the abovementioned principle appears here as that excess

which is not included in the score, but which at the same time determines the performance of the work quite significantly.⁷⁶ It is not the remembering of the 'moves', after all, that we should be looking out for here, but, rather, all that might be going on around this remembering, as Kelleher suggests: 'the stopping, the looking, the noticing, the thinking while the thing goes on: the quietness that is articulated so to speak between the lines, and the more provisional and delicate gesturality that takes place as it were "off the score"' (2008: 49). In fact, perhaps it is not by chance either that I am thinking of this specific duet, of two artists who share many years of collaboration, and who have evidently developed a series of tactics and strategies when working and/or performing together onstage. It is these kinds of principles of performance (as well as the strategies of collaboration that they might be linked to) that I am now after, not least because I feel that such principles somehow cause and sustain the kind of thinking that might be going on in a show whereby the performer(s) engages with a series of written instructions or the prompts forming a score as the performance itself unfolds.⁷⁷

To go back to the choreographic consideration of the theatre stage as the board of a board game, then, I imagine that such an undertaking might allow for certain principles of performance to emerge, which again might not be directly translatable into action in any obvious way, but which could be put forward as those unwritten principles accompanying any one of her scores potentially. My approach will be this: to follow through a series of tasks that will help me pursue this idea by transferring my thinking from the theatre stage to the board of the board game. This is, after all, the nature of thinking per se, as Boris Groys would argue, 'a step-by-step movement from one option to the other', 'from one image to another in a systematic way' (2005: 56-57).⁷⁸ What would I need to do, then, what principles of performance would I need to establish or pursue, in order to perform a shifting of my thinking from the stage space to the board of a board game, given what each one seems to be doing to me, not only as an image

⁷⁶ This is a score the spectator actually sees lying on the floor in front of the two sitting performers, in the form of two notebooks, one for each performer, which both Burrows and Fargion often consult in order to keep the show going, so to speak.

⁷⁷ See also the way in which Adrian Heathfield and Tim Etchells discuss the works of Forced Entertainment which are based on tight rules or structures (Heathfield, in Helmer & Malzacher, 2004: 77-99). Here, as Heathfield suggests, 'a highly constrained set of dynamics' within a simply structured text, for example, might result in 'a kind of excessive production of ideas' (ibid: 77); similarly, as Etchells admits, the performers/players in a show like *Quizoola!* might feel that 'the tighter the structure or rule the freer the play can be', so that, in fact, '[t]he rules [...] can really be written on a postcard. But in performative terms the possibilities are endless' (ibid: 81). Again, one imagines that these possibilities could relate to the sort of excess that is produced through and because of certain (unwritten) principles of performance that the performers share, and which in this case might concern strategies of stretching the (written) rules or scripted text, or of negotiating one's 'moves' within a structure or set of given parameters.

⁷⁸ This is from an essay by Groys in the catalogue for the 'Open Systems' exhibition at Tate Modern (edited by DeSalvo, 2005: 50-63), where the critic considers art as a mimesis of thinking (see also later on in this section).

(as in my mediations on the theatre and the game board), but also as that space of potential performance? How would I return to the theatre stage then?

I come up with four further tasks: 'Go horizontal'. 'Mark out the territory'. 'Create a miniature'. 'Find the new beauty'. These are not to be taken literally necessarily – although it is not unimaginable that indeed they could – but, rather, they are to lead into that specific kind of doing which is none other than thinking. In fact, I would like to insist in proposing such a choreo-thinking practice as one which resists predetermining the performance outcome and does not seek to articulate a specific way of doing (in the sense of creating a manual for choreography), given that all this could eventually be exhausted. Rather, what I have been aiming at here is a way of opening out possibilities, which therefore focuses on imagining and preserving what I have called the space of the dance possible.

Task #3: Go horizontal

[...] for the sake of belonging to something that belongs to you.
(Ridout, 2008: 113).

If I were to consider the theatre stage as a game board, then the most obvious thing this would require is that I shift my attention from the vertical plane to the horizontal. And if the choreographic space started to operate on the horizontal, then I also sense that the idea of another possible shift would emerge, a shift from the representational (typically theatrical) plane to that of mere presentation; a presentation of 'things', that is, not standing in for something else but appearing as themselves, so to speak.⁷⁹

Yet, as soon as I have uttered this idea, I realise how I remain slightly sceptical about this proposition, given that I am still wanting to speak about (or think of) a space of and for performance, where I am not sure if anything at all can ever appear 'as itself'. In fact, I admit my resistance not only towards the notion that things can appear as themselves in performance (or in the performance space), but also towards any sort of attempt within performance to break down aspects of the theatrical set-up; this could be by asking audiences to somehow participate in the show, for example, or by taking

⁷⁹ The notion of horizontality in dance performance is also discussed by Lepecki (2006), in a chapter where he considers two works, by La Ribot and by Trisha Brown, respectively (also mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis). Yet here, as I shall show, I am not concerned with performances that operate literally on the horizontal, but with an imagined sense of horizontality that could exist even in performances staged conventionally on the vertical plane of representation (or, simply, on the theatre stage, with the audience seated 'properly' in the auditorium).

a performance into an alternative performance space, so that the boundaries between stage and auditorium are seemingly broken, and/or the structure of the theatre is questioned (or removed altogether). To put it more accurately, while I have nothing against site-specific or participatory performances in principle, I often question, however, whether such set-ups, often thought of as breaking down the theatrical apparatus, really do operate in that way.

If, as Carlson explains (1989: 128-129), theatrical performance is based on 'the implied dialectic of the space of the observer and the space of the observed', then could I, as a maker, work with (instead of against) the particular set-up of these two worlds in confrontation, as he says, and still think through the idea of the theatre stage as the board of a board game, in order to thus 'go horizontal'? What if, instead of 'going horizontal' by seeking to work against the vertical plane, I accepted that, regardless of the physical structure in which I place my performance, the representational game is always there, and the spatial relationship of the observer to the one being observed is always one of confrontation?⁸⁰ After all, if I place the performer into an alternative space to that of the theatre stage, and have the audience watch her from all around, or if I present the solo in a gallery space and invite the audience to enter and exit the space whenever and for as long as they want, or if I structure the piece so that the audience find themselves sharing the 'performance space' with the performer, will this have meant a shift on the horizontal? How does one 'go horizontal', other than in a literal way? What else could it mean to 'go horizontal'? How could I maintain and potentially redefine the spatial relationship between theatre stage and auditorium by following through the idea of the theatre stage as the board of the board game?

Let me take another detour here, and remember a particular instance, which drew me into the idea of horizontality, this time as a spectator, who in fact very much enjoyed the way in which horizontality worked on her, as she stayed seated, without having to move around, come and go, or participate in the proceedings of the performance.

As soon as I enter the performance space, I immediately feel a strange curiosity about this mess that surrounds me and has been created before I arrive. It is spread on a bumpy horizontal plane which includes both the empty performance space of the Greenwich Dance Agency hall, and the ranked seating where the audience is supposed to sit. A vast space then has been filled with clothes and furniture, all randomly scattered throughout the space – or so it seems. I get absorbed in an act

⁸⁰ See also Casellucci's proposition that '[t]here is no possibility of passage or circulation between the audience and the stage, there's a clear separation', so that, in fact, the layout itself of the auditorium appears belligerent or violent as it waits for the 'spectacle' to happen (Castellucci et al, 2007: 204).

of observation and figuring out. I try to calculate the number of objects that are scattered around, and speculate on their history and purpose. Suddenly, the thought occurs that this piece might spill over the stage and into my space; it might eventually include me in it. Shortly after, the realisation that I am not sure I want to be a part of this... I want to stay fixed and safe in my spectator place! I just want to be entertained perhaps. It's a strange sensation this... I don't mind being challenged, surprised, or even puzzled... but, please, do not let this mess blackmail me into becoming an active participant in it!

