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Generating co-presence: dancers' ways of knowing and discoveries in improvisation choreography

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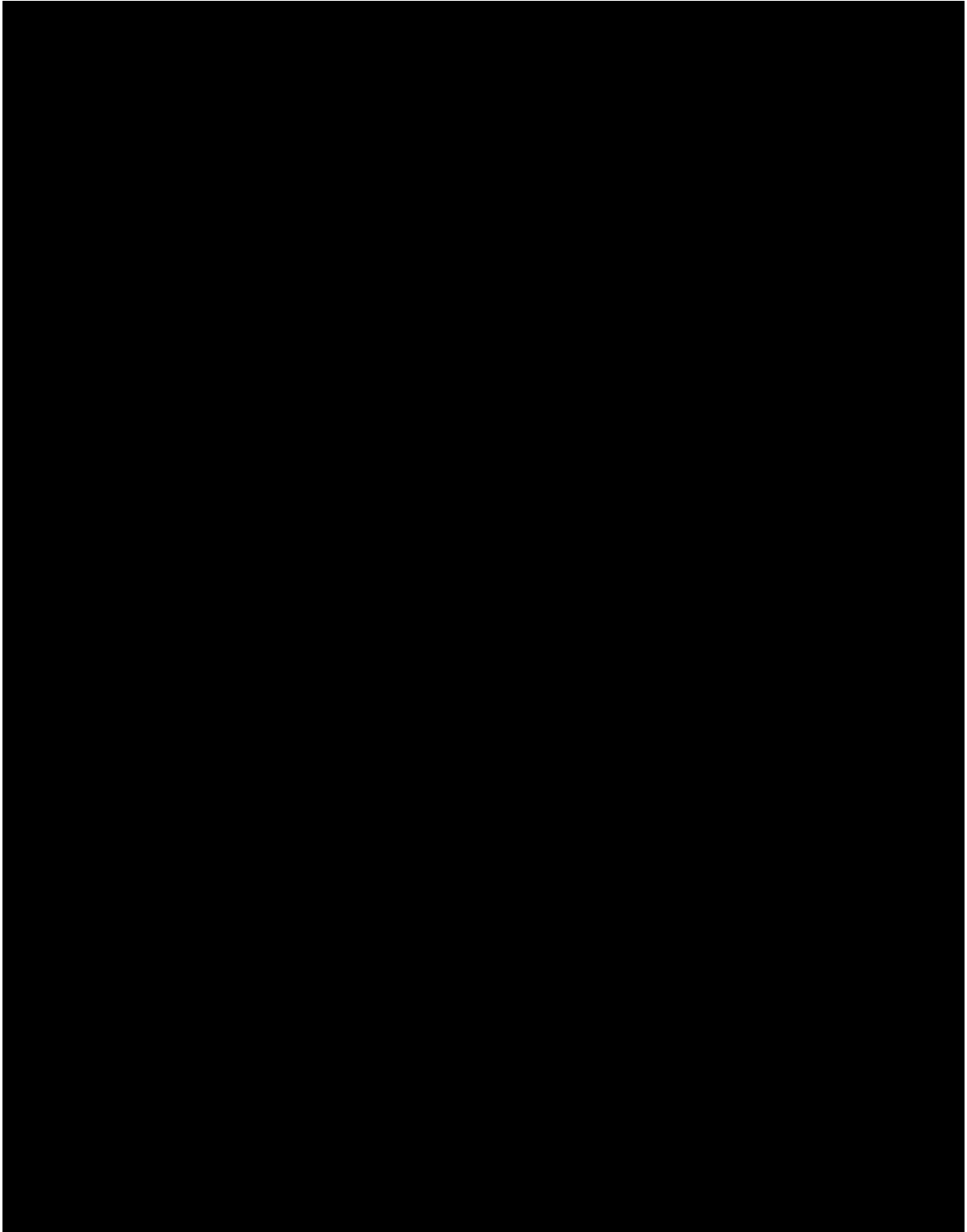
**Generating co-presence:
dancers' ways of knowing
and discoveries in
improvisation choreography**

**By
Marisa Godoy**

July 2021



**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**





Certificate of Ethical Approval

Applicant:

Marisa Godoy dos Santos Ruegg

Project Title:

Generating co-presence in/through dance making: Intuitions, practices, and discoveries in collaborative creative processes in contemporary dance

This is to certify that the above named applicant has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as Medium Risk

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Abstract

Through an investigation into collaborative making processes in contemporary dance, and the myriad expert artistic skills this requires, this study amplifies the dance artists' voices in order to help grasp arguably indispensable competences in the creation of what I will name 'improvisation choreography'. Among these skills are the generation of original movement material and dancers' engagement with ways of knowing and states that are often tacit, and thus challenging to articulate and document. In improvisational work in particular, specific modes of being, thinking and moving, as well as an enhanced perception of self, other and environment – which foster creative modes of working – are crucial components of process and performance. I address questions related to the acquisition and maintenance of skills, as well as to the factors shaping an appropriate environment for performers to tap at will into the desired modes of being and operating. In order to investigate the progression of enskillment, my research is rooted in and informed and shaped by practice, both artistic and ethnographic. Adopting a constructivist paradigm and a practitioner-researcher stance, I conducted fieldwork on the choreographic practices of dancer and choreographer Thomas Hauert with his company ZOO, and the creation of *Flot* (2018), which he realised in collaboration with the Centre Chorégraphique National Ballet de Lorraine. By means of an autoethnographic perspective, I carried out ongoing movement practices whose insights inspired reflective inquiries and poetic musings. What I gathered was analysed using Grounded Theory methods. This study was part of the Research Video project, which is aimed at developing a video annotation platform. By engaging in annotation practices, I examined the affordances and probed the utility of this prototype software for the analysis and publication of research materials.

The voices of dance practitioners, including myself, and those of dance researchers and anthropologists, along with the modes of writing I engaged in, are the 'amplifiers' that co-constructed the insights arrived at here. I propose that developing and sustaining skills in 'improvisation choreography' in group settings is a collective undertaking, with accountability distributed across the performers, the materiality and actuality of the place of practice, and the time substance manifesting as duration and periodicity. Sustaining skilled performance, which involves expert intuitive operation, is an attribute of practitioners' co-presence and co-action in favourable conditions of space-time, where the volatility of these factors is a determining factor to be considered. A greater awareness of the implications explored here may be key in

informing the way in which dance professionals both design and implement models of practice, production and performance. For that, the focus would lie on knowing not only what the required and indispensable skills may be, but in inquiring into how the dimensions of skilful improvisation in dance-making may be more widely contemplated. Such inquiry would also consider how the environment can be crafted for practice and performance by dancers, choreographers and their collaborators, taking into account the suitability of dimensions of people, time and place, for the flourishing of dance artists in and through the dance works they co-create, and bring to life.

Foreword

Full absorption: a prologue

I have been dancing professionally for over three decades.

Earliest memories of dance: me in the living room of the flat we lived in as a family, me around the age of five, dancing to one of my parents' records around our dining table, alone, fully absorbed in the dancing.

I don't remember the music so well – a big-band recording perhaps – but I still can see the scarlet red label on the vinyl.

The experience of being fully absorbed changed as the years passed. It transformed even more with the dance lessons, aged fourteen.

Still, the passion was immense, pervasive, inescapable.

Just the presence of that reflective surface in the room, that mirror... that focus on conforming to outward shapes, that rigorous discipline... creepingly redefined my moves, and how absorbed I was in moving.

Somehow dancing was still wonderfully delicious, but that complete absorption of my first dances became rare, a rarity actually, as I went on.

On realising these implications – a sort of unbearable longing – I embarked, perhaps around twenty-two, on a sort of rescue operation.

My pursuit of a transformed, adult version of that absorption is the driving force and background for both my artistic inquiry and this research project.

1 Introduction

Beginnings often conceal the desire of other beginnings. [...] When I remember the book's many abandoned working titles I wonder why I experienced such difficulty defining its scope (Carter 2004: 1).

This quote does not draw a veil over the desire of another beginning; rather, it is here due to its likeness to my own experience of experimenting with various beginnings and titles. Artist and writer Paul Carter's opening sentence in *Material Thinking* (2004), a volume on artistic collaboration and the interconnection between the practice and theory of making art, reminds me of my ideas for a beginning, which developed into the foreword to this thesis. Unsure whether starting in such a personal manner was worth pursuing, I produced numerous beginnings. In fact, this was more a movement out of necessity than an idea: to approach scholarly practice as an artist, to let the beginning be what and how it *felt* it should be. Moving beyond my doubts, I assumed it was appropriate to start with a personal narrative (as if I were telling myself my own story), reflecting on what I remembered from my first dances and how that influenced my life as a professional dance artist and, consequently, my research in the arts. As scholars Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta and Tere Vadén put it, '[n]ew knowledge can be produced only if one is willing to take the risk of assuming something that in effect can later be shown to be false' (2014: 29), and this brings my idea for a beginning into perspective. At the outset, before I could proceed with any writing, the question 'what brought me here?' was pressing and was what might be able to elucidate some of the questions that followed: why and how am I here now? And what are my interests and questions?

An intentional act, this integrative approach is taken as a means to unleash the potentialities of my inquiry and my writing. Hannula and colleagues believe that the act of writing – as a mode of thinking, undertaking research and reporting it – 'has to find a way of treating language in a pluralist manner, so that the uniqueness of artistic experience is not lost when our thinking about it is communicated' (2014: 37). The words 'integrate' and 'unleash' emerge as traces of artistic practice discovery, of solving the choreographic impasses I have faced on my trajectory. In my view, they also relate to the opening paragraph of *Material Thinking* (Carter 2004: 1), quoted from above. Carter's words encourage acknowledgement of what *is*, afford acceptance of how things are. A book, a poem, a dance piece may receive many titles and have

many beginnings in its creation. Choosing *the* title and *the* beginning may ask of the author the generosity of allowing the work to experiment with its own possible names and its own potential scope. In the same vein, Carter has said elsewhere that ‘the method is only ever a flexible set of reasonably resilient points of critical reflection that guide you on the way’ (2016). He elaborates on a close relationship between the work and the method. This viewpoint is respectful of emergent courses of action likely to occur in creative processes, which I opt to integrate into this endeavour.

‘Dance works are made of a mix of ideas, physical practice, happenstance, forgetting, remembering, minor epiphanies and daily discoveries, joined together piece-by-piece, over time’, writes choreographer Bebe Miller in her *Dance Fort: A History* (2015). The daily discoveries of dancers and how these arise are fascinating, particularly the interplay of ways of being, thinking and moving together, and how highly skilled dancers become in regard to perceptions of self, other and their immediate surroundings. This is something actor and theatre scholar Phillip Zarrilli has termed ‘extra-daily skilled modes of embodied practice’ (2007: 647). These capabilities foster creative modes of working and are crucial components of dance-making and performance. Collaborative dance-making is a space where co-presence, co-thinking and co-action are purposefully generated while dance is made and performed. Hence, in order to study how dance artists experience collaborative processes, I enter the field of choreographic work in which improvised movement material is a core component of both creation and performance. My study is developed around the work of dancer and choreographer Thomas Hauert with his company ZOO, and the production of *Flot* (2018), which he realised in collaboration with the Centre Chorégraphique National (CCN) Ballet de Lorraine. Thomas and ZOO’s work is based on improvisation and provides a rich field of investigation that exposes the various dimensions of collaboration and dancers’ ways of knowing, and allows the implications of what is indispensable in this mode of dance-making to be delved into.

Initially, my aim was to look at the work of various artists but some of the intended collaborations turned out to be unviable. This organically led to my opting for a case study; hence, instead of a variety of perspectives, studying Thomas Hauert and ZOO’s practices offered me the chance to obtain a deeper view into my topic. In pursuing this avenue, both the ethnographic view of this choreographer and his company’s trajectory in developing their approaches led to my attending performances, and meeting ZOO dancers who co-developed the practices. I also adopt an autoethnographic approach,

incorporating ongoing movement practices and journaling. Although practice is the driving force in my exploration of the ethnographic and autoethnographic data, theory and practice are in a dialogical relationship and are mutually nourishing.

This investigation is embedded in the project entitled 'Research Video: Annotated videos as a new standard of publishing practice-based and artistic research', which was based in the Institute for the Performing Arts and Film at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), in Switzerland. The project (further explained in Section 1.1.3) was concerned with alternative, hybrid publication formats and aimed to develop a video annotation prototype named Research Video (RV). I was a research associate on the project and participated in various ways to the development of the prototype, for example by engaging in practices of annotation and integrating annotated videos into my doctoral thesis, creating thus this hybrid research output. I also contributed to the volume *Filming, Researching, Annotating: Research Video Handbook* (Lösel and Zimper 2021), one of the RV project's output, authoring the chapter 'Potentialities: What's Next for the Research Video Tool' (Godoy 2021).