Laughter is heard. Gradually it multiplies and fills the space. It is not deafening; its sound is rather hollow. The stage becomes full of people – ordinary, non-dance people I think, most of them above 40 years old – laughing and moving objects around. The laughter keeps going at a similar pace, intensity and volume, with rare climaxes, rare outbursts. More and more people appear. They eventually 'clean' the seats, collecting all objects and spreading them on what I now see clearly defined as the performance space. These forty (or so) people do not seem to have any intention of interacting with me. They just want to collect all the stuff and place it back where it belongs – that's their job. My spectator place is safe. They will take up only the space that belongs to them. Phew! This is a traditional theatre piece.

Objects now cover the whole performance space. They form a finished puzzle. That's it. Task accomplished. A small pause. And then, the undoing of the task. All objects get moved once again, and are this time placed into a pile in the centre of the space. The laughing continues. And then there is another pause. Finally, a last spreading of the objects. Everything goes back to exactly the same place where it was before (or so it seems). The performers are still laughing. They seem obsessed with placing things in the correct place. I get obsessed with remembering the place. That's it. Task accomplished – again. A small pause. Some laughs later, everything is covered up with chipboards. The lighting turns warm. I realise it has been "natural lighting" up until that point, and it has actually been lighting me too... well, at least I haven't been conscious that I participated! – or did I not?

In the post-show discussion La Ribot admits that she shares with Romeo Castellucci the latter's desire to place the spectators back in their seats. Indeed, I have been sitting rather comfortably in my seat throughout the piece, despite my involvement in figuring out the rules and patterns holding the work together. An audience member yells: 'Thank you, I realised that I need to participate more in my life!'. I wonder what exactly made him realise that, and how a non-participatory spectator experience has led him to a desire for participation... Maybe I am also slightly jealous of La Ribot for having achieved this. And maybe what I am mostly jealous of is this: her way of structuring these simple and obsessive actions in a way that kept the audience (or at least some of the spectators) engaged, and drew them into a mental trip even as they stayed seated, within their traditional spectator role.⁸¹

A few years later, I am about to create a solo; I am wanting to think through the task of going horizontal, while maintaining the traditional set-up of the theatre. And it is now that I realise that what scares me most about horizontality is its potential to spill and

⁸¹ Edited notes from my experience of watching *40 Espontáneos* at gDA, as part of Dance Umbrella, 2005.

include both performer and spectators, so that they find themselves sharing the same space, or so that they both feel the same level of involvement or participation in the performance proceedings. My question now is whether I can still resist participation, even as I go horizontal. How can horizontality be thought of from the theatre stage, in a similar way to how it operates in board games, but not by collapsing the distinction between the player-participant and the player-observer (or spectator)?

An old obsession returns, this time through the writings of Nicholas Ridout: it is my recurring obsession with Samuel Beckett, and with his way of structuring 'things' by exhausting combinations, in particular. In fact, if the first part of Ridout's essay 'On Three Kinds of Belonging', which bears the subtitle '1.Choreography', seems to me related to the idea of a performance working on the horizontal, then it is not by chance, I suggest, that in this section of his essay, Ridout ends up discussing chess and snooker, 'mere playing', as he says, 'a pre-adult over-investment in just moving things around for the sake of it' (ibid: 113). The essay starts with a discussion of Molloy's routine of sucking stones, which is a choreography of operations, the author suggests, that results in the creation of a system of belonging – or, rather, a system which has no other purpose perhaps than to give a sense (to both doer and spectator, as we shall see later) of belonging to belonging, or belonging to something that belongs to you:

Beckett's Molloy seeks to locate himself in time and place by arranging around himself a system in which everything is in its place. [...] Having devised the system and accommodated his organism to the rhythm of its operations, [...] [h]e has, one might say, surrendered his existence to a choreography of belonging, or, one might say instead, he has composed his existence by means of this choreography [...].

(Ridout, 2008: 112).

Undoubtedly, these thoughts somehow echo my experience of watching La Ribot's *40 Espontáneos* (2004). Placing oneself within an arrangement of things emerges here as a way to re-think the idea of the theatre stage as the board of a board game, and so to discuss horizontality in a way that bypasses the notion of representation versus mere presentation. In fact, I would like to pursue this idea further, and propose that 'things' need not be placed on a horizontal plane necessarily, as in La Ribot's work, for the system of belonging to be sustained. Firstly, such a process of placing might concern different kinds of things and not just objects; for example, movements, words, sounds, thoughts, remembering or actual people. And, secondly, placing might mean here an appearance or occurrence of 'things' within a space of performance that consists of the air as much as the ground – not just the floor of the stage, but also the atmosphere or the environment of performance, as the Castelluccis would perhaps say. In fact, if the

pawns belong to the game board as much as the board belongs to them, then one could think of the performer too as appearing within a space where the arrangement of things sets up a system which belongs to her as much as she belongs to it. This will still be a choreography for the stage, but one which has borrowed from the game board a notion of horizontality through which subjects and objects are organised in a relationship of correspondence and co-dependence. In this way, it could be argued that, similarly to the proceedings of the combinatorial, no element is privileged against the other, but each is there to justify, give sense to and affect the other's presence through their belonging to an overall system. The unwritten principles accompanying the choreographer's score in this case might seek to set the rules of co-dependence, rather than predetermine the performers' actions, so that subsequently both choreographer and performers might enter the plane of horizontality through this idea of belonging, as it develops from within the overall plan, structure, or game. Finally, according to Ridout's proposition, the spectator might emerge here as an umpire; we could say that, by observing (and obsessing with) the operations on stage, in this way the spectator also enters into a relationship of belonging, 'entertaining himself with the simultaneous fantasies of control and of belonging' (Ridout, 2008: 113). And the best part of it is that he will not have been invited to participate or actively play; just like the spectator of *40 Espontáneos*, who might still remember the pleasure of belonging to the proceedings on stage, even from within the safety of sitting quietly in their seat.

Task #4: Mark out the territory

The idea of marking out the territory of performance takes me back to that boundary between the stage space and the space of the auditorium; this time, however, it draws my attention to that front edge of the stage, which is supposed to separate the space of performance from that of the everyday world, where real people are in fact supposed to be sitting. Is it that edge of the stage then where the artificiality, the pretence, or the make-belief of the theatrical are celebrated, by marking the border where the theatrical starts (or ends)? What happens when someone appears there? Tim Etchells writes of his work with Forced Entertainment:

[t]he chorus-like line-up – all the performers at the front of the stage and addressing the public directly in turns – has been the most common recurring structure, appearing in project after project, especially as a way to begin. Here at the top of the show, the line-up is an act of mutual revelation and confirmation for both performers and audience – we are all here, all in place, all present and correct. The performers are stood before you in a line at the edge of the stage. You, at the same time are all there in the

auditorium, sat in your rows and facing us. A blank face-off. ... The zero of theatre. Us facing them. Them facing us. Watching. Waiting, ready.
(Etchells, 2006: 140).

To stand on the edge of the stage, then, might mean that one appears at the zero of theatre, a confirmation of the existence of that real person before they go off to become something or someone else. Of course, there exists another space too, where real things seem to take place, just before or just after the non-real appears, and therefore also an additional boundary between the real world and that of performance; this is the offstage space which seems to have always belonged to the performer and which might include dressing rooms as well as the wings on the sides of the stage. In any case, as McAuley suggests (2000: 23), 'the onstage/offstage dialectic and the complex relationship between physical or material reality and the fictional, illusory world created in and by it' have been at the centre of many discussions on theatre architecture, while the stage door, in particular, operates as 'the physical manifestation of the demarcation between the world at large and the "secret kingdom" of the theatre practitioners, between public and private, between outside and inside' (ibid: 67). My task of marking out the territory of performance anew then, as if the stage space were to operate like the board of a board game, brings up the following questions: How does the performer appear now on that edge between the material real and the fictional illusion? How does the practitioner, whether choreographer or performer, maintain their kingdom secret, if the edge of the stage becomes something like the edge of the game board?

I bring back the image from earlier on, of that group of people sitting around a table and playing a board game. What seems to stand out when I think of the edges of the board is in fact the arms of the players, which could be understood here as that connecting line between the real person playing and their representative on that fictional world of the game. I see the arm extending from the player to the game area, and the hand doing all the moving around of the pieces, operating almost like a passport, a sort of vehicle by which the player is permitted to enter the game, be within it and, eventually, leave. In fact, there is no other way for this game to happen, other than through the use of this 'passport'. One could not play by being only outside, in the same way that they could not exist only in the inside of the board. The area is marked out precisely so that it can produce a border, and this kind of border is necessary for the player to appear both in the inside and on the outside of the marked out space at once.

I am now thinking of something someone told me about a solo I once created, based on a soundtrack of recorded monologues by women narrating memories. The women

were either British or American, and so their narrations were recorded in English; yet neither I nor the performer of the piece are from an English speaking country. The observation was made, therefore, that in this piece one could sense a peculiar relationship to language, a sort of connected-ness but also somehow a clear distance from the language of these recordings. In fact, at the time, it might have been that these recordings functioned as our passports into the English language. One could say, retrospectively, that as we worked on the monologues we kept our relationship of the foreigner to this other language, but at the same time used the recordings to connect to, or find a way of belonging to, the English-speaking performance space.

For this solo we are about to create now then, maybe I can revisit the theatre space as a foreign land, whose border we need to cross, in order to find a place within, while at the same time maintaining our place outside. It seems relevant then to recall at this point an essay by Sophie Nield, which seeks to describe the border (in the sense of the border between countries) as a theatrical space, by also presenting the refugee as a performer who appears in a specifically 'theatrical' set-up. She writes:

The border, like the theatre, is a place where you have to appear. The border, and the border-dweller or refugee, [...] both 'appear' at the moment at which they come into conjunction. This encounter, too, requires the production of a space in which identity can be doubled; in which it is possible, indeed necessary, to be present in more than one way: in which one must simultaneously be present and be represented.

(Nield, 2006: 65).

Hence Nield goes on to describe the ambivalence in the experience of the border-crosser (ibid: 64), and the tension at the border 'between here and there' (ibid: 69), which we might feel on the borders of the theatre stage as well. In fact, the author proposes that '[w]e are able to move only in so far as we are able to appear at the margins, at the borders, only in so far as we are able to accurately represent ourselves to the audiences we encounter there' (ibid: 69). But also, I would add, the performer might be able to mark out her territory and appear at the borders of the stage only in so far as she keeps returning from time to time to that chorus line-up moment, when the zero of theatre is re-established, or where she might be able to change the colour of her pawn, to cross over, from participation to observation perhaps, and back again. Still, she has marked her territory and belongs there, to the 'land' that belongs to her. The border reminds her of the moment of passing out of her own life into some other life, leaving herself behind, as Ridout says of the ghost figures in *invisible dances...* (2006: 18); and this is where she might return to renew her passport, if you like.

Task #5: Create a miniature⁸²

Dear S,

If I could, I would have written this in very small hand-writing and sent it to you as a letter folded many times and put in a tiny envelope. Or, if I would have spoken this to you, I would have whispered it, so that anyone else wanting to hear what I am saying would need to lean forward and pay close attention, really listen carefully. My first questions to you I guess are: How would you perform the solo in response to this? Would it be possible for you to imagine performing the piece small, folding it into many pieces and placing it perhaps in the pockets of spectators? Or would it be possible for you to whisper every word and every move to a different spectator, as if choosing what to address to whom, and as if trying to get the rest of the spectators to lean forward in an attempt to note what you are doing?

I don't know if you've sensed where I'm going with this... For the new version of the solo, I'd like us to imagine the stage space as a board of a board game, and so really what I am suggesting here is that we consider the stage as smaller, and us as capable of placing it on a table, folding it up, putting it away in a box or bag, taking it anywhere with us, keeping it forever maybe in our drawer or pocket, or getting rid of it, throwing it away in the garbage, recycling it, donating it to charity... I am not joking! And I am also certainly not implying that you would appear here as a pawn manipulated by an external hand. This is not about control or authoritativeness over the theatre stage, but rather about protection and affection. Can we be protective of the theatre stage? What would this mean for you as a performer?

You know, I have been thinking, the theatre stage might be very vulnerable. Think of it as easily breakable; if it belongs to us, as much as we feel we belong to it, then it is almost like we have a huge responsibility to keep it safe. So this is not about respect either. I know you've said you often feel awe when entering a big stage; but maybe the stage feels the same about you. It is not about being respectful to the structure and the history of the theatre. It is more about exploring it, and paying attention to the little details of the stage, of any stage, as if it is a miniature stage. How would you enter into that kind of stage?

Of course, my major preoccupation is the audience, as always. Following on from this idea then, once we have miniaturised the theatre stage, I would like us to think of the whole piece as a gift. Maybe the stage space as the board of a board game is like the wrapping of the performance as a gift. Do you remember when P once said that the best thing an actor can do today is to at least be generous? If I were to offer these words to you, how do you imagine offering your appearance to the audience?

See you in the studio,
F.

⁸² See Stewart, 1993, and especially Chapter 2, titled 'The Miniature' (pp. 37-69), as well as Skantze, 2007 (pp. 138-144), on scholarly exchange and performance-making as gift, for ideas which have influenced the thinking that unfolds in this task/letter.

Task #6: Find the new beauty

When I'm working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think only how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.

(Buckminster Fuller, n.d.: [online]).

It is quite often that mathematicians and scientists refer to the beauty of the solutions to problems. The qualities they usually seek are efficiency, economy, and an overall sense that the problem has been solved through steps which follow a general rule of necessity. These are of course qualities that are sought-for in board games too, not just in the way players choose and perform their moves, but already from the way the game is constructed. Similarly to mathematical theorems, for example, chess problems exhibit a sense of economy and purposefulness in the way they work as organised systems to be 'solved'. If the performer is therefore to appear within a stage system which is to be played with (or 'to be solved') according to a set of rules and a general principle of efficiency, could this lead to a specific (new perhaps?) understanding of beauty in performance? In fact, why is it that performances which are constructed through scores, as well as performances that work through the proposition of a thoroughly structured system are sometimes considered as dry or as very restrictive in terms of the freedom they leave for the performer to make choices, respond spontaneously, and/or express an opinion or attitude about the proceedings on stage? To come at it another way, what is the performer's role (or beauty, if one could say that) within such structures?

An interesting answer comes from Boris Groys, as he looks at the *Open Systems* exhibition at Tate Modern (2005) and explains:

[I]f the creative act itself is part of a certain system and guided from the beginning by a certain set of rules, then the artist has a unique inner access to the system. And this means that the artist has a unique competence and power [...] The integration of an individual creative act into a communicative system was interpreted by some theoreticians as a sign of the death of autonomous artistic subjectivity. But this subjectivity successfully survived its death by making the system itself the object of its inner, intimate experience. (Groys, 2005: 52).

Indeed, the notion of a score or a system might initially sound threatening to creativity or to the performer's subjectivity more specifically. When used in performance-making, mathematical formulae and games of intellectual skill, which are in turn often based on opposition, repetition, multiplication and exhaustion, are often accused not only of

predetermining the outcome of the work and hence restricting or taking over the performer's input – erasing the performer's subjectivity – but also as transforming the performer into a detached executor, a kind of solipsist, who is cut off from reality and focuses all her powers and attention on the obsessive fulfilling of a prearranged plan. Even so, one could ask, how is this kind of solipsistic act related to the social event, or encounter, of performance? Would it be worth looking for another kind of beauty here?