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I write about what brought me here, and the line of inquiry that drove me to realise this project. I also state my main interests, and speak about how further investigation of the underlying principles of my practice appeared to be an organic and interesting way to go – now seen from a totally new perspective, through new approaches – and I thus position myself as practitioner-researcher within the study. This position is supported by my overall methodology and an emergent autoethnographic approach. I also present my questions and aims to then explain in detail the research area in focus. In brief, I ask whether there are indispensable qualities in improvisational choreographic practices and, if there are, I inquire into what they are, and how such skills, which arguably foster creative modes of working, can be sustained over time. My aim connects to furthering awareness of the realities and implications of professional dance practice as it occurs now, which may inform the way in which dance practitioners and researchers establish core principles of engagement with dance in accordance with what the dance profession is becoming, hopefully sensitising our approaches to what is yet to come.

Modes of writing and displaying will vary as the thesis unfolds, as explained in Section 1.2. I have experimented with alternative forms of writing up gathered data and

different ways of laying out my material, engaging with the different writing modalities that emerged from practices of note-making, typing, journalling and annotating on both paper and video. These modalities manifest 'irrational free-playing and rational controlled modes' (Locke 2008: 569), and I intend to take advantage of the way in which these modalities speak to and complement each other (2008: 566).

In Chapter 2, I explore the core terms of the study, establishing terms of reference on the basis of which to look closely into dancers' first-hand experience and accounts, and to further the investigation of the macro- and microcosms they partake in. I do this by zooming in on knowledges generated by researchers and practitioners within Dance Studies and Anthropology, to build upon their legacy and position my inquiry. These areas of human practice and knowledge 'speak' to one another and help me build an agile scaffolding for the exploration of my topics. I start by outlining this study's cosmology, defining the features of this context and forging the hybrid 'improvisation choreography' – a term put forward in order to analyse and discuss the nature of the space of cooperation I look into, and to depict some of the implications of improvisation as choreography on dance artists' lives at work. Both the companies and the artists who contributed to the study are introduced here. This chapter paves the way for delving into the particularities of the practices that configure Thomas Hauert and ZOO's making process and performance practice.

Chapter 3 outlines the paradigms guiding my inquiry and research design, explains the methods adopted for data-gathering and analysis, and sets out the underlying basis for my choices. Here I also explain the procedures and report the practices I engaged in during the project. The rationale for using ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches is detailed; the process that led to my establishing the collaboration with Thomas Hauert and Ballet de Lorraine, and with three further company ZOO members is explained. I specify the procedures employed at each stage of the research and describe how data was gathered, thereby establishing Constructivist Grounded Theory as the method of analysis and explaining how I approached interview and video material.

The microcosm *Flot* and the macrocosm ZOO are explored in Chapter 4, which comprises the reporting and analysis of gathered data. This chapter offers the reader/viewer an insight into collaborative dance-making through descriptions of the

practices I observed, fieldwork narratives, interview quotes and annotated video. In a dual mode of presentation, data is analysed and discussed both in the present manuscript and online, in annotated videos in the Research Video platform.

Chapter 5 is the discussion of my findings, where I draw on four main categories distilled from and grounded in the analysis process. These are placed in relation to the materials explored in Chapter 2, pulling threads together and weaving a cohesive conceptual framework, based on Grounded Theory analysis. The chapter also includes reflections on the autoethnographic process.

'Epilogue' is the title of Chapter 6. Here I summarise the main aspects of the study and synthesise the ideas explored in the discussion. As my concluding thoughts, I put forward a conceptual framework, articulating how this may contribute to research on dance practice and competences involved in current improvisation-based work, and how the study may offer professionals a better understanding of what 'improvisation choreography' implicates.

1.1 On what brought me here now

The question 'what brought me here now?' became, in the early stages of the project, so imperative that it required scrutiny before I could proceed. An autoethnographic underpinning supported the idea of reflective hindsight regarding my artistic practice and offered the rationale for looking at my artistic background as *the* background of the present research. In his book *Being Alive*, anthropologist Tim Ingold starts by saying:

[...] in this book I present a very personal view of what, for me, anthropology is. I do not pretend that it is in any way representative: to the contrary, anthropologists reading this book may feel that it strays rather far from their usual preoccupations, and that its centre of gravity lies closer to other fields such as art or architecture (2011: xi).

Centre of gravity – what a suggestive way to refer to the kernel of one's work. This also attracts my attention because of my intention to consider the context of my study as a 'cosmology', an idea I will unpick in Chapter 2. It was precisely my very personal view and interests that helped me delimit my focus of inquiry. My preoccupation with the nature of what I refer to in my practice as 'intentional presence' guided the search for

artists who could contribute to the present investigation, and who could help find answers to a number of recurring questions.

I reflect on what presence is to me. At the moment, presence is a complex instance, process, experience. An attempt to put it into words would read, in a rather long sentence: presence is intentional access to internal and external cues available to us as the moments we experience unfold, allowing thoughts, perceptions and courses of actions to feed one another, which calls for an integration of previously acquired knowledge, yet a reduction of rumination (attachment to the past and to presumptions), and the neutralisation of preconceptions (forecasts of the future) that are irrelevant to or unsuitable for an experienced situation. It is an intentional state, quality or skill that potentially increases the level and quality of interchange and communication with oneself, others and the environment, and – in the context of performance – with the performance space and the audience. It is like the experience of full absorption I mentioned in my prologue – it has the possibility to be rediscovered, redeveloped. Using Zarrilli's words, it is like the actor who 'negotiates "interior" and "exterior" via perception-in-action in response to an environment' (2007: 647). It has become a lifelong engagement, in a broad sense. With regard to performance, I agree with Gabriela Giannachi, Nick Kaye and Michael Shanks who affirm, in their *Archaeologies of Presence*, that it is a prerequisite in meetings between the observer and the work, that 'presence represents a *conditio sine qua non* for such encounters to occur' (2012: 101, original emphasis).

If memory does not fail me, I started becoming concerned about this issue at the age of twenty-two. I had just performed as soloist in a production of *The Nutcracker*, after moving back to Brazil at the end of a two-year period in Mexico City, where I had been studying various dance styles. Discipline was one of my strengths and I rehearsed with dedication, but my interest in the strict discipline that predominated in the ballet world I was in was beginning to weaken. Strangely, after *The Nutcracker* shows I could not remember most of my experience on stage, except for a sense of disconnectedness or dissatisfaction at not being able to perform some rises *en pointe* to perfection. This forgetfulness, this sense of being absent from the experience, troubled and provoked me, igniting what became a pursuit of sustained presence, a journey whose centre of gravity gradually migrated towards concerns with modes of 'co-presence'. Knowing what I experience, in a wider sense, and the need for a conscious being and operating

in movement have permeated my career ever since. This poem by Robert Lax, a poet whose writings greatly inspire and influence my artistic work¹, comes to mind:

I continue to watch, and that's what counts. What counts, if anything does. Something does, but the question I more often ask myself is who counts it? Do I? I do. But does anyone else? Does anyone else in the universe count what happens? Does anyone else in the universe know what matters? Does anyone care, I mean, personally care? Ah, well, why get into that, as long as I do.

And I do. Seem to. Seem to want to know what's going on. From moment to moment. Why it's going on. What counts, from moment to moment. I want to know. Seem to. Seem to want to know. Seem to want to know what it's all, or even, what any small part of it's about (1984: 54).

Moving back to the present, and to the context of this study, I did not speak to either Thomas Hauert or the other collaborating artists about such things. When we met in Nancy at the beginning of the creation process of *Flot*, I avoided mentioning the terms 'presence', 'intentional presence' or 'co-presence'. Firstly, I did not want to refer in my own terms to the qualities I was interested in researching, and hence bias our conversation. Also, it was unclear to me what terminology to use in addressing the focus of this inquiry – is it a state, a quality, a process? Is it better approached and studied as presence, attention or awareness, and how do they differ? I was three years into my doctoral research, in 2019, before I learned that Thomas Hauert works with the term 'constant presence' (Hauert 2019). He had produced a booklet entitled 'Tools for Dance Improvisation' (2019) for a workshop he taught, and he gave me a copy on the occasion of our last interview. At this point, my relationship with the terminology I use to address this topic within the thesis became easier, and some answers arose, as I shall elucidate in what follows. From the perspective presented above, I enter into a conversation with artists and scholars, interacting with artistic and academic references, and also drawing on terms of reference that relate to aspects of what I will refer to as an individual's 'innermost spheres'.

1.1.1 Research background

What is understood as contemporary dance has been changing, its manifestations transforming as the art form evolves. Contemporary dance's spectrum has been

¹ North American by birth, Lax was a writer and minimalist poet who, after working for publications such as *The New Yorker*, left for Patmos, Greece, at the age of 50, to contemplate and write (Humbert and Penzel 1999).

widening and it includes a broad range of aesthetics and formats. Social theorist Rudi Laermans says that '[m]uch is possible within current dance, but not anything goes' (2015: 58). All dance cultures, and different eras at that, delineate 'a specific realm of the danceable' (2015: 56). Yet, if I consider what is framed as dance in the programmes of dance venues and museums, and what is performed in these contexts, this realm has become increasingly diverse. What I have experienced and seen on stage under the label 'contemporary dance' in the past two decades – and still see – may include dancers speaking, singing, playing instruments, navigating affective and cognitive states of various natures, interacting with the audience (verbally and nonverbally, with or without bodily contact), interacting with animals, making use of digital media to integrate online events into the performance, and interacting with materials and props in various states (solid, liquid, etc) which they may manipulate (by constructing, destroying, reconstructing) and occasionally also insert into their own bodies, among other actions that are too numerous to mention. They may also not move at all. Interestingly, elsewhere Laermans points out that contemporary dance has 'vastly contributed to the striking enlargement' (2008: 10) of the notion of the performing arts. He writes:

This much can be taken for granted: used in a temporal sense, the expression 'contemporary dance' points to an unstable, constantly redefined experimental zone in which artists from various backgrounds cooperate and combine in a seemingly boundless way text, physical movement, video technology, lightning [*sic*], high and low musical genres. Since the middle of the 1990s, contemporary dance has indeed become the prime laboratory of the performing arts (2008: 10).

Interests, desires, questions: ignition points when embarking on a research journey. On the one hand, I am interested in knowing more about modes of being, which extend out to modes of thinking and moving (I will use 'moving' and 'acting' interchangeably), that are characteristic of the exceptional states in which expert improvisers perform. On the other hand is an interest in dancers' capacity, once they have experienced the states and skills necessary to create and perform improvised work, to sustain these abilities over time, as well as the ability to cope with the challenges of working for long stretches in hyperalert states while collaborating with others. Thomas Hauert and ZOO refer to the exceptional qualities of 'perception, attention and concentration made possible and required by improvisation' (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). Likewise, dance researchers Catherine Stevens, Kim Vincs, Scott deLahunta and Elizabeth Old write:

Contemporary dancers train for many years and when working at the top of their professional field [...] they integrate mental and physical capacities in ways that are unlike other physical practices (2019: 17).

As my foreword hints, accessing or tapping into states of oneness or full absorption in the actions one engages in – for the purposes of this study, the act of making and performing dance – is the driving interest behind both my artistic and my scholarly research. Arguably, this type of experience has an intangible aspect; we may occasionally ‘be there’ (as Thomas refers to it, interview 4) where *there* involves the being and the thinking and the moving, without these elements being in any way separate or experienced as distinct. Beyond dichotomy, beyond divides. We can barely grasp what makes states of full absorption or predict when they will be available, and we seldom intentionally access them. Or perhaps we can and do. Through practice. So ‘being there’ is also a practice. What kind of dance practices facilitate the capacity to enter such spaces and states? These abilities have an intricate nature and can be elusive; the experience of immediacy, or of no mediators or gaps between being, thinking and acting as characteristic of presence, is not as simple to perform as a learned physical skill.

Among a number of questions that arise are: why is this mode of being necessary in dance practice and performance? What are its components? In the knowledge that it does not involve the repetition of learned movements or thought patterns, but rather intricate conversations between numerous factors that form each moment/experience, and that each moment has an infinite number of origins and possible unfoldings, how can one learn to be skilled in this mode? Further – and most importantly or intriguingly – can we develop the ability to tap into it at will, and sustain it? One context that lends itself to such scrutiny is improvisation practice, as indicated in dance artist and academic Vida Midgellow’s view that ‘improvisations are enabled through being open and responsive to interior and exterior worlds’ that can operate through an internal awareness and the ‘ways your presence, your movement choices, are shaped by, and in turn, shape those around you’ (2019: 9). In this light, there are dimensions to be considered in studies of dance-makers’ lives at work that are dimensions or spheres of our innermost human lives, of our essential beings, so to speak, in continuous relation with ‘the bigger picture’.

Dancer and scholar Rebecca Stancliffe states that '[f]or centuries, innovators have employed or devised methods for articulating and transmitting the skills and knowledge acquired through the practical and theoretical experience of dance, or, in other words, dance and movement knowledge' (2018: 16). She adds that dance knowledge is synonymous with movement knowledge. In my examination of this type of knowledge, or of dancers' ways of knowing, my objectives are to trace the genesis of ZOO and Thomas Hauert's performance-making, a case that lends itself as a site for my examination, and to explore methods of articulating the resulting comprehensions in a non-traditional way that offers the reader/viewer a rich insight into this cosmology.

With the opportunity of taking part in the development of the RV prototype and experimenting with hybrid publication formats using video annotation – determining to a certain extent *how* I would research – I was faced with the question of *what* I was interested in investigating. Given that some of the methods for this research were set out by the RV project, and these were new territory for me, it seemed sensible that the 'safe haven' of what had been central to my performance practice, and also the field where I had been working for the previous three decades, would be a suitable space from and in which to explore the unknown ground of video annotation in dance. I was curious to know more about other artists' processes, to widen my view and look at similar modes of working as an observer. This matched the *how* to research that was determined by the RV project, and fitted with its aim to devise new methods for articulating and disseminating the ways of knowing of performers, and develop an alternative publication format for the performing arts through video annotation.

1.1.2 Being, thinking and making dance together

As we live our lives, we intuit, experiment and make discoveries by means of myriad approaches, modes of being ourselves and being in the world, modes of reflecting and acting, which anthropologist Konstantinos Retsikas has referred to as 'modalities of being and acting' (2010: 136). In this sense, dance-making does not differ from life itself. Dance-makers go about being dance professionals, creating their dances (in studios and in countless other spaces), thinking and moving together with others as they practise and perform. As with life, they intuit, practise and discover novel ways of togetherness – among themselves and with their audiences. Their engagement with the other surely also involves interaction with inanimate features of their surroundings. Hence, in what follows, no matter whether I refer to the creation of solo or group

dances, I am speaking from, about and through a cosmology of dance-making that encompasses the multifaceted interplay of individuals – self and other – and the environment².

In the words of Sarah Whatley, a dance scholar and improviser herself, '[n]ot all improvisation involves contact with another, whether framed as CI [contact improvisation] or not, but all improvisation does require training to open the body to new possibilities, to develop trust and curiosity' (2019: 412). Opening the body to the new and to trust involves opening oneself as a person; it involves one's totality. Adding to this, from another area of the performing arts, Zarrilli describes his stance as an actor by saying that he 'simultaneously inhabit[s], act[s] within, and respond[s] as a sentient, perceptual being to the very specific (theatrical) environment' (2007: 641). He also highlights 'being perceptually responsive' to nuances of performance, to timings and cues that fluctuate, and to the 'actual presence in this environment' of other performers (2007: 641).

What is meant by being present in the moment, and the resulting readiness to respond? What is the value of intentionally focusing on the here and now? Conditioned patterns manifest in the ways we are in the world, in how we think and act. Creativity and openness to the potential unpredictability of each moment are arguably compromised by the conditioned patterns we gather as we grow and interact with the world. How does choreographic practice couched in improvisation offer dancers the means to tackle these hindrances? How can they develop, hone and sustain heightened levels of perception in action, or what Thomas Hauert calls 'constant presence'? Ideally, as Zarrilli says of the 'actor-as-perceiver', the performer 'undergoes training that allows one to become like an animal, ready "to leap and act"' (2007: 647).

De Spain writes that improvisation 'is creativity on crack and, as such, would seem to be a fool's path to research' (2011: 26). One question related to this challenging characteristic lies in the type of 'evidence' this study can provide. What will the nature of elucidations offered by the context in focus be? My objectives focus on observing, reflecting on and articulating how dance artists collaborate, learn new skills and

² In my view, these dimensions are hard, if not impossible, to isolate, both in experience and in order to study them. I will hence work in a synthetic fashion and will often refer to these interwoven facets of human experience as a threefold term – self/other/environment.

perform, taking different perspectives (other artists' and my own) through the use of hybrid approaches – scholarly, ethnographic, autoethnographic, artistic – and through inquiries into modes of writing. What are the indicators that a dancer is in the appropriate mode of being and operating required for the performance in question? Who is entitled to assess that? The conceiver(s) of the work, in this case the choreographer(s)? Is it essential that dancers learn how to assess the circumstances (self/other/environment)? If it is, can dance practice provide the tools for that assessment? Moreover, from the perspective of the research, what are the indicators of 'constant presence' and intuition in operation? Do states need to be demonstrated, and how would that ensue?

A prevalent notion is that the cognition that contemporary dance-making entails is distributed (Whatley 2020: 311), and there is research within dance that has a special focus on the distributed cognition characteristic of collaborative work; however, my focus is not on cognition itself. I have found resonance in the way in which Tim Ingold speaks about the intimate relation between 'becoming knowledgeable' as we walk outdoors and experience the ground we walk on and the weather: 'In reality, however, not only does the extended mind of the wayfarer infiltrate the ground along myriad pathways, but also, and inevitably, it tangles with the minds of fellow inhabitants' (2010: 129). Hence, I examine in Chapter 2 the improvisatory in dance in dialogue with the kind of Anthropology carried out by a handful of anthropologists who are looking at practical ways of knowing:

If knowledge is indeed made, then making has to be understood in the sense implied when we say of people that they 'make their way' in the world. It is not a construction, governed by cognitive mechanisms of one sort or another, but an improvisatory movement – of 'going along' or wayfaring – that is open-ended and knows no final destination. It is precisely this sense of knowledge-making, which is equally knowledge-growing, that I attempt to establish (Ingold 2011: 116).

1.1.3 The Research Video project

Part of what brought me here was the opportunity to participate as a research associate in the Research Video project³. The project was initiated by Gunter Lösel, leader of the research focus 'Performative Practice' at ZHdK. Driven by a growing

³ The Research Video project (2017-2021) was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

interest in the overlaps between artistic ways of working and academic research, I applied to participate in the Research Academy, an event organised by Lösel that invites leading researchers to ZHdK to facilitate workshops with performing arts practitioners. Professor of Dance and writer Scott deLahunta and Professor for Cultural Theory Karin Harrasser had been invited as lecturers for the Research Academy 2016, which I participated in. At that moment, I was busy with dance artists' discoveries in dance-making and how we often act from intuitive sources with a view to investigating myriad aspects of creation and performance, and how these intuitive processes and discoveries could be disseminated in the dance field itself more abundantly, and also reach a wider audience. Lösel and deLahunta had been in dialogue as the RV project was being designed, and by the time the Research Academy took place my participation in the project had been agreed. I was able to choose a topic that was of interest to me, with the prerequisite that video material was used, and my task was to use the RV prototype, develop a practice of video annotation and investigate ways to integrate RV projects into my doctoral thesis. deLahunta's inputs during the workshop greatly fed my interests and questions, and meant that I could envision a bridge between my personal interests and the setting-up of Lösel's project.

Considered as a rich medium with unique features for the documentation, analysis and dissemination of various practices, the popularity of video-based research is growing (Habib and Hinojosa 2015: 51). As digital technologies become more accessible and ever more integrated in everyday-life modes of communication, so do our ways of knowing and understanding, as they 'are intimately intertwined with the technologies we use to store and transmit information' (Bleeker 2010: 4), performance scholar Maaïke Bleeker points out. In this regard, a variety of opportunities for experimenting with ways of recording, documenting and preserving dance content have been introduced through digital technologies (Whatley 2020: 311). Among the digital technologies that artists apply in the studio, video has been used extensively to record and analyse their own work, and also as a support in choreographic composition and reconstruction. Moreover, interdisciplinary partnerships have investigated and produced digital tools that offer dance artists and scholars new ways to visualise and transmit dance content, creating new means of accessing information on dance practice while also 'probing the embodied practice/document dichotomy' (2020: 311).

In Lösel's view, '[v]ideos are present in every step of research, from video abstracts to data collection, data analysis, interpretation, publication and presentation of research' (2021: 16). He asks how this ubiquity may change the way in which knowledge is generated and whether an annotated video, more precisely a Research Video project, can be produced as a stand-alone output for the dissemination of academic investigation (2021: 15). Guided by these questions, the video annotation prototype was developed by software developers Martin Grödl and Moritz Resl. Drawing on existing video annotation software, Grödl and Resl developed an online tool that aimed to be user-friendly, accessible, open-source and based on best practice (Grödl and Resl 2021: 30-32).

Within dance studies, annotation is often analysed in the light of its possible meaningful connections with movement notation systems and is regarded by dance researchers as deriving from or overlapping with notation systems (Blades 2015; Stancliffe 2019). Notation systems aim to inscribe movement on paper or any other medium to represent dance movements for archival or analytical purposes. Historian of contemporary theatre Clarisse Bardiot sees annotation and notation as overlapping, the border between the two being often undefined (2015). Overlaps notwithstanding, Hetty Blades asserts that:

while notation focuses on the hypothetical ideal form of the dancing body, some annotations [...] concentrate on relations and space, opening up possibilities for highlighting that that is not perceptible in performance or recording, such as traces and internal experiences, providing new ways to inscribe movement (2015: 33).

At an early stage, the Research Video project was regarded as one of two strands of this research. Later, the priorities and specificities of my inquiry had to be sharpened, which led to a recalibration of the thesis design, and to regarding video annotation as an approach to the data, a method within the overall methodology. During the project, I reported my approaches and the issues I encountered in my annotation practice, and thus contributed to the development of the prototype in terms of its utility and specificity in dance research. Besides using annotation as the method of analysis and reporting of time-based data, and also the RV platform as a space for reflection on and discussion of the findings that would be integrated into this manuscript, I worked on the production of a prototype stand-alone RV publication. My annotation practice is hence explored in Chapter 3 where my methodology and approaches are presented.

1.2 Modes of writing and displaying

[T]o move, to know, and to describe are not separate operations that follow one another in series, but rather parallel facets of the same process – that of life itself (Ingold 2011: xii).

Taking this thesis as a space of experimentation, I experiment with alternative forms of writing up gathered data and different ways of laying out my material, engaging with various modes of writing that emerged from practices of note-making, typing, journalling and annotating on both paper and video. These modes transit across three modulations: expository (descriptive and narrative), journalling (stemming from ongoing movement practices, and movement as research method) and video annotation. They manifest 'irrational free-playing and rational controlled modes' (Locke 2008: 569) and I intend to take advantage of the way in which these modalities speak to and complement each other (Locke 2008: 566). By making use of a split-page format⁴ within the document, the descriptive mode follows the standard left alignment whereas the narrative mode and the rather poetic autoethnographic journal entries (written in italics and lower case) are right-aligned. A fieldwork narrative and an autoethnographic entry will appear in the following ways respectively:

Fieldwork

Nancy 6 May 2018. Hotel room the night before I start observing Thomas and Ballet de Lorraine work together. Do I have everything? Do I know how to manage cameras, tripods, microphone, computer, audio recorder, myself? Are the batteries charged? Excitement mixed with thrill mixed with curiosity, mixed with various other things I cannot name, don't have the words for.

variations

*insights post / pre / in-between practices:
variations in proximity are decisive for richness of views and understandings, perspectives, perceptions
(ongoing movement practice journal, 22.10.20)*

⁴ Dance researchers Jill Green and Susan Stinson point to new 'deconstructivist' forms and literary styles with which to display multiple voices that may offer multiple readings and meanings and thus break up 'univocal authority', de-centre the writer and interrupt assumptions of 'know[ing] reality' (1999: 111). The researcher who includes interviews and journal entries might present a split-page format; by dividing the page, multiple perspectives are highlighted by spatial sectioning, purposely making the narrative style less neat and easy; this creates a juxtaposition of voices, interrupting the authorial as well as the authoritarian voice (1999: 111).

In his work on practice-led research, in which he advocates a 'performative research paradigm', Haseman writes that practitioner-researchers may be 'constrained by the capacity of words to capture the nuances and subtleties of human behaviour' (2010: 149). He quotes Professor of Sociology Norman Denzin to stress that 'there has been a call by some scholars and researchers for "texts that move beyond the purely representational and towards the presentational"' (Denzin 2003: xi cited in Haseman 2010: 148), which has resulted in proposals within qualitative research to include forms such as poetry, theatre, performance, dance, and the visual and graphic to represent claims to knowledge (2010:149).