In response to *Open Systems* again, critic and art historian Johanna Burton argues that

ironically, by so diligently honing methods to resist exteriority, the solipsist ultimately reveals the delicate connection between self and social. The solipsist presents a possibility heretofore unconsidered: by constructing a means of denying the world, one necessarily constructs a system of belief in relation to it. Such a system is often seemingly strange or illogical, not grounded in collective experience but in individual tactics of negotiation. But this is precisely why the solipsist is so invested in the world. Prying open seemingly closed systems by disregarding their imperatives, involves not only a knowledge of them but a (likely ill-founded) faith that they can be subverted; [...] The solipsist [...] is *all* subject.

(Burton, 2005: 74-75, her emphasis).

Following Burton's proposition, systems can therefore be proposed as an alternative way of navigating the world (rather than mirroring it); in other words, a way through which the individual might connect the self to the social in a way that avoids representation (see also Burton, 2005: 74), or a way in which to work through solipsism, in order to open out to new sets or relations and to devise new tactics or strategies of negotiating one's relationship to what stands outside the system.

It is interesting at this point to mention that for Thomas Lehmen, a choreographer who regularly uses the notion of systems to create work, a system can be conceived theoretically in terms of 'everything to which the differentiation between a specified inside and a specified outside can be applied' (2003: 41)⁸³. On the one hand, then, Lehmen and Kramm suggest that a system might generally mean an 'integrated association of things, actions and parts', which includes any principles or order 'according to which something is built up', the 'interrelation or inter-positioning' of those separate things, actions or parts, and the 'interconnected dependencies of all elements' (ibid: 40). On the other hand, though, the particularity of the system lies in that the specific elements it uses as its parts 'cannot simultaneously be parts of another system'; additionally, then, the system operates as a 'form' that is clearly differentiated

⁸³ Thomas Lehmen and Sven-Thore Kramm include the term 'system' in a glossary they produced as part of *Stationen* [Stations], a booklet accompanying the homonymous project, which took place between 2003-2004, in Berlin, Brussels and Ghent.

from what the authors call 'the environment', which might remind us here of what Burton refers to as 'the social' or 'the world'. In this way, and if, following the propositions of Romeo and Claudia Castellucci, we have previously thought of the theatre stage too as an environment, that of the spectacle, then the idea of the system which the theatre might borrow from the board game, implies that this environment is in fact clearly separated from any other environment or anything external to it; it stands independently, we would say, to the outside world.

Following on from this, I could also therefore suggest that the performer, who might often appear as a solipsistic figure on the theatre stage which operates like the board of a board game, seeks and proposes the kind of beauty that emerges from an efficient and purposeful working through of different sets of rules and parameters, with a certain degree of belief and commitment on her side to the idea of the performance as a constructed system. In this way, she is not obliged to reveal or represent the real world 'as it is', so to speak; rather, the pursuit of the kind of beauty that comes from the way in which she negotiates her relationship to the system might be precisely what allows her as a player to reveal her relationship to the so-called 'real' outside world. The task of finding the new beauty could therefore be rephrased and understood not in terms of a quest for the real in performance, but, rather, as an acceptance of and curiosity for that other real which *is* performance.

This is perhaps how Matthew Goulish understands beauty too, when he suggests, in his *39 Microlectures in proximity of performance*, that beauty lies in the process of making the human being appear from inside the ghost which is always present (2000: 84); in fact, following a proposition by Wooster Group director Elizabeth LeCompte, that the actors transform in performance 'from self to more-self', Goulish proposes artificiality as a concept through which to understand this specific act of transformation, and particularly underlines the importance of the labour that might actually be involved in this process of generating 'the more self', through a constant layering over 'the self' (ibid: 83-4). Again, this echoes the pursuit of the artificial or the seemingly unreal, which might be worth considering, not only because 'when talking about performance "the real is a trap"', so that it might be healthy sometimes to question what is real in performance, as Jonathan Burrows once suggested (cited in Protopapa, 2004b: 6), but, also, in order that performance is allowed to reveal a different sort of reality; a kind of beauty, we could add, that stems from the performer's labour as she appears to engage with the purposeful constructed-ness of the staged system.

At this point then, I wonder whether I could pursue this proposition further and suggest that the idea of beauty I am trying to construct here may also be perceived through the notion of magic. I specifically note Xavier Le Roy's interest in Harry Potter, and his proposition that the book series offers the possibility of an imagining of another relationship between humans and objects, or between humans and everything else, in a way that it provides a potential escape for anyone not satisfied with the real world. Or, rather than an escape, I could imagine that magic provides alternative ways in which one may understand their belonging to this world (which, in turn, belongs to them, as we have seen earlier). Indeed, Le Roy appreciates the kind of magic he finds in Harry Potter precisely because of the way in which it offers an alternative perspective towards reality. What becomes important, however, in this case, is that, as the choreographer himself notes,

J.K. Rowling describes a world which is still very [much] in relationship with our codes. [...] She follows the idea that there is not such a thing like new and completely different. Nothing is completely new; it always refers to the things you understand which construct your understanding of the world.

(Le Roy, cited in von Hantelmann, 2002: [online])

In other words, the engagement with the magical or unreal world does not necessarily imply a denial of the real world; rather, it presupposes a thorough understanding of the structures which operate within the real world. To approach reality, one might need to actually construct a system that proposes an alternative to this reality. And if this were to be pursued on stage, then I could propose that the space of the dance-possible therefore emerges not as one where we seek for the real, but rather as one where we seek for the beauty of an alternative systematically constructed reality. In fact, whether this pursuit involves solipsistic acts of different sorts is not so much the point here. Rather, it might be worth thinking through this notion of the magic, the artificial or the unreal, precisely so as to be able to reconsider solipsism and, arguably, even reality itself; in this way, solipsism might appear afresh, not as a foreclosure to relationality or to reality anymore, but as an opening out to new types of relations, new things or imaginings, further encounters – a new kind of beauty altogether.

VI. As if concluding

This project's aim, as described from the outset of this thesis, has been to propose and explore the notion of possibilising dance through what I have described as practices of choreo-thinking, as a response to the contemporary phenomenon of exhausting dance – in other words, to find the space of the dance-possible, to practice choreo-thinking, so as to enable the choreographer to keep going, as it were, despite exhaustion. The idea of concluding such a project then might sound somewhat paradoxical, given that the attempt has been to work through exhaustion in order to arrive at a sense of beginning, rather than reach that 'far edge of things', as Connor suggests (2003: [online]), which would imply an ending or closure. Not only this, but the reader might also have a sense now of having engaged with a work that has opened out to a variety of discourses, practices and ideas; it is in this way, after all, that this document not only reflects the multiple strands of the practice that went on as part of the project – and, again, by practice here I mean performance-making as much as writing, and any other sort of activity or encounter that has informed the work – but also adopts something from the very nature of the sort of thinking that is sought for through this project of possibilising dance.

Hence, in order to remain 'faithful', so to speak, both to the idea of possibilising and to the nature of the practice that has been presented throughout this thesis, I will approach the ending as an opportunity to offer propositions for new beginnings, a series perhaps of open-ended endings, which indeed reflect on some of the issues I have discussed, but which do so also taking into account the question of what might come next. After all, it is this pressing question, 'what comes next?', towards which, as we have seen, possibilising dance might be able to offer a way of responding. In the brief conclusion that follows, then, I return to the political in dance, the space of theatre, the contemporary moment for choreography, and the notion of performance-making as interruption, as themes worth revisiting with a view to enabling further possibilising.