Moreover, I intentionally engage with what has been referred to as the practice of 'linguaging' (Phipps 2007: 12; Ingold 2011). I am fascinated by words, language, and fluid meanings. Writing has been a space of creation to me since an early age, and the performance of language has been part of my artistic work in the form of spoken texts, sometimes written by me, sometimes by other authors. In the present research, rigour of thought feeds language; playing with language feeds thought in a movement of reciprocity. I have adopted this (to me very natural) process as a research approach. In *Correspondences*, Ingold takes up Alison Phipps' term to say that we perhaps need an understanding of language

that brings it back to life as a practice of 'linguaging'. In a living language – one that is not semantically locked into a categorical frame but endlessly creating itself in the inventive telling of its speakers – words can be as lively and mobile as the practices to which they correspond (2017: 82-83).

I take up this notion and I make use of certain analogies to probe exactly this potential, of words being as 'lively and mobile as the practices' (Ingold 2017: 82) I investigate. Phipps explains that the term emerged for her and her colleague Mike Gonzalez 'out of the process of struggling to find a way of articulating the full, embodied and engaged interaction with the world that comes when we put the languages we are learning into action' (Phipps 2011: 365). They distinguish between our effort to use a language in classroom contexts from that of 'being a person in that language in the social and material world of everyday interactions' (2011: 365). She adds to that the term 'linguagers', and writes that these are persons

who engage with the world-in-action, who move in the world in a way that allows the risk of stepping out of one's habitual ways of speaking and attempt to

develop different, more relational ways of interacting with the people and phenomena that one encounters in everyday life. 'Languagers' use the ways in which they perceive the world to develop new dispositions for poetic action in another language and they are engaged in developing these dispositions so that they become habitual, durable (2011: 365).

As I read Phipps, I see a further parallel to my use of language. My first language is Portuguese, I live in a German speaking country where I communicate in the so-called High German and in Swiss German dialect, but I write my research in English. I live, and negotiate both internally and with others, in four languages, daily, and translation is unavoidably part of this process. I follow this approach not as a method but as an approach to my uninterrupted translation, not only from thoughts that manifest in Portuguese and German into English, sometimes in a mixture of all three, but also from my ways of knowing as artist into my ways of knowing and writing as researcher.

My dual mode of presenting gathered data, analysis and evidence – in this document and online – constitutes the integration of my annotation practice into the thesis. My approach has two main aims: firstly, to test out ways of reporting research in congruence with the methods defined at the outset of this study through my participation in the RV project. With this aim, I join with the efforts of practitioners and researchers challenging traditional ways of representing research and thus contribute to advances in the use of video annotation as a publication format in Performing Arts research. The second main aim is to offer the reader various perspectives on the multi-layered processes and materials that constitute my interpretive inquiry into creative collaboration, exploring modalities that align with the particularities of artistic methods.

Between Chapters 3 and 4, I will propose an 'interlude' to the reader that involves a first exploration of the RV platform, clearly suggested at the end of Chapter 3. In Chapters 4 and 5, the reader can go back to specific annotations that are indicated by the day of the recording, the calendar date, and the time code or the name of a specific annotation; for example [DAY 2_180508 – 00:01:01] or [DAY 3_180509 – PERCEPTION]. All the annotated videos are stored in a cloud server folder, accessible through the link specified below. It should be noted that, in accordance with Coventry University's policy, the copyrighted music tracks used in the studio and in the performance have been edited out of the video files.

I invite the reader, before embarking on the next section, to become acquainted with the RV platform's features by viewing the video tutorial indicated below. This offers the opportunity to get to know the mechanism of viewing the annotations as a preparation to explore the RV projects at the end of Chapter 3, and then engage with the reporting and analysis of data in Chapter 4, and the discussion in Chapter 5.

How to open and navigate a Research Video project

The RV projects that were created as integral part of the thesis are files saved as '.rv'. They are all located in the SWITCHdrive⁵ folder MARISA GODOY_VIDEO FILES, accessible through the following URL:

<https://drive.switch.ch/index.php/s/ps6SKy0UZutwTCa>

First of all, open the URL that gives access to the SWITCHdrive folder. Click on the download link in the upper right-hand corner in SWITCHdrive. The RV files will thus go into the 'Downloads' folder of your computer. I recommend saving the files in your hard drive, in a folder of your choice. These annotated videos can be viewed in the Research Video online platform, exclusively in the Google Chrome internet browser (downloadable from <https://www.google.com/chrome/>). To learn how to open and navigate the RV projects, please watch the video 'RV TUTORIAL 1', saved as '.mp4' file in the SWITCHdrive folder. The script of the video tutorial can also be found in Appendix 8.5.

Instructions on how to navigate and edit video material in the RV platform are also available in the handbook *Filming, Researching, Annotating: Research Video Handbook* (Lösel and Zimper 2021), accessible through the following address: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783035623079/html>

⁵ SWITCHdrive is the cloud server where the RV projects that are part of this thesis are stored.

2 From the map to the cosmos: an interdisciplinary framework

Searching for appropriate terminologies with which to articulate and make sense of the processes within my study, I played with the idea of *mapping* my field of investigation; a map, however, did not suit my purposes because of its two-dimensionality. I then turned to anthropologist Tim Ingold's notion of ecology. As I progressed with reading, writing, practising and reflecting, and with defining not only terminologies but also the practitioners and researchers I would dialogue with, the notion of 'cosmology' kept on coming to the fore as a possible framework for thinking and writing about the area of contemporary dance I focus on. In the first week of fieldwork, I was intrigued by the multidimensionality of what I was experiencing – as observer, but also as practitioner observing other practitioners. A cosmos opened up its manifoldness before me, and to understand this universe of collaboration in 'improvisation choreography' through the lens of my inquiry – the modes of being, thinking and moving; the self, other and environment relationalities; the ways in which skills are acquired, sustained and transformed – would entail an exploration of its 'cosmology'⁶. The term evokes a strong sense of richness of relationalities, complexity, dynamics of attraction and repulsion, centres of gravity, orbits, and a variety of dimensions to be considered. My proposal is to follow what the term's definition and etymology suggest, and to develop a working notion of cosmos, of an ordered – at times disordered – dynamic system. I draw this analogy with the purpose of engaging with the nature and origin of the universe of collaborative dance-making that uses improvisation as source and method, with its macro- and microcosms.

The notion of cosmology will be unpacked as the various dimensions – and the interplay between them – are identified, analysed and synthesised in the course of the thesis. I do not attempt to embrace the full scope of choreography based on improvisation. Rather, I remain close to and am guided by my research questions as I zoom in and out of the realities studied here. I thus shift from my initial cartography-like idea of mapping the field to a more global perspective of a cosmology of 'improvisation choreography', and an analysis and discussion of the implications of the practices and processes involved therein, the forces of attraction and the constellations that

⁶ Cosmology studies the nature and origin of the universe and deals with processes, structures and relationships (Cambridge University Press 2021; Merriam-Webster 1993). Etymologically, cosmology stems from the Greek roots 'kosmos' (cosmos) and 'logia' (discourse, reason, account) and entails metaphysical discourses on the 'ultimate philosophical problems relating to the existence of the universe' (Cambridge University Press 2021; Merriam-Webster 1993; Online Etymology Dictionary 2001-2021).

constitute a networked whole⁷. Curiously, Thomas describes his various choreographic works as microcosms (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021), something I was not aware of but learned later on in the research.

2.1 On dance practice's grounds and terms

[...] the forming of words to describe and articulate dancing is difficult, and even more so when speaking about improvised movement. [...] we are always inside language, inside words, such that the forming of language, however temporal, is an important part of coming to understand and share what we do and the ways we exist in the world (Midgelow 2013: 3).

Here I explore the words and grounds on which I developed the terms of reference for my study. What follows is a response to my interaction with both the literature on dance and performance practices and anthropological studies on practical knowledge. The words I choose gain meaning within the relationships I propose for my purposes.

The modes of being, thinking and moving (or modes of operating) I set out to investigate are likely to occur in dance environments where improvisation is the primary approach to making dances, which I will call 'improvisation choreography'. By 'making dances' I refer to the overarching process that goes from daily movement practice through to creative strategies, to choreographic composition, to worldview. Worldview here means an artist's positioning with regard to life's bigger picture, in other words, their viewpoint and ideals concerning the artistic, the social and the political that form the basis according to which they are, think and act in the world. The nomenclature used by dance artists and theorists to designate choreography created and performed on the basis of improvised movement is diverse, and there is no

⁷ My interest and purpose in this process was less to adopt a theoretical underpinning for the study than to find an analogy that helped refer to the relationalities that are in operation in the area under investigation. I played with possible correspondences between cosmology-related terminology and the various layers of dance production, probing the suitability of my using an analogy in contrast to resorting to existing theory. Ingold's 'ecology of life' draws on anthropologist Gregory Bateson's 'ecology of mind' (Bateson 1973 cited in Ingold 2000: 16). Disagreeing with Bateson's notion of mind being separated from 'the ecology of energy flows and material exchanges' (Ingold 2000: 18, 19), Ingold postulates the need to rethink how we understand life, proposing an 'ecology of life' that sees the 'whole-organism-in-its-environment' as 'one indivisible totality' (2000: 19). Though I amply reference Ingold's writings, it was necessary and decisive to recapitulate the discovery-oriented approach I adopt. This involves searching for patterns in the data and reflecting on their meanings, as well as assuming a creative stance and a relationship to the data that follow rather intuitive modes of thinking/acting. Hence, my further exploring the cosmology analogy was favoured in contrast to diving into anthropological theory as I built a scaffolding to study dance artists' reality and practice-specific language.

consensus on a single term. Such modalities of dance creation, which include a variety of practices, processes, performance modes and production procedures, are referred to as open choreography, instant composition, choreographic improvisation, improvisational choreography, improvisational performance, real-time choreography and performance-generating system (Benoit 1997; Cvejić 2015; Foster 2002; Hansen 2015; Hansen and House 2015; Vass-Rhee 2018) – a plethora of names that indicate an ongoing negotiation in and about the nature of the practice and suitable signifiers (Gardner 2008: 56). These terms, only briefly mentioned here, will be explored later in Section 2.1.1, together with my rationale for the designation ‘improvisation choreography’.

Dance artists give names to their experiences in the studio, to tools they co-create, to dance phrases, and to shared aims and values, some of which are of an intangible nature. They go about this process as both a functional and a poetic activity. Names also ‘emerge and multiply as new dances are created’, deLahunta writes in his exploration of ‘the utility of words used in the studio, breaking the rules of language to learn from and through the body, embodying language through the poet’s *Technique*’ (2015: 254). Looking into the work of three artists, he explores the use of words as an ‘acquired skill’ in the creative process context, where ‘the encounter means removing language from its mechanical function as text and shedding its formal semantic anchors, yet using it for more than just associative potential’ (2015: 245). Terminology emerging from the practices I observed and participated in during this research, coupled with what arose from the literature, has nurtured my journey and helped trace the topographies, the surfaces and positions that connect the various practical and theoretical grounds I draw on. Before specifying and exploring each of the key terms, I will enter the space in which my case study took place and unpack what goes on in this cosmology, while touching on the precedents of current practices and processes.

2.1.1 Improvisation (and) choreography

To improvise in performance is to choreograph with all eventualities (Zuniga Shaw 2019: 319, in conversation with Thomas Hauert).

In order to enter the space of my case study from a clear standpoint, I will first treat the two terms separately – a challenging task for reasons that will become clear in the following lines as I reference authors who speak of improvisation and choreography at times as clearly differentiated and at times mingled together. I am not alone in

addressing the terms separately to arrive at a working definition and potential theorisation. Kent De Spain, a movement/multimedia artist writing on movement improvisation – whose publications are among a small number focusing on dance improvisation – takes a similar approach. De Spain notes that the reality of dance-making is much more complex than what separating the two terms for scrutiny may offer, and that no matter the extent to which clarity regarding what they denote might seem useful, this may not take us forward and we perhaps make things worse (2019: 690). Subsequent to my two-step scrutiny, I propose the compound term ‘improvisation choreography’ to address the specific type of creation and performance process in focus, and with which I weave reflections stemming from my experience as dance-maker, performer and teacher.

Improvisation and choreographic practices stand in close relationship in contemporary dance cosmology. In group settings, their combined use in the making and performance of dance involves, per se, collaborative modes of working. A creation process involving a dancer and choreographer working together does not necessarily imply a collaborative instance, in terms of the creation of movement and other aspects of the work. In turn, a dancer and choreographer working together by means of improvisation, which is a continuously generative event, intrinsically implies a collaborative instance – albeit to different degrees and on different scales.

This study is concerned with the collaborative by means of improvisation: occasions that are generative of co-presence and cooperation, of thinking and acting together, to create and compose. In being collaborative, in implicating various dimensions of the environment where dance is produced, as well as innermost aspects of the individual, improvisation generates the materials for the work, and the organisation of these. Such modes of working thus require from dance artists not only creativity and inventiveness but also compositional skills that involve an awareness of how the piece is evolving in performance, and also nuanced reflective and critical stances – a ‘dramaturgical consciousness’, Vida Midgelow terms it (2015: 106, 111), and ‘improvisational awareness’, in De Spain’s terms (2011: 26). I would add that, in my case study, the variety in dimensions of space and time that artists deal with, of energy and vibration, and surely of relationality, co-define the outcome of the making process, its performance and its reception.

Assuming that, in improvisation, dancers make various sorts of decisions that are crucial to the creation, shaping and 'becoming' of the work, in both processes and performance (Benoit 1997; deLahunta, Clarke and Barnard 2012; De Spain 2019), it could be argued that choreographic composition is involved in improvisation. Evidently, not all choreography is improvised. But, in the reverse direction, since choreographic choices are made by the performers of improvised work, can it be said that dance improvisation *is* choreography?

Improvisation

Improvisation is an impermanent generative practice in that what it creates is transient, whether in dance, music or other performing art forms. Etymologically, the term carries the notion of the not yet seen, the not yet provided, of unrehearsed acts created, carried out or shaped in the unfolding of the moment in a given space; the word also suggests that one engages in an activity with little or no preparation (Online Etymology Dictionary 2001-2021). This has parallels with the way in which we go about living our lives as humans, in the sense that we combine internal and external cues in our interaction with the surroundings to act and react according to the circumstances and to our and others' intentions and purposes, and no one can tell exactly how things will unfold. In dancer and scholar Ann Cooper Albright's words, '[e]verybody's life is an improvisation' (2019: 26). Agnès Benoit writes in her book on interviews with leading dancer-improvisers including Yvonne Rainer, Mark Tompkins, Simon Forti and J. K. Holmes (some of whom I will refer to in this chapter) that improvisation is ephemeral, a constantly changing phenomenon (1997: 7). Kent De Spain, who interviewed dancer-improvisers about improvisation issues and resources, remarks that regardless of whether a beginner or an expert, improvisation puts the dancer on a 'level playing field' with the other in that no one taking part knows what will happen next (2014: 4), to a certain extent.

The notion of little preparation or none at all, however, does not apply to improvisation practice in this cosmology. By 'improvisation' I mean the generation of movement material while dancers are dancing, whether or not supported by tightly composed scores and tasks and/or by rather loose parameters that guide the practice – aspects of the composition of improvisation that determine the degree of open-endedness of the work. The term 'score' is not treated here as a synonym of either notation or graphic representation of dance movements, though it does not exclude the latter. In

dance contexts, 'score' has been and still is used to refer to information or instructions provided to dancers by the author(s) of the work, or agreed upon collectively, and it concerns the artistic intent of the work, informs trajectories and/or indicates the atmosphere of the performance. Its form of representation varies from the graphic to written and spoken text. As interdisciplinary artist and dance scholar Ariadne Mikou explains, '[s]cores encompass different visual processes and outputs, such as notations, annotations, drawings, sketches and dynamic marks' and 'might involve sharing of tools during a dance improvisation' (2018: 171). deLahunta, Clarke and Barnard use the term 'task-like things' to refer to 'rule-based improvisation, scores and game structures used either during the creative process and/or directly in performance' (2012: 244, 245). Dance improvisation may be practised for its own sake, as a stand-alone performance modality, and also as material and/or method of choreographic composition, at times applied during both creation and performance; hence the actual purpose or function of the practice is not implicit in the term itself. Midgelow describes improvisation as a 'long-standing and central approach within the choreographic process for many dance makers; while for others it is a performance form in its own right' (2019: 1).

As dance historian Sally Banes describes, improvisation has been referred to as 'indeterminate choreography', 'open choreography', 'situation-response composition', 'in situ composition' and 'spontaneous determination' (2003: 78). Artists working with improvisation in choreography relate to the coupling of these two practices in so many different ways and create such an unimaginable variety of artefacts that I find it difficult to conceive of clear-cut distinctions between the improvisatory and the choreographic. For example:

To choreograph, you must already be holding in your mind the thought that the thing you're making will be part of something that will go on for a while [...] This extended commitment is what I aspire to. It is very rare that one comes across a performed improvisation that can control this much material, or whose dancers can think in such large terms (Marks 2003: 135).

However, dancers who do have the ability to think and act in 'large terms' are not that rare in contemporary dance today, and neither are 'performed improvisations' that are conceived as long-lasting works, which may indeed be performed over a span of years and sometimes decades. Marks admits that, when choreographing dances, she starts with improvisation – improvisation as practice and process, but not as performance.

Her 2003 'Against Improvisation' chapter carries the subtitle 'A Postmodernist Makes the Case for Choreography', and in it she argues for the view that fixed material can be more deeply explored. Yet, this argument could be understood as a dichotomy between the two. In turn, dancer and choreographer Jonathan Burrows reveals in the preface to his *A Choreographer's Handbook* how in leading workshops on choreography he discovered that:

the questions and ideas that preoccupy choreographers are shared across the aesthetic borders that divide us. This has contradicted in a joyous way the wisdom I have grown up with, which seemed always to be pitting one approach or set of beliefs against another as if it were the enemy: ballet versus modern dance, theatre versus abstract dance, improvisation versus set-dance, conceptual versus dancey-dance... (2010: xi).

I add this quote here to support my own position. I do not cultivate an either/or approach, this against that, choreography against improvisation. Rather, I discuss what emerges out of other artists' and researchers' musings in/as practice that gesture towards possible understandings of the multi-layered realities and the interplay of layers within collaborative dance-making based on improvisation.

Seeing improvisation as 'the place for things to happen between people, or between the dancers and the dance' and 'a way to discover what the dance will be about' (Marks 2003: 135) seems to reduce improvisation to one single usage. Marks adds that, before she presents a piece of work, 'it has been transformed into carefully worked and reworked choreography, down to the smallest details' (2003: 135).

In genealogical terms, improvisation was a practice in the *commedia dell'arte*⁸, which was popular in Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries (Barnes 2011) and only permeated the dance world much later. As a modality for creating and performing dances, it emerged in the early 19th century through the first precursors of modern dance and gained prominence in dance-making around the 1960s and 1970s (Banes 2003; Cvejić 2015; Lycouris 2000). Rudi Laermans, who frequently writes about contemporary dance, describes how the proponents of the various strands of 'free dancing' of the 1960s understood it as 'the celebration of a liberated, or even natural

⁸ Professor of Italian Richard Andrews writes that the most obvious feature of *commedia dell'arte* 'was the practice of improvisation on an outline scenario instead of memorizing script', a technique that 'won amazement and admiration, and became the defining characteristic of *Comedie Italienne*' (2011: 131-133). Improvisation then did not resemble what is practised by modern actors (2011: 131-133).

body', even though some strands, for example contact improvisation⁹, were 'codified according to the 1960s ideal of sociality as being together in an informal and smooth way, without conflicts or tensions' (2015: 58). Still, as he sensibly states, '[d]ifferent times, different body ideals, different definitions of the danceable' (2015: 58), and so the improvisatory of today serves the most varied purposes of dance artists and may collide with the ideals that were prevalent when improvisation was flourishing in the last century. What Laermans describes as a dance culture that became an active counterculture and 'that presently looks rather like a worn-out utopia of democracy: being always in tune with each other, being endlessly engaged in a harmonious conversation' (2015: 58) went through phases of less relevance in the 1980s, re-emerging every now and then and regaining space in the 1990s to evolve into a widely used creative practice, process and performance mode. The use of improvisation in present contemporary dance cosmology is not celebrated; it is often not stated as the working method of a given performance and then not recognised as such, perhaps due to its being approached and performed differently from in its early expressions and hence referred to in other, new, terms.

Nonetheless, improvisation has in some ways kept its aura of counterculture. It has been a tool for artists like choreographer William Forsythe, for example, to forge new ways of making dances with classical ballet vocabulary, supporting a paradigmatic change in institutionalised dance contexts with his technologies of improvisation (Driver 2000). In a similar way that improvisational approaches were embedded in the core values of the 1960s, and were paramount in the questioning of prevailing ideals of dance and choreography as defined by the modern dance tradition (Laermans 2015: 203), Forsythe also departed from standards defined by the tradition of classical ballet. He embarked on the development of a hybrid of ballet and improvisation, which he described in a public interview in 2020 as having been met with audience disapproval, at the time of the beginning of his tenure as director of Ballet Frankfurt (personal notes). The method of generating choreographic material he developed in the 1980s (Driver 2000), improvisation technologies, can be seen as contrasting with the ideals of

⁹ Although discourse on dance improvisation often includes contact improvisation, presumably due to its importance in the dance improvisation landscape, it is necessary to note that for this study I will engage neither with the practice of nor the discourse on contact improvisation. My concern is with what improvisation entails as choreographic practice.

'being endlessly engaged in a harmonious conversation' (Laermans 2015: 58) of the early days of improvisation.

Elizabeth Waterhouse, former dancer with the Forsythe Company and dance researcher, reveals considerations of potential friction between improvising together with company members while at the same time sharing other aspects of life, aspects of what she calls 'a positive regard to difference' (Waterhouse 2010: 153). Referring to Waterhouse's writing, Lecturer in Dance Fiona Bannon suggests that there was an appreciation of 'cooperation as a working ethos' in the company's embodied process of relationality, that '[i]t [wa]s not about becoming the same people in terms of performance' but rather about working among a spectrum of possibilities in a 'space that c[ould] be seen as a device to explore relationships of mind, of self, of world, and of community' (2019: 45-46).

Improvisation is being 'reimprovised'. In this process, in place of the core values of the 1960s and 1970s explained by Laermans (2015), the fascination with dissonance and polyphony – terms borrowed from the music domain – typifies artistic choices that are explicit not only in improvisation as practice, process and performance but also in the relational. Polyphony and dissonance manifest in relationality terms in modes of creation wherein multiple voices co-create the work, and dissonant ideas may be equally welcomed into the inquiry. This is the case, for example, in ZOO's artistic processes and oeuvre spanning more than two decades. Moreover, in the current era of dance production, when collaborative modes of creation that earlier characterised the independent dance scene have been appropriated by institutional repertoire companies, improvisational approaches have gained new spaces. It is noticeable, however, that this appropriation does not necessarily embody contemporary dance's values and ideals, thus presenting challenges to dancers and choreographers alike, an idea I will revisit and discuss in Chapter 5. This notion has also been pointed out by De Spain when he says that our culture's dualistic and literate tendencies view improvisation and choreography in opposition, often favouring the idea of choreography and placing improvisation on the margins, 'where the marginalised have often been explored and mastered it in ways that are eventually reappropriated by the choreographic mainstream' (2019: 689).

In terms of what improvisation affords, dance-makers and performers have, Middelwag attests, engaged with improvisation 'as a critical practice and emergent discourse' (2019: 1). In her view there is 'an increasing body of writing that positions improvisation as a critical area of study, reaching beyond the arts to wider inter/disciplinary concerns' (2019: 1). Sarah Whatley states that although there is a difficulty in talking about improvisation due to its nature, the 'growing corpus of writing and reflections that emerge from the practice of improvisation are particularly valuable in helping to build a discourse and a theoretical framework for the practice' (2019: 415).

Furthermore, there is a crucial and paramount aspect of artistic inquiry, practice and production that should not be forgotten, namely, its intrinsic transient nature, its becoming and its constant reinvention. In our theory-like musings, we should not lose sight of the myriad practices of various artists who are currently making and performing work by means of the improvisatory and who would argue that their work is not 'improvisation' even though it is categorised as such in Dance Studies discourse. Neither should the wide variety of artists' motivation and purpose in using the improvisational be disregarded. As practised in dance, improvisation has served as a method of critique and as the critique itself of established modes of being and operating. As I will explore in relation to *Flot* in Chapter 4, it can be argued that Thomas and ZOO's work is an instance of reflection/practice on another scale and couched in rather different ideals from that of the early days of improvisational practice; ZOO moves through curiosities, movement inquiries, relationality questions, a taste for disruption, dissonance of various sorts, rebellion, utopia and anarchism (Thomas, interview 1).

Choreography

The definition of 'choreography' is here less important than the dimensions and implications of current practices themselves. To some artists, improvisation and choreography are distinct, while to others they are complementary, even inseparable – the former being generally considered an open-ended structure whereas the latter may designate a strictly set piece of work. Yet, is it that simple? If there is a distinction, how do the two differ?

Choreographer Victoria Marks explains that 'when confronted with the option of improvising or choreographing, I choose to choreograph' (2003: 135). This statement

seems to suggest two things: that choreography and improvisation are both seen as product, and as two distinct products; and that Marks' preference, as an author of dance works, is to create pieces that are choreographies, not improvisations. A further example of a clear distinction, and a fundamental one, is dancer-improviser Mark Tompkins' view. In a conversation on improvisation with Agnès Benoit, he describes how '[s]ometimes things can fall into place for someone who suddenly understands what's happening. This person creates then the possibility for an active dialogue which is a fundamentally different one from that of a choreography' (Tompkins (1995) in conversation with Benoit 1997: 217).