On the open-ended ending(s) of possibilising

If possibilising dance was presented in the introduction of this thesis as a response to the notion of exhausting dance, then another issue that came up in that section was the

extent to which certain choreographic strategies of exhausting dance – in the sense of doing away with dancing as movement-in-flow – could be seen as a political gesture towards (or for) dance. In particular, I presented earlier Lepecki's argument that the 'slower ontology of movement', or the 'still-act', as the author says, which one might encounter in the works of choreographers such as Jérôme Bel or Xavier Le Roy, for example, propose a resistance towards the kind of propensity to movement that dance has inherited from modernity. Moreover, I explained how dance in the sense of movement-in-flow, or the conception of dance as isomorphic to movement, has been linked to a whole series of 'problems' in dance, including dancers' physical exhaustion, that results from learning strict techniques of dead masters or from 'workshop-hopping', as well as the spreading of national ballets for the sake of the glory that comes with reviving nineteenth century steps – all this, as part of a particularly contemporary dance economy, or what one could perceive as the institutionalisation of dance today (see also Lepecki, 2006: 126).

Indeed, I could not deny at this point that I would easily join Lepecki in arguing against many aspects of the ways in which dance has become part of institutions, both cultural and educational; in fact, it would not be hard for me to recall specific moments of personal and professional anxiety caused by the way in which the dance economy operates. Apart from that, though, I would like to suggest now that possibilising dance might actually offer us here an alternative approach towards such issues. This approach has nothing to do with adopting a certain kind of attitude towards any kind of movement that appears or does not appear in dance performance; neither does it seek to propose another strategy aiming to subvert the system of a particular dance economy. Rather, possibilising dance might suggest a need to review the idea of the political in dance altogether. That is to say, we now might want to ask: Can we really stop those techniques from being taught, or those big ballets from touring? Is this what we are really after, anyway? Or, how else could we think through the idea of the political in dance, other than in terms of a resistance towards exhausting, disciplined – often in the sense of choreographed – dancing?

For Lepecki, as we have seen in Section IV, the (politically problematic) relationship of choreography to dance is based on the demand that dance is made reproducible. Along those lines, he has also proposed that

contemporary dance must return to the problems posed by choreography. This return is not one of style, or language, but exactly the return to a problematic [...] which dance has been thrown into, but [which] is not really a

problem of dance. Contemporary dance discovers choreography as the polarizing performative and physical force that organizes the whole distribution of the sensible and of the political at the level of the play between incorporation and excorporation, between command and demand, between moving and writing, as those central elements for all performance composition.

(Allsopp & Lepecki, 2008: 4).

Perhaps, then, it would be worth rephrasing Lepecki's concern, and indeed accepting that the question for dance now, or the problematic into which it might be worth throwing dance now, concerns its relationship to choreography, and, more specifically, the way in which choreography demands (in writing) that dance organises itself as movement, whatever the language or style of that movement. At the same time, though, it might also be useful to clarify where we feel this demand comes from currently, or, rather, to remember that other demand on dance and choreography, before one may even speak of reproduction: the demand that something appears on stage in the first place; the demand, in other words, that choreography organises some kind of 'theatrical appearance', even if for that one time when something needs to happen onstage. This demand, we could imagine, is one made by the theatre itself, the environment of the spectacle which is (and always has been) set up as a space where the spectators take their seats in the auditorium to look at what happens on the 'empty' space of the theatre stage, as we have seen in Section V (Task #1). In this way, dance's 'melancholic entrapment', as Lepecki names it (2006: 131), could be thought of here not necessarily as linked to its ephemeral nature, but primarily as dance's reaction to the expectation – by producers, by spectators, by the dance market, or by dance scholarship even – that it [dance] makes its appearance as an organised spectacle within the theatrical set-up. Hence, the choreographer's question now might be how to deal with this demand, how to '-graph' for the theatre in the first place.

To stop and think, or to withdraw in order to think, as I have argued in Section IV, following Arendt and Heidegger, might be one possibility. In fact, if Lepecki's proposition concerns a stopping and thinking that is (re)presented onstage (in the form of the 'still-act'), then the withdrawal and thinking we could imagine here is not one that needs to necessarily be presented, represented or reproduced in an actual instance of performance. This could still be an option, of course; yet our problem remains, and it is a problem of theatre. It is for this reason that I have proposed a re-imagining of the theatre, before one even appears on the stage; this re-imagining, after all, might allow the choreographer to re-think the theatre, so as to look at the stage anew; to make it appear for her as a space of possibility, the space of the dance-possible.

My strategy has been to perform a particular thinking journey, from the theatre stage to the board of a board game. However, there are probably many more journeys to be taken, in order for more questions of theatre to be asked. After all, the metaphor of the game board, which has served here as a tool with which to pursue a re-imagining of the theatre stage, helps create the space of the dance possible, but might also, arguably, present us with certain limits, particularly in relation to the aesthetics it could imply. More specifically, one could think of a certain type of casual (or anti-theatrical?) aesthetic here, often associated with contemporary European dance, and particularly with so-called experimental works, usually based on structures that are semi-set / semi-improvised. Or, one could also imagine a certain type of performance presence emerging from types of performances where the performers are asked to work through a constructed system on-stage, to the extent that such a presence could soon become stylised, or 'acted-out' very skilfully on the side of the performers. It should be clarified, however, that the game board metaphor has been explored here not in relation to any type of performance aesthetics it may or may not produce; rather, as a root through which to re-conceive of the theatre stage altogether, so that a renewal of choreographic practice occurs which is rather independent from any kind of aesthetic or stylisation. In fact, I would propose that, as soon as the limits of such a choreographic project appear through the adoption of a particular aesthetic, then we might have almost reached that point of exhaustion; and, hence, there would be no better time than this for new re-imaginings and further possibilising.

In this sense, what remains is the need – and the imperative, we might add – that one eventually returns to the theatre stage, not forgetting that the theatre is the space of that encounter which we call performance, in whatever way the theatre might ever be re-imagined; that is, the encounter which takes place in that shared moment when performer and spectator come to confront one another (in the theatre, or in any other kind of space, for that matter). Hence, with possibilising dance we enter a process of re-imagining and 'befriending' the theatre, I would suggest, which might also therefore be envisaged as a re-thinking of all the relations that are embedded in the encounter between (theatrical) dance performance and spectator.

Furthermore, we could now return to the question of the political in dance through the notion of the contemporary, as discussed in Section II. In particular, we could now think of the political precisely through dance's relationship to its contemporary – and by contemporary here I do not mean only the concurrent, in the sense of that which takes place at the same time, or the new, which also indicates a demand to be new and

original; rather, I am hinting at the sense of contemporaneity which is unique to performance, and which concerns the encounter, once again, that takes place in performance, but also in rehearsal, or as part of a collaborative process or artistic exchange more generally (and, undoubtedly, also in writing, as it is taking place now on this page). In fact, if possibilising dance was proposed earlier on as a potential way to deal with the demand to be contemporary, then it is not meant that it does so by questioning or determining dance's relationship to the current state of affairs worldwide, or to issues of politics that might be pressing in the contemporary moment (as might have been the case with some instances of political theatre, for example); in fact, possibilising dance might not even be concerned with the kind of self-reflexivity that is apparent when dance considers its relationship to its own history, or to the creative methods and means of production that dance has pursued at different times (or under various names and labels).⁸⁴

Instead, possibilising dance addresses the contemporary moment by thinking through the relations between things, people, spaces, and the rules, strategies or tactics of play, particularly as those appear and belong to the moment of performance. The reconsideration of these relations then might be sought-for, or practiced, as we have seen, either through the solitary activity of choreo-thinking and/or through the constant multiplication of encounters the choreographer might pursue in the various contexts she finds herself. Whether this would be a way to address the political or not is perhaps beyond the point here. What is still pertinent, though, is the relationship to the contemporary. Hence, when the choreographer is posed with questions such as 'How do you want to work today?', 'What kind of art do you make?', or 'What could be the possibility of creating art today?' (see Peeters, 2007: 111-112), it is in the interplay between choreo-thinking and encounter where she might perhaps be able to find a response; this is where, in other words, she could find a reason perhaps to keep going.