However, if performance can be understood through a 'dual "is/as" approach' as suggested by Jane Bacon and Vida Midgelow (2011: 3) – and I believe this approach applies to improvisation too – I propose improvisation is/as practice, process and performance. This view raises the question of whether dance improvisation qualifies as choreography, since it has compositional aspects implicit to its execution that affect the artistic outcome, and the relationship between creating and composing can be fluid. In order to draw nearer to possible answers, two relevant aspects need to be considered: firstly, how the role of the dance artists involved in the work in question is defined and realised; and, secondly, what is understood by choreography.

Here, 'choreography' is not meant as a synonym of fixed movement phrases, as some of the above distinctions suggest. According to choreographer and scholar Susan Leigh Foster in her detailed essay 'Choreography', the term derives from the Greek words 'choreia', circular dance, 'the synthesis of dance, rhythm, and vocal harmony manifest in Greek "chorus"; and "graph", the act of writing' (2011)¹⁰. Foster tells us that the meaning of choreography evolved from that of the documentation of dances through notation in the 18th century – a practice that contributed to the categorisation of different dance modalities at the time (2011: 16) – to the 'art of making dances' – not the art of inventing dance movements but rather that of arranging steps – in the 19th century (2011: 40). It later also came to mean the 'process of individual expression through movement' and the 'act of creating a dance' (2011: 16, 43). Bearing influences from the collective modes of dance-making of the 1960s and 1970s (2011: 61), in

¹⁰ 'The first uses of the term, however, are intertwined with two other Greek roots, "orches", the place between the stage and the audience where the chorus performed, and "chora", a more general notion of space, sometimes used in reference to a countryside or region. Where "choreia" describes a process of integrating movement, rhythm, and voice, both "orches" and "chora" name places' (Foster 2011: 16-17).

current usage, in times when extended choreography is a denominator for the use of choreographic paradigms in discourses on, for example, logistics and traffic (Foster 2011: 61; Frischkorn 2018: 20-21), choreography is referred to as ‘the act of arranging patterns of movement’ (Foster 2011: 16) and ‘the organization of people and/or things, in relation to time and space’ (Hilton 2019).

As a choreographer, Jonathan Burrows, in questioning what constitutes ‘material’ in dance while comparing it with music parameters wherein ‘one single note played once does not necessarily constitute material’ (2010: 113), speaks about the problematic nature of assuming that once material has been found one just has to put it together: “[p]utting it together” is choreography’, he writes (2010: 113). Numerous artists interact with and articulate the relationship between the practice of choreography and the significance of the term. Jeanine Durning and Elizabeth Waterhouse (2013) wrote an article on a workshop they devised together, in which the inevitable question ‘what is choreography?’ was posed by the participants. Instead of attempting to answer the question, they posed another question based on Deborah Hay’s practice of ‘what if...?’, which Durning knows in depth. In answer to their question, ‘what if choreography is...?’, a ‘wall documentation’ of seventy-seven proposals came into being, which was then transcribed. Examples of these proposals are:

What if choreography is just a different term for the word dance?
What if choreography is your own interpretation of movement in space and time?
What if choreography is a dialogue between everybody and everything that is involved (in it)?
What if choreography is a field of the choreographer’s, dancer’s, and audience’s perceptions?
What if choreography is that, whatever happens to you, while you’re dancing?
(2013: 47-50)

This reminded of my own question: what if choreography is in the eyes of the seer, in the ears of the listener, in the perceptions of the perceiver?¹¹ I sympathise with artists who also engage with scholarly inquiry and, while intending to examine improvisation (De Spain 2014) and choreography (Durning and Waterhouse 2013) opt for ‘opening-up’, as they say. Pinning choreography down too tightly would make it ‘less’ and would not facilitate the reader’s realisation of ‘a fuller range of possibilities’, De Spain explains

¹¹ This question emerged in the early stages of this research when I was working in collaboration with costume and set designer Nic Tillein and video artist Roland Schmidt during a residency, investigating ‘being’ as creative practice in urban and rural open spaces.

(2014: 5). In Durning and Waterhouse's case, they 'wished to underline that choreographic direction and language is about mobilizing the mind, mobilizing choices, mobilizing the body and not about fixing these' (2013: 46). I take this up and continue my exploration of the term 'choreography' with the intention of developing what I would like to become a working term specific to this investigation, an agile scaffolding for the exploration of my topics, not meaning to fix or reduce the scope of the practices and processes in focus but to probe the term's potential and specificity in relation to this project and develop a dialogue with my reader.

Dance writer and researcher Melinda Buckwalter asserts that a dance may have music, costumes, set design, props and text yet it will not be a dance without a moving body (2010: 12); hence, choreography may also refer to the overall composition of a piece involving dance elements among various other things. The use of the term, however, does not stipulate *when* the organisation of its constituent elements takes place, leaving a door open for on-site, real-time¹² movement arrangement that also qualifies as choreography. Yet, this refers only to the compositional aspect, since the mere organisation and arrangement of movement does not intrinsically refer to its actual creation. To keep movement generation as a feature of the choreographic, the notion of the 'act of *creating* a dance' from two centuries ago (Foster 2011: 16, added emphasis) has to be resorted to, at which stage, embedded in the different practices and processes the term has come to signify, I put forward the term 'improvisation choreography'.

Thomas Hauert and ZOO have given names to the various practices they have developed, yet they do not use one specific term to refer to their choreographic practice, and this raised the question of how to address it in my research. Conversations with Thomas pointed to the incompatibility of terms found in the literature. Hence, as a result of fieldwork, of readings, and of reflections that also integrate my practical experience, I have opted for the plain coupling of the two terms – two nouns that denote the practices of choreographing and improvising put together as mutual modifiers, forming a term that allows for a perspective of the event I investigate as practice, process and performance. Further, following what I stated at the beginning

¹² The expression 'real-time', widely used in dance discourse to refer to movement and other materials created in the course of a performance, acknowledges the temporality of the event but not its spatiality. I have hence opted to combine it with the expression 'on-site', but I may also use them interchangeably.

of this section, that in group settings the making and performance of dance based on improvisation involves, per se, collaborative modes of working, and assuming that, in improvisation, dancers make decisions that are crucial to the shaping and becoming of the work, in both making and performance, choreographic composition is inevitably involved. Thus, in employing the term ‘improvisation choreography’ I specifically address collaborative practices of dance-making and performance that are based on improvisation – on-site, real-time movement generation – used as the means whereby movement is spatiotemporally inscribed and also organised – in short, choreographed.

The following comes last for a reason. I open the chapter ‘Improvisation / Cut and Paste / Choreography’ in Burrows’ *A Choreographer’s Handbook*, read the following passage, and see the synthesis, in a few lines. It could not have been put more clearly or simply:

Improvisation:

Improvisation can be a principle for performing. This is an approach to making performance that demands as much focus, clarity of intention, process, integrity and time as any other process. If choreography is about making decisions – or about objects placed in relation to each other so that the whole exceeds the sum of the parts – or about a continuity of connection between materials – then *improvised performance is as much of a choreographic act as any other approach*, the decisions are just made faster. For some people this is the right and only way for them to work. For some pieces this is the right and only way for them to work.

[...]

Improvisation:

Improvisation is a negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking.

Choreography:

Choreography is a negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking (2010: 24, added emphasis).

Improvisation with a signature

This section calls attention to the defining nature of an artist’s modes of working, even when they work collaboratively and intend to ‘scape’ known patterns through the improvisatory as the basis of their choreographic composition. Dancer, choreographer and scholar Simon Ellis writes in a blog post that, in our attempts to see things as if for the first time, we refer to our ‘looking with *fresh eyes*’, a ‘practice of testing your own assumptions and habits about what it is that you are seeing or experiencing’ (2019, original emphasis). Similarly, Steve Paxton has explained that in trying to find ways to trick himself, and in working with contact improvisation to see if he could discover why

improvisation was regarded as not having a structure, he realised that the structure was him: 'I couldn't get outside of that. I couldn't continue the process because I kept running into myself, and my habit' (Paxton (2010) in Konjar 2011: 16-17).

In this process, every improviser's practice includes certain things and excludes others. That is unquestionable. Speaking about the set conditions of choreographer Simone Forti's early improvisational work, Melinda Buckwalter observes that certain 'conditions of the dance limited the available movement choices as a result, and captured very particular palettes of movement' (2010: 13). She adds that in Forti's work, even if movements are not set, they are nonetheless 'precisely defined by the physical task at hand' (2010: 13), which could be said about most dance improvisation. My point is that, while improvisation-based work questions choreographic solutions based on both reproduction of known movements, as Thomas refers to it, and attempts to escape coded techniques and the habitual patterns dancers carry with them, it includes certain parameters and excludes others. As an outcome, choreographers who create in these modes inevitably develop their own signature through their choices and conditions.

Although most contemporary choreographers who also teach their methods have not created what they would call dance techniques – as Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, José Limón and other modern dance precursors did – each of them has created what Susan Melrose terms 'signature practices' (Melrose [2007] 2021; Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher 2015). Melrose explains that, in terms of the wider arts communities, expert practitioners engage in 'signature practices', which are "marked" and recognisable as such', and 'whose significance is realised through the (possible) act of exchange' ([2007] 2021). She goes on to say that

'signature' signals not simply a recognised marking, impressed 'in the work'; it signals not simply intellectual property ownership; but what is recognised as signature involves a relational mark, established between 'the work', its maker/s, and its validation by those whose judgements of taste and value are vital to the disciplines concerned. Signature practices, in other words, are singular or self-defining; but at the same time an aspect of them recurs, across a body of work, and between that work and its contextualising framework/s; and they are repeatedly modulated within given disciplinary parameters ([2007] 2021).

This concept explicates what some improvisation choreographers express in terms of having a choreographic language, which denotes their recognition of identifiable

connecting threads across their oeuvre that place the work within a certain cosmology. At this point, as part of the process of scaffolding my grounds and terms and beginning to address Thomas Hauert and ZOO's 'signature practices' (Melrose [2007] 2021; Melrose, Sachsenmaier and Butcher 2015), I introduce the artists and the companies that contributed to this study.

2.2 Collaborating artists

For the purposes of the project, I contacted a number of artists whose work I had seen on stage and which, in my view, exuded engagement with the issues I sought to investigate. Informed by my research questions, I wanted to develop an ethnography on the entire creation process, right through to the performance on stage. I searched for artists to whom highly skilled perceptions of self, other and environment, or the notion of presence and/or issues of conscious awareness, were important in creation and performance. Among the selected artists¹³, Thomas Hauert was the only one who was both interested in taking part and also about to start a new creation that fitted my data-gathering schedule. With ZOO, he had just created *How to Proceed* (2018), in the company's 20th anniversary year. No new ZOO creation was planned for the subsequent months but Thomas Hauert was to make a new piece with CCN Ballet de Lorraine and he offered me the chance to follow that process. He had been invited by the company's artistic director, Petter Jacobsson, to create a new work and he put me in touch with the company, who welcomed my proposal and agreed to my visiting rehearsals and video documenting the process. I expressed my interest in the dancers' perspective in investigating nuances of the performers' and choreographer's views, and I was allowed to ask the dancers whether they would volunteer to participate by way of individual interviews.

Ballet de Lorraine dancers Pauline Colemard, Tristan Ihne and Vivien Ingrams, and ZOO members Thomas Hauert, Sarah Ludi, Samantha van Wissen and Mat Voorter¹⁴ have been a great source of inspiration in my research process, and an invaluable fount of information. Watching them dance and interact with one another, meeting them face to face for our talks, listening to their voices while transcribing our conversations,

¹³ Dancer and choreographer Lea Moro, dancer and choreographer Emilia Giudicelli, and the duo Igor Urzelai and Moreno Solinas were the other artists I was in contact with. Despite their interest in taking part, their plans to create a new piece were still undefined at the time my research schedule had to be finalised, which made it impossible to collaborate with them for the purposes of this study.

¹⁴ Whenever they appear side by side, collaborating artists' names will be in alphabetical order by first name. When both first name and surname are used, the alphabetical order will be by surname.

and viewing video recordings of rehearsals and performances has brought so much insight and understanding to this study that the fruits of our collaboration go beyond the scope of this thesis. Their contribution to my practitioner-researcher inquiry is only partly manifest in this thesis, and it will continue to reverberate as I carry on with life as artist and researcher.