If, as I have been proposing in this section, the contemporary moment asks questions about/of theatre, and possibilising dance works through a reconsideration of the relations that take place within theatre, then, presumably, it is precisely a return to theatre that is needed in order for such propositions to be tested in practice and to subsequently be thought through further. That is to say, if the choreographer has befriended the theatre, then now is the time for her to come back to it. In fact, it is worth

⁸⁴ See Read (2008/2009) and Kelleher (2009) for relevant discussions on the relationship between theatre and politics; what is interesting here is that both authors start by questioning even the basic premise that theatre is in a position today to address the political in a straightforward and unproblematic way.

remembering the way in which, in Section II, I presented performance-making as a practice that comes to interrupt the 'situation' set up by the theoretical enquiry of any practice-based research project potentially, and of this project of possibilising dance more specifically. Choreo-graphing then emerges as a practice to which one returns, in order to destabilise the ground of possibilising, to figure out perhaps what might have been lost in the imagined transportations of thought, in cited passages by various authors, in theoretical propositions and philosophical considerations. This might have something to do with returning to the experience of making work or the actual feeling of what goes on in the moment of the encounter between choreographer and performer; it might relate to the moment when the choreographer sits in the auditorium to watch her work amongst other spectators. However, one imagines that it might not be enough that the performer appears on the stage (or in the studio) for this practice to start interrupting the situation that has been so carefully set up theoretically. The return happens immediately, but for an interruption to occur more time is needed; more work needs to take place. This is the nature of the sort of labour that is shared amongst collaborators, and which then leads to that moment of exposure in front of (or beside) the audience. This work takes time, just as that work took time. More questions about relations and possibilities appear then. A new space for thinking becomes necessary.

And so, it is only after that time that the choreographer might want to return to these propositions, remember them, think them through further, make new ones. But first, I need to let go, again. Nothing like breathing out these last few words, in order to put new life into them, as someone would have said in Beckett.

VII. Postscript

How to make an approach to the work? Be approachable. Appropriate it. Draw near to it. Draw it nearer to you. Come into relationship with. Position your self. Find a stance. Find an intimacy, with the different places and spaces that the making comes from and moves towards. Sources and outcomes. Inevitably personalized, yet deliberately non-confessional and purposefully incomplete.

(Wright, 2002: 90).

The Archive Room, or Whose archive is this anyway?

At this point, the reader will have had a chance to look at the documentation material presented in the DVDs attached at the end of this thesis, particularly if they are not familiar with my choreographic work, and/or if they have not seen *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]*, the piece I presented for examination purposes at The Michaelis Theatre, Roehampton University, on 29th April 2009.

As explained in previous sections of this thesis, the works I include in the DVDs are presented as examples of the kind of practice that took place during and as part of my PhD project, even though it will not be possible for the one watching this material to fully experience the live encounter which took place in the moments of rehearsal or performance. I consider such works, however, as comprising a series of outcomes that are all part of the overall process of the performance-making practice of this project; at the same time, these DVDs reveal perhaps how the practical research developed and where it arrived. Hence, the documentation does not seek to demonstrate *in practice* or *through performance* the theoretical discussion which unfolds in my thesis, neither does it work as an exploration or synopsis of the various arguments I have presented in writing. Rather, it reflects specific moments of a practice that spread across five years, and which has only come to a temporary close with the end of this project.

It would be fair to say, however, that the reader will probably be able to sense traces of my overall thinking, as it unfolds in the written thesis, within the material on the DVDs, particularly whenever I refer to specific performance works in these pages, but in other sections of this writing as well. For example, while watching the works on DVD 1, which could be seen as accompanying Story #1 (Section III), the reader will be reminded of

the way in which my performance-making practice developed parallel to my obsessive interest in the theatre of Samuel Beckett. These works might also appear, after all, as working towards exhaustion (even though they never actually exhaust all possibilities), whether this concerns an exhaustion of spatial journeys (as in *QUADish-ish*), or an exhaustion of images to present to the audience (as in $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$), etc. It is also likely that, when watching *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]* on DVD 2, the reader will be able to gain a further understanding of the notions of 'possibilising dance' or 'choreo-thinking', as these have informed my practice; or, they might be able to re-think what I have called 'principles of performance', which I articulate in Tasks #3, #4, #5 and #6 (Section V). However, it should be noted that such connections have purposefully not been forced within the writing, but have been left open for each reader to make individually. In fact, this seems more aligned to the way in which my practice evolved, parallel to the theoretical thinking I developed in writing, rather than in direct response to or as an embodied version of the ideas that emerged from any theoretical enquiry.

In particular, then, DVD 1 contains documentation from three works: *QUADish-ish*, a group piece that was inspired by Beckett's *QUAD*, and was performed between 2005-2006; *Umm... I... and uh...*, a solo piece choreographed for Susanna Recchia, and performed between 2004-2006; $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$, a full-evening show performed in 2006, whose first part consisted of a reworking of *QUADish-ish*, and whose second part was based on written scores that the performers used onstage (as I first incorporated them in my practice). Although the reader is free to watch the material included in this DVD in any order, I have, however, proposed a particular way of viewing this material as it appears on the menu of the DVD and as I have explained in the beginning of Section III. More specifically, I have divided the video recording of *QUADish-ish* in three parts, in-between which the reader is invited to watch the whole video recording of *Umm... I... and uh...*, and a slide show with photographs from the process of making and performing the second part of $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ (which is accompanied by sound that was used in the performance). Firstly, then, *QUADish-ish* keeps returning, as the people on stage multiply and as spatial configurations seem to get exhausted. Secondly, *Umm... I... and uh...* is offered as a whole video, so that the reader might compare it to the way this piece is then remembered in *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]* (see DVD 2). Thirdly, the second section of $w^{ish} + q_{ish}$ appears through sound and photographs only, given that this piece was very visual and turned out differently each time it was performed, depending on the venue, the number of performers and the scores used in each show. Overall, then, I have offered documentation here in a way that reflects how I, too, now look back at this work, remember it, re-think it, appropriate it, position myself against it,

or seek a relationship to it, as it remains ‘inevitably personalized’ and ‘purposefully incomplete’, to use Fiona Wright’s terms from the opening passage above.

Umm... I... and uh... [revisited], which was performed between 2008-2009, appears in two versions on DVD 2, and is the solo work I choreographed for Susanna Recchia, a long-term collaborator before and throughout my PhD research. This work emerged out of a need to look back at what happened through practice in my research and to try to rediscover with (and through) the performer small details that played a significant role within this practice, but which tend to get forgotten, or rarely find their place, within documentation material and theoretical writing. Whereas in the written thesis I consider the theatre stage as a game board, in this piece the stage becomes an archive room, in which the performer explores fragments of past memories and incidents, as she performs a ‘revisiting’ of the older work *Umm... I... and uh...*. It should be noted, however, that this piece has also been performed outside the context of my PhD, for audiences who have not seen the original solo and/or are not familiar with my work at all; in this sense, it stands as an independent work, which might have something to say about how memory functions, for example, and, potentially, about how the performer thinks through her own memories, as she places them in space and uses what we call a ‘memory map’ to construct a journey through them. In fact, the proceedings on stage are based on a score I create anew for Recchia before each performance, and so each time the work is performed a new version of the story that could be our past practice is revealed. In this way, a certain level of randomness is also incorporated in the piece, in relation to the order in which memories are revisited, the sound tracks brought into the piece and the costumes and make-up tools used in Recchia’s explorative journey.

Finally, then, my practice has not only been multi-layered and complex as a process, but also shared amongst artists. In this sense, the archive of my practice belongs to the performers I have worked with as much as to the choreographer. Recchia, in particular, has taken part in all the works created during the research, and as such was the most appropriate performer to inhabit the stage as an archive. She was therefore staged in *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]* as a parallel researcher with her own reflections on practice, or, even, as an archivist herself; I consider, after all, that the performers I have worked with have also presumably collected (or archived) experiences from our shared moments of encounter, each in their own way. Hence, with *Umm... I... and uh... [revisited]*, Recchia and I attempted to playfully scratch the surface of memories, to reveal traces of what took place, by allowing the personal to merge with the anecdotal from within an exploration of the stage as our shared embodied archive.

VIII. Appendices

Appendix I: DVD 1

QUADish-ish [PART I] – 10 min.

Edited video recording from Resolution!2005

The Place Robin Howard Dance Theatre, London, 29 January 2005

Choreography, set & lighting design: Efrosini Protopapa

Created with and performed by: Tom Adams, Alex Beech, Priska Lüthi, Eri Papacharalambous, Elena Prapidi, Susanna Recchia, Anastasia Tsonou, Gianluca Vincentini

Joined by: Dionysia Basta, Ilaria Davvanzo, Laura Glaser, Christina Karydi, Anna Moscatelli, Luli Segal, Katerina Siganou, Beata Stanikowska

Music by: gotan project, Thelonius Monk, Wynton Marsalis, Louis Armstrong

Recorded voice: Alex Beech

Music/sound editing: Efrosini Protopapa

Costume design: Evdokia Veropoulou

Video camera operators: Trine Nedreas, Ricky Montanari, Dionysis Tsaftaridis

Director: Steve Jackman (The Place Videoworks)

Video editing: Efrosini Protopapa

Supported by Laban, The Place and Roehampton University.

Umm... I... and uh... – 23 min.

Edited video recording from Resolution!2006

The Place Robin Howard Dance Theatre, London, 5 January 2006

Concept, choreography & design: Efrosini Protopapa

Created with and performed by: Susanna Recchia

Recorded voices: Lucy May Constantini, Meghan Flanigan, Sarah Shorten, Amy Voris

Sound editing: Efrosini Protopapa

Video camera operator: Peter Baterson

Director: Roswitha Chesher (The Place Videoworks)

Supported by Laban, The Place and Roehampton University.

QUADish-ish [PART II] – 6 min.

Edited video recording from Resolution!2005

The Place Robin Howard Dance Theatre, London, 29 January 2005

[See credits above]

w^{ish} + q^{ish} – 5 min.

Slide show from the process of creating and performing the second part of the work
Laban Theatre, London, 2 March 2006 / The Michaelis Theatre, London, 9 March 2006

Conceived and choreographed by: Efrosini Protopapa

Created with and performed by: Alex Beech, Priska Lüthi, Pano Masti, Eri
Papacharalambous, Neil Paris, Elena Prapidi, Susanna Recchia,
Anastasia Tsonou

Music/sound: Dominique Troncin, Giorgos Hatzinasios, Nicola Piovani

Recorded voice: Alex Beech

Text advice: Pano Masti

Sound editing: Efrosini Protopapa

Set and lighting design: Efrosini Protopapa

Costume design: Evdokia Veropoulou

Photographs by: Christian Kipp, Efrosini Protopapa, Francesca Recchia

Slide show editing: Efrosini Protopapa

Supported by Arts Council England, Lewisham Creative, Laban and Roehampton
University.

QUADish-ish [PART III] – 9 min.

Edited video recording from Resolution!2005

The Place Robin Howard Dance Theatre, London, 29 January 2005

[See credits above]

Appendix II: DVD 2

Umm... I... and uh... [revisited] – 23 min.

Edited video recording from Springdance festival 2009
Kleine Zaal, Theater Kikker, Utrecht, 23 April 2009

Conceived and choreographed by: Efrosini Protopapa

Created with and performed by: Susanna Recchia

Recorded voices: Lucy May Constantini, Meghan Flanigan, Sarah Shorten, Amy Voris

Sound editing, costume and lighting: Efrosini Protopapa

Dramaturgical advice: Cath Willmore

Camera operator: Claudia G. Hoedemaker

Video editing: C*View productions

Supported by Dance4, Laban and Roehampton University.

Umm... I... and uh... [revisited] – 33 min.

Edited video recording from Dance Diary 2009

The Michaelis Theatre, Roehampton University, London, 29 April 2009

[See credits above]

Camera operator: Christian Kipp

Video editing: Efrosini Protopapa

Supported by Dance4, Laban and Roehampton University.

Appendix III: Images referred to in Section V

Legend	Page
Figure 1. 'Highgate Wood School, London'. Photo by Hugo Glendinning (n.d.), from the project <i>Empty Stages</i> in collaboration with Tim Etchells. Source: online image, available at: http://www.hugoglendinning.com/timetchells4.html [Accessed: 14 August 2008].	142
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Figure 3. <i>The Show Must Go On</i> (1998), by Jérôme Bel. Photo by Herman Sorgeloos, courtesy of Jérôme Bel. Source: online image (also on the cover of Lepecki, 2006), available at: http://82.238.77.78/jeromebel/eng/diaporama/lds/images/lds5.JPG [Accessed: 14 August 2008].	142
Figures 4a & 4b. <i>Ping Pong</i> (1966), by Alighiero e Boetti. Goetz Collection, Munich. Photo by Sammlung Goetz © Giorgio Colombo, Milano. Source: De Salvo, Donna (ed.) (2005). <i>Open Systems: Rethinking art c. 1970</i> , pp. 86-87. London: Tate Publishing. [Scanned by the author].	143
Figure 5. 'U. A. Walker', New York, 1978. Photo by Hiroshi Sugimoto, from the project <i>Theaters</i> (1975-2001). Source: online image (also in Brougher & Elliott, 2005: 88), available at: http://www.sauer-thompson.com/junkforcode/archives/2009/01/22/sugimotoHtheatre.jpg [Accessed: 12 August 2009].	144
Figure 6. 'Radio City Music Hall', New York, 1978. Photo by Hiroshi Sugimoto, from the project <i>Theaters</i> (1975-2001). Source: online image (also in Brougher & Elliott, 2005: 83), available at: http://www.formfollowsbehavior.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/204.jpg [Accessed: 12 August 2009].	144
Figure 7. 'Cinemara Dome', Hollywood, 1993. Photo by Hiroshi Sugimoto, from the project <i>Theaters</i> (1975-2001). Source: online image (also in Brougher & Elliott, 2005: 92), available at: http://www.mediaartnet.org/assets/img/data/2240/bild.jpg [Accessed: 12 August 2009].	144
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Figure 9. Image from Jean Genet's <i>The Maids</i> by the Univ. of Sydney Theatre Workshop. Cover of: McAuley, Gay (2000). <i>Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre</i> . Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. Photo by Raymond de Berquelle [Scanned by the author].	145

- Figure 10.** The Monopoly board. Source: online image, available at: http://ecs.victoria.ac.nz/twiki/pub/Courses/COMP205_2009T1/Assignment2/monopoly-board.jpg [Accessed: 14 August 2009]. 146
- Figure 11.** Tavli opening positions for the game 'Portes' [Doors]. Source: online image, available at: http://www.ligas-books.gr/shop/components/com_virtuemart/shop_image/product/54e14f6e29a9f852598f028ad2975098.jpg [Accessed: 12 August 2009]. 146
- Figure 12.** Go board after some turns. Source: online image, available at: <http://bsixcentdouze.free.fr/tc/tgm-en/img/go.jpg> [Accessed: 12 August 2009]. 146
- Figure 13.** Carcassonne field and pieces after some turns. Source: online image, available at: <http://www.gamesrat.com/images/carcassonne-online1.jpg> [Accessed: 14 August 2008]. 146
- Figure 14.** Chess opening positions. Source: online image, available at: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c3/Chess_board_opening_staunton.jpg [Accessed: 12 August 2009]. 146
- Figure 15.** Chess problem. Past Victorian trivia from *The Illustrated London News*, 1863. Source: online image, available at: http://www.iln.org.uk/iln_years/year/images/Trivia%20past/iln%20trivia%201863%20Chess%20problem%20984.JPG [Accessed: 12 August 2009]. 146