My motivation to conduct interviews with Ballet de Lorraine and ZOO dancers came from a strong sense that I could not undertake research on collaborative dance-making without speaking with the dancers themselves, and bringing in their experiences and voices. Since the project involved the use of video material from the outset, artists would be easily identified in the material and I therefore proposed a non-anonymous mode of participation. In response, all the dancers agreed to be named, and also to be referred to by their first names. In our interactions there was no formality, and this quality belongs in my writing as a reference to the type of relationship we gradually developed.

The ways in which the dancers shared their experiences with me, how they searched for the terms and truths of lived events, in many ways inspired me to be true to my own voice – an outcome I had not predicted and only now perceive. The impact of their assertions empowered me. In ethnography, it is believed that a researcher empowers participants by ‘giving them a voice’ (Pink 2015: 76). However, I did not believe I could do this, as they are already empowered by their extensive experience, expertise and knowledge. Hence, I do not seek to empower them; I simply want to bring to the fore that power, to make available nuances of their contribution, and I do that also through the directness of using their first names. I am thankful that there was a degree of trust in the relationships within the study that enabled this conduct, and this also made tangible the ‘collegial’ essence, the ‘belonging to the same community’ quality of the encounter.

Company ZOO

Spurred on by Thomas, ZOO was co-founded by Mat, Samantha and Sarah (all of whom contributed to this study and are still in the company at the time of writing) together with Mark Lorimer. Samantha, Sarah, Thomas and Mark Lorimer had been working together in Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker’s company Rosas. Sharing common interests, they came together to investigate ways of creating and collaborating, and to

explore alternatives to the modes of working they were used to at that stage. Mat joined them shortly afterwards. The name 'ZOO' was inspired by a book the group used as study material and it 'suggests a vision of man as an animal species – a very peculiar species indeed. In other words, man not fettered by culture' (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). Since its inception in 1998, the group has been based in Brussels, Belgium, and has staged its work around the world, touring in Europe, and on the African, American and Asian continents. Internationally acclaimed, ZOO is praised for its staged work and for the improvisation methods and tools it has developed, on the basis of which various of its members choreograph, and also teach in both artistic and educational contexts.

One central concept of ZOO's overall choreographic project is trust, and this is translated into the company's structure and working modes (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). Working as a collective, there is an explicit interplay of freedom and responsibility in which hierarchical models are questioned. The dancers' role in the company may at times be clearly defined, and at others it might fluctuate. Although Thomas often initiates the projects, the making, as he says, is a collective process and the artists' strengths are explored and nurtured, epitomising what Rudi Laermans calls a 'semi-directive mode of participative collaboration' (2015: 285). Their individual positionings and contributions mingle with a 'shared reality' (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021), proposed by Thomas, that asks of each artist a readiness to cope with the lack of conventional authority and the apparently chaotic processes (2021). In my conversation with him, Mat expressed his appreciation of Thomas' ability to share responsibility and authority, and also his confidence even in moments of helplessness; the fact that he could both lead and admit to not knowing how to proceed, which was the inspiration for the title of the piece they created in their 20th anniversary year – *How to Proceed* (2018).

Also playing a key role in the company's work is intuition, a topic I addressed in my conversations not only with Mat, Samantha, Sarah and Thomas, but also with Pauline, Tristan and Vivien (Ballet de Lorraine), and which I will take up at various points in the thesis. ZOO is guided by the conviction that 'intuition allows much more complex and unexpected results than a process based on initial verbalisation' (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). The company describes its dance as abstract in so much as it revolves around the body and movement, and '[d]ance does not have any narrative or figurative dimension' (2021). Further, the company does not regard form and content as distinct

– in the process of making, ‘meaning gradually emerges from the latent preoccupations that find an outcome in the work on movement’ (2021). In this regard, tacitness¹⁵ is a matter of course, in that ‘awareness of an intention does not necessarily involve the ability to verbalise it, and can even precede this verbalisation. We can “know” without being able to “explain”’ (2021). To the audience, in turn, each work ‘proposes a model that can be very meaningful. The artistic project seems like a micro-utopia, an alternative vision of man, power and society’ (2021) – these are features of the company’s modes of production that transpire in the choreographic.

I was intrigued by what ZOO is drawing upon, and asked Thomas in our first interview whether his and the company’s ideologies had been driving principles from the outset. He said that this was rather an aspect he had become aware of through the work and had gradually articulated. The company’s website states:

The work of Thomas Hauert and ZOO first develops from research on movement, with a particular interest in improvisation-based processes exploring the tension between freedom and constraint, individuals and the group, order and disorder, form and formlessness (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021).

Over the course of more than two decades the company has remained stable, and several of the founding dancers are currently involved in new productions and in the delivery of the methods they co-create. In their view, ‘[t]his longevity affords a depth to the choreographer’s research’ (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). In contrast with the usual working conditions of the majority of freelance dancers, described by dance scholar Cecilia Roos as ‘rather of change than of consistency’ (2014: 6), Mat, Samantha, Sarah and Thomas have had a longstanding and consistent artistic relationship. This was decisive in considering these dancers’ contribution to this study. Aspects of this consistent and lengthy collaboration emerged in the interviews as being formative in the development of the practices. Employing the analogy of cosmology to speak about improvisational work within contemporary dance, I will treat ZOO as a macrocosm wherein the smaller units of choreographic work will be referred to as microcosms.

¹⁵ The adjective ‘tacit’ derives from the Latin *tacitus* (past participle of *tacere*) to denote ‘that [which] is passed over in silence’, ‘assumed as a matter of course’ (Online Etymology Dictionary 2001-2021). The noun ‘tacitness’ does not appear in leading online dictionaries such as the Cambridge Dictionary or the Merriam-Webster Online, but it does have an entry in the Collins English Dictionary (see <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/tacit>).

ZOO and Thomas' work has been investigated and written about by other researchers. One publication looking into their strategies is the Motion Bank¹⁶ Online Score¹⁷ *Two* (Motion Bank 2013), which addresses the choreographic approaches of choreographer Bebe Miller, and of Thomas and ZOO. Due to the information it provides on ZOO's generative strategies, this Online Score is relevant in various ways and will therefore be discussed in more detail than other source material. As I was searching for dance artists to take part in my project, Motion Bank was one of the spaces I explored. Statements related to the nature of ZOO's approach motivated me to contact Thomas (more on my rationale for this choice can be found in Chapter 3).

Annotations are widely used in various Motion Bank's Online Scores. Though *Two*¹⁸ does not use the kind of annotation I am dealing with, it has been a source of information and inspiration for my annotation practice, and it presents key aspects of ZOO's practices. Two residencies and one guest performance¹⁹ marked the interaction with Motion Bank that also involved Mat, Samantha and Sarah. Professor for Dance and Technology Norah Zuniga Shaw explains that the first phase of the Motion Bank project ends with two dance companies that, although unrelated to one other, are akin in 'choreographing improvisation for performance' and 'engaging directly with the nature of human consciousness' (Motion Bank 2013)²⁰. In a blog post, she shares questions emerging from her reflections on the notion of 'two-ness':

So then what, [...] if anything, can we locate in the movement knowledge that is dance to help us experience, express, and explore contemporary multi-consciousness? (Zuniga Shaw 2012).

Two has a horizontal navigation orientation that resembles the flipping of the pages of a book. As I swipe sideways, I enter the different areas of a specific page, and here

¹⁶ Led by Florian Jenett and Scott deLahunta, Motion Bank is a research project of the Mainz University of Applied Sciences (Between Us 2019).

¹⁷ The 'Online Score' is Motion Bank's web publication format, as Florian Jenett explains in an online article. Differently from the idea of 'score' used in dance practice, the term was created by Motion Bank and 'got established as a label for web documents that brings together various formats and can serve various purposes' (2021).

¹⁸ *Two* was produced by The Ohio State University Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design in collaboration with Motion Bank (Motion Bank 2013). The Motion Bank Online Score *Two* can be visited in this link: <http://scores.motionbank.org/two/#/set/sets>

¹⁹ *Mono* (2013), the piece performed by ZOO on this occasion, 'was presented as a co-production of The Forsythe Company for Motion Bank, from 29 November through 1 December 2013 inside the frame of Live & OnLine 2013 at The Frankfurt Lab' (Motion Bank 2013).

²⁰ I will limit my consideration of the Online Score *Two* to the sections that relate to ZOO/Thomas Hauert.

the 'rooms'²¹ stretch or shrink according to the size of the display. Artist and co-director of Motion Bank Florian Jenett has said, 'these pages are outlets for thinking about a specific area, one view, one aspect' (deLahunta, Jenett, and Cramer 2015: 10) of the overall library they create for each of the Online Scores. The material in *Two* is not a thorough analysis of one of ZOO's pieces, as is the case with the Online Score *Using the Sky* on Deborah Hay's *No Time to Fly* (2010). Rather, it is an analysis of two of the company's practices, the 'careful scientist' and the 'assisted solo', explored later in Chapter 4. The way in which Thomas and ZOO engage with human consciousness is touched upon through statements in the form of quotes from Thomas. Video materials featuring Mat, Sarah and Samantha are also part of the score as well as graphic representations based on algorithmic analysis of data collected using motion capture technology.

Displayed in four sections – 'Habit' and 'Impulse' relating to ZOO's work; 'Memory' and 'Tendency' to Bebe Miller's – the expressed aim of *Two* is 'to shed light on and bring us into a direct encounter with the dancing mind and the thinking body'²² (Zuniga Shaw 2012). In the section 'Habit', video clips and texts are accompanied by pages entitled 'Possibilities', 'Intuition' and 'Invention'²³. 'Impulse', the third page in *Two*, unfolds under the titles 'Attention', 'Momentum' and 'Network'. Here the videos are longer and involve more interaction among the dancers (all three dancers perform the role of the soloist assisted by the other two) and the richness and complexity of the practice becomes evident. Moreover, the gradual construction of the 'assisted solo' (for example through the 'metal wire') is also documented, as are the changes in the parameters of the basic version (forming group constellations), some of which were not explored in the making of *Flot* and are therefore not analysed in this thesis.

Further exploration of the sections listed top centre of the score reveals related documents that unpack some of what is not unravelled in *Two*'s most prominent sections. A blog post entitled 'Dance Awareness' by former dancer and researcher

²¹ As with other Online Scores, the elements of *Two* were collated in the MoSys publishing system, created by Motion Bank, and the materials are displayed as if they were in different exhibit rooms (deLahunta, Jenett, and Cramer 2015: 10).

²² In *Two*'s 'Credits and Acknowledgements' section, Zuniga Shaw explains that 'the dancing mind and the thinking body' (Gere 2003) is a phrase she borrowed from scholar David Gere with his permission. It appears in the volume *Taken by Surprise*, which he co-edited with Ann Cooper-Albright (Gere 2003 cited in Motion Bank 2013).

²³ These terms are not further explored; they seem to be thus displayed to indicate key words emerging from interviews with the artists.

Bertha Bermúdez, written as a response to a post by Zuniga Shaw (2012), presents reflections that emerged in the process of creating *Two*. The layers of discussion in both these posts impart a depth that the exploration of the sections ‘Habit’ and ‘Impulse’ in the Online Score do not²⁴. In her blog post, Bermúdez writes:

We have been focusing in the past projects on the perspective of the maker. Here the dancers are invited to present their role in the production of choreographic knowledge which is super important. This opens a space for a lot of new thinking and inspires new modes of defining, talking about what dance is (2012).

Special attention seems to be given in this blog to the dancers’ perspective and experience. This, however, does not strictly manifest in the score, and the position, experience and statements of the choreographer remain central. Arguably, this approach is not in line with Thomas’ modes of working, as he explicitly regards his process as collective, with choreographic decision-making broadly distributed across the group – ‘collective and collaborative work is always at the centre of the creative process’ (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). Lecturer in Dance Jennifer Roche, writing from her dancer’s viewpoint, contends that ‘the subjective experience of dancers as they engage with the choreographic process is rarely expressed within current dance discourse’ (2015: 2). In her book *Multiplicity Embodiment and the Contemporary Dancer*, she draws on practical research undertaken with four different choreographers and pulls together various fields of study to chart ‘a dancing subject moving through distinctive creative processes’ (2015: 17). Roche attests to the under-representation of the dancer’s voice and to the fact that ‘first person accounts of the creative practice of dancers remains a peripheral area within dance research’ (2015: 3). Aligning with efforts to value and acknowledge dancers’ contribution, one of my aims in involving in my research the dancers who collaborate with Thomas has been to question the common emphasis on the choreographer that is often seen in published documentation of processes in dance. Having members of the company participate and contribute but then not presenting their statements is an incongruity I set out to engage with.