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

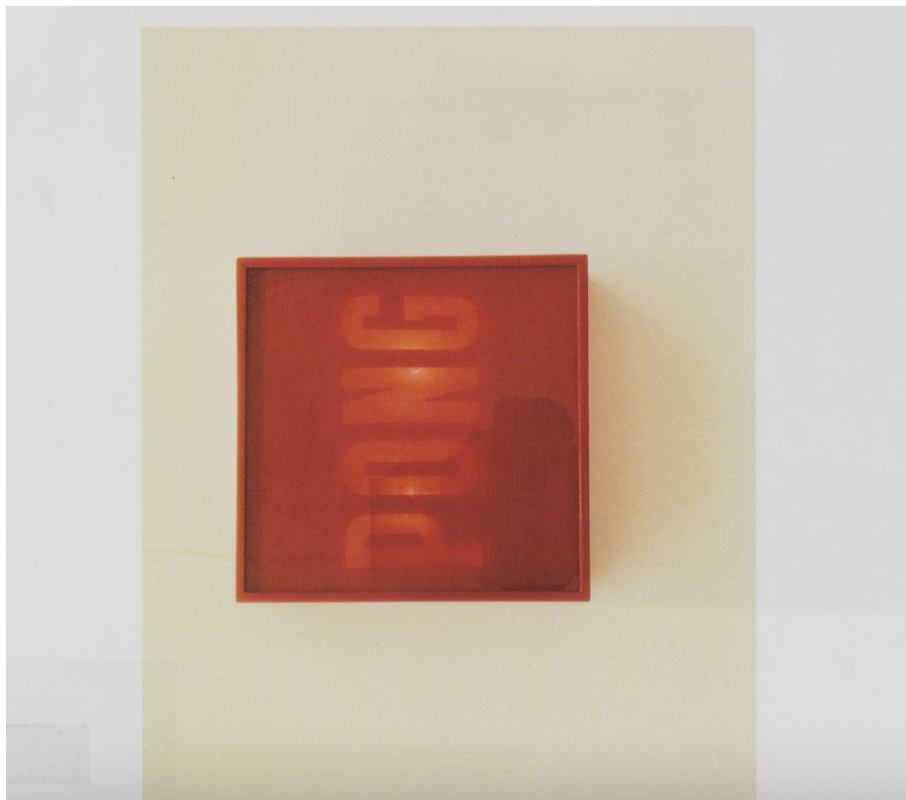


Figure 4b



Figure 4a



Figure 5

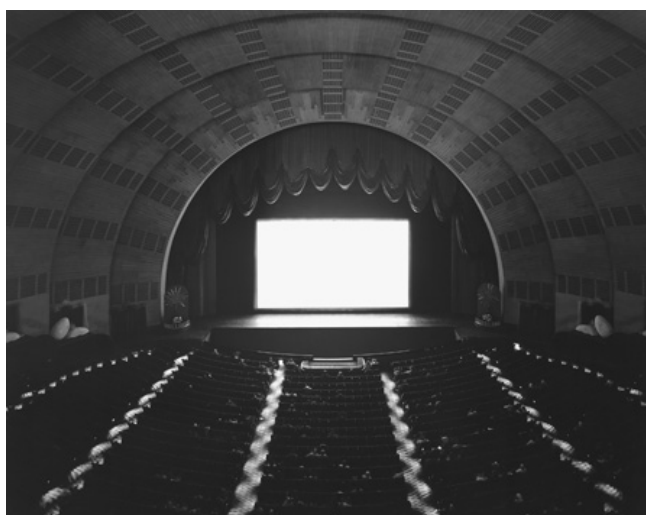


Figure 6



Figure 7

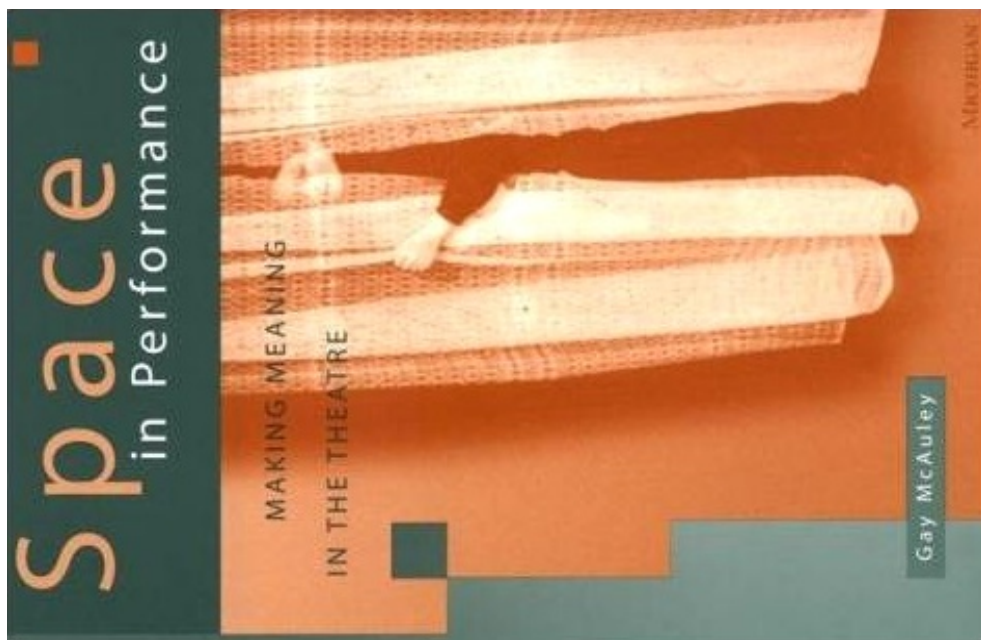


Figure 9

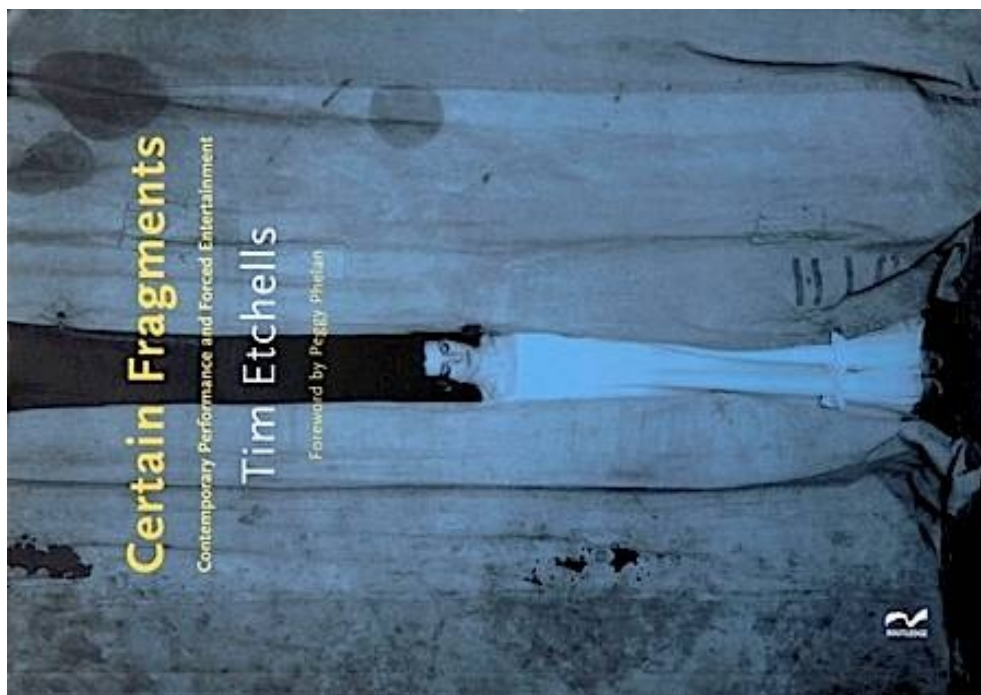


Figure 8

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