It should be noted that the selection of texts referenced in this thesis that are written from the dancer’s perspective or include the dancer’s voice (authored by dancers,

²⁴ Although the titles at the top of the score inform the viewer about the existence of explorable metadata, a dedicated search is required to get to what could be called more ‘meaty’ content, concerning both the *Two* project as a whole and the work of the guest choreographers.

scholars and/or artist-scholars) is not exhaustive²⁵. Driven and informed by my research questions, I selected a handful of relevant material to shape a framework of references. Besides the materials I cite that are authored by dancers and/or represent the dancer's experience (e.g. those by Agnès Benoit, Gill Clarke, Kent De Spain, Jeanine Durning, Laura Karreman, Bebe Miller, Chrysa Parkinson, Steve Paxton, Freya Vass-Rhee, Elizabeth Waterhouse) there is a growing number of volumes and online publications, scholarly and otherwise, containing dancers' writings or accounts of dancers' experience that contribute to what Roche has termed 'a burgeoning area' in dance studies that positions 'dancers as a source of knowledge and as capable of self-representation' (2015: ix).

Two has been decisive in my choice of case study and has provided me with access to details about Thomas and ZOO's work that I was not aware of as someone who knew their oeuvre mainly as a spectator. I see the Online Score as an entrance to exhibition rooms, to use Florian Jenett's words (deLahunta, Jenett and Cramer 2015: 10). I am aware of the challenges of documenting, analysing, articulating and disseminating the knowledges and multiple facets of dance. Nevertheless, it is possible that a viewer's expectations, potentially raised by expressions such as the artists 'engaging directly with the human consciousness', and a sort of promise of 'a direct encounter with the dancing mind and the thinking body' (Motion Bank 2013), may remain unfulfilled. Still, *Two* offers my research in particular great material to build upon. Through my ethnography of Thomas' collaboration with Ballet de Lorraine, and my interaction with Mat, Samantha and Sarah, I sought not only to better understand these practices by investigating how they came about, but also to relate them to the wider context of the creation process and performance of improvisation choreography, raising questions about how the 'alert state of attention' (Motion Bank 2013) that Thomas refers to in the Online Score is sustained.

²⁵ Further examples of texts that are written from dancers' perspectives and/or include dancers' voices are found in the online platform Sarma, 'a laboratory for discursive practices and expanded publication' that focuses on artistic research and its discursive outcomes (Sarma 2002) and is where *Oral Site* and *The Dancer as Agent Collection* are located. Sarma displays publications by and about performance artists and practitioner-researchers whose work may involve both performing and authoring choreographic work. Also providing an account of the dancers' perspective, the Online Score *Using the Sky* (Motion Bank 2013) was built on two pieces of work by performer and choreographer Deborah Hay, and on interviews with Hay and two of the dancers (2013). Also, journals such as *Contact Quarterly*, self-described as 'the longest living, independent, artist-made' journal 'devoted to the dancer's voice' (Contact Quarterly 2014-2021), has filled the dance literature landscape with artist-authored contributions since 1975.

THOMAS HAUERT

Besides his work with ZOO, Thomas has choreographed for both the independent dance scene and state-funded repertoire companies, and has taught the methods developed with ZOO in professional and higher education contexts. In his work with other groups, the values and the ingredients, the principles underpinning the dynamic systems or microcosms he creates, draw upon the approaches developed within ZOO. Here, the shared worldview of ZOO transpires and yet it has to be recontextualised to create a space of investigation for dancers of companies working within very distinct structures. Thomas' curiosity extends to seeing, for instance, how his improvisatory methods may be used by different bodies (Whatley 2019: 414). Hence, he has also collaborated with inclusive and mixed-ability groups, such as Candoco Dance Company. On the making process of *Notturnino*²⁶ (2014), which Thomas co-created with Candoco, Whatley writes that it demanded that the dancers be 'in a specific head – and body – space' (2019: 414, citing Pedro Machado). This instantiates that Thomas maintains one of his signature choreographic elements, namely, a specific mode of being, whether working with ZOO, Candoco or Ballet de Lorraine, as will be evidenced later. With regard to the work with Candoco, Thomas spoke about the need for dancers to be in 'total alertness and presence and how the resulting creative unity produced a kind of utopia' (2019: 414). In the video Whatley refers to in her chapter, dancer Mirijam Gurtner asserts that *Notturnino* requires the company 'to act a specific state, and it is a state of total alertness and a state of total presence' (Candoco Dance Company 2014).

Thomas expresses in this same video how he thinks the choreographic microcosm of *Notturnino* has the 'potential of kind of reflecting the bigger world' (Candoco Dance Company 2014), a potential I see in his work in general. According to the dancers' accounts in the video, creating *Notturnino* was a collaborative process, just as in *Flot* with Ballet de Lorraine. Transiting through these different macrocosms, Thomas inscribes his worldview into the work, through the topics addressed and the methods used, yet positions himself as author in different ways. In ZOO there is a commitment to what Laermans has articulated as 'an overall egalitarian regime of production, discussion and decision-making' (2012: 95) and, depending on the work, dancers are acknowledged as co-authors. Still, Thomas is the person initiating projects, doing what

²⁶ *Notturnino* was inspired by the film *Tosca's Kiss* (1984), and it addresses the aging process of Italian musicians and opera singers.

Laermans has referred to as ‘feeding and coaching the collaboration’ (2012: 95). In turn, Thomas may declare his authorship of pieces outside ZOO in terms of his having developed the concept, or both concept and choreography (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021).

I first saw Thomas on stage in 1999, performing his solo *Hobokendans* (1997) shortly after he founded ZOO with four other dancers. The company performed most of its productions in Switzerland in the fifteen years following that, and I had the opportunity to attend performances of several pieces. For the present study, watching Thomas’ first solo and various of ZOO’s works, has also given me the opportunity to reflect on his choreographic making by drawing on my experience as a spectator.

During fieldwork, and as an outcome of conversations with Thomas, the idea of getting other perspectives on ZOO’s practices emerged. I came to the conclusion that learning about the experience of other members of the company, who had been co-creators of the choreographic approach, would help elucidate the inquiry. Thomas agreed this would add meaningful information to the study, and he put me in contact with Mat, Samantha and Sarah. We studied the possibility of visiting the company in Brussels to carry out interviews during rehearsals of repertoire, but this eventually proved unviable. ZOO had been invited to perform *How to Proceed* (2018) in Switzerland, in December 2018, on which occasion I attended the performance and made arrangements to subsequently interview the dancers. Our meetings were set to take place in Lyon, France, on the occasion of performances of *How to Proceed* in February 2019.

SARAH LUDI

Born in Switzerland, Sarah grew up in Geneva, where she studied dance at Ballet Junior de Genève. She later moved to Paris and then to Brussels, where she joined the dance company Rosas and took part in productions such as *Kinok* (1994) and in the restaging of three older productions including *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983). In 1998 she joined ZOO and is one of its core members. Sarah has had artistic co-responsibility for two of ZOO’s productions and has also created her own work. She has collaborated with Mette Edvardsen and Mårten Spångberg, and is a certified Alexander Technique teacher, giving lessons in parallel to her activities as a dancer (Ludi 2021).

SAMANTHA VAN WISSEN

After studying dance at the Rotterdamse Dans Academie, Samantha joined Rosas in 1991. Until 1997, she participated in creations such as *Ertz* (1992) and *Mozart Concert Arias* (1992), and also toured the repertory pieces *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1983) and *Mikrokosmos* (1987), among others. She joined Thomas as co-founder of ZOO, and has been involved in most of its creations and tours. Samantha has collaborated with Inne Goris in two of her theatre pieces, and more recently with François Gremaud for the theatre solo *Giselle* (2021). She works also as a dance teacher, including lecturing at the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S.), and has been a faculty member of the ImPulsTanz festival since 2008 (van Wissen 2021).

MAT VOORTER

Mat works with both dance and other arts. With ZOO he has created-performed in almost all the works since its inception. For more than 25 years he has worked with his life partner David Zambrano studying, performing, organising and designing costumes for many of their creations. In 2018 they together inaugurated Tictac Art Centre in Brussels, a space for dance and other art forms with a focus on sharing spontaneous creation and improvisation through workshops, performances and exhibitions. Mat's other recent collaborations include Anne Lore Baeckeland (improvising for/with children), NEST (directing and creating costume and scenography with teenagers), and Les Slovaks and Cie Thor (costumes, created in collaboration with Pepa Canel) (Voorter 2021).

Centre Chorégraphique National Ballet de Lorraine

Founded in 1968 in Amiens, France, as the first national choreographic centre, Ballet de Lorraine was transferred in 1978 to Nancy. Petter Jacobsson, a former dancer with Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet, has been general and artistic director since 2011, working in close collaboration with Thomas Caley, who was a principal dancer with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and is currently Ballet de Lorraine's research coordinator. As a state-funded repertoire ensemble working with twenty-six dancers, the company focuses on contemporary creations, while also preserving and programming an extensive repertoire of modern dance legacy (Ballet de Lorraine 2021). Besides pieces authored by Jacobsson and Caley, the work of renowned choreographers such as Merce Cunningham, William Forsythe and Twyla Tharp have been performed by the company. Original creations like *Flot*, made in collaboration with

its choreographer, include pieces by Maria La Ribot, Mathilde Monnier and Cindy Van Acker among others (Ballet de Lorraine 2021).

Ballet de Lorraine dancers feature on the company's website as 'choreographic artists', indicating they are regarded as co-makers of choreographic work within the structure. The company also develops smaller projects that provide members of the ensemble with the opportunity to make and show their own work. Moreover, former dancers of the ensemble have the possibility of performing their productions in the choreographic centre's venue.

The ensemble's daily routine involves a morning company class²⁷ followed by rehearsals of new creations and repertoire pieces. Cecilia Roos' description of ballet companies' current modes of working corresponds to those of Ballet de Lorraine, where dancers are asked to participate in the making process. Roos explains that, albeit not to the same extent as in the independent scene, dancers take part in generating the work's movement material through improvisation – 'a clear difference in this respect compared to fifteen years ago' (2014: 7).

PAULINE COLEMARD

Pauline began her career as a professional dancer at Ballet de Lorraine after studying for four years at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Lyon. During her time in the company, she performed works by William Forsythe, Trisha Brown and Merce Cunningham among others. Pauline left Ballet de Lorraine in 2018 to start working as an independent dancer. In the same year, she obtained her diploma as a dance teacher. She continues to dance with different companies, including L'ineffable Théâtre and that of Simon Feltz, himself a former dancer with Ballet de Lorraine (Cie Simon Feltz n.d.).

TRISTAN IHNE

Born in Geneva, Tristan trained in classical ballet at the Geneva Dance Centre and was engaged in 2005 by the Ballet de l'Opéra de Bordeaux. Two years later, he joined Ballet de Lorraine. In 2012, he co-wrote the piece *I Might Steal Your Clothes* presented

²⁷ In total, I spent twenty-four days in Nancy observing the creation of *Flot* with Thomas, and later a few days of rehearsals six months after the premiere. During this time, company classes were in classical ballet. Vivien reported that in some periods they had a contemporary dance class, on occasion, dancers could opt to do their own warm-up on Fridays. She sometimes taught a yoga class, which I once had the opportunity to join in.

at the 'Danse élargie' competition at the Théâtre de la Ville, Paris. Alongside his career as a dancer, Tristan is interested in music and also engages in production and deejaying. For the project *carte blanche* at CCN Ballet de Lorraine in 2014, he created and directed the short film *-scope* (Ballet de Lorraine 2021).

VIVIEN INGRAMS

Vivien trained in London at English National Ballet School and Rambert School before beginning her first contract in 2006 with the Ballet Biarritz Junior in Spain. She then worked as a freelancer with the Bozsik Yvette Company in Budapest, the Ballet de Bordeaux, and Kukai and Compagnie Elirale in the Basque Country. In 2011, Vivien joined Ballet de Lorraine, where she has danced repertoire pieces by Merce Cunningham, Twyla Tharp, Trisha Brown and Martha Graham, and collaborated in new works by Mathilde Monnier, Gisèle Viene, Marcus Morau, Cindy Van Acker and Maria La Ribot among others (Ingrams 2020).

2.3 Linking practice, experience and knowing

This section is located in the intersections of practice, experience, knowing and skill explored from a dance as well as an anthropological perspective. Certain events can be more than one 'thing' at a time, and may occur in such close conversation with others that identifying the fluidity of their borders may prove more helpful than drawing clear distinctions between them. Likewise, terms used to define events can be fluid. Here I propose that practice, experience and knowing may play different roles in relation to one another – each of them may be to the others the precursor, a repercussion, a means whereby or even the space wherein it exists, transforms, evolves. I explore pertinent ontological and epistemological questions and suggest a model of relationality that enables a dance-specific approach to these concepts as well as to skill and enskillment, the processes of learning and sustaining capabilities. My point here is not to establish an order of what comes first, second and third but rather to create a framework suitable to the task of researching the questions I pose. This process entails an acknowledgement of overlaps and interlaces, identifying synchronicities and mutual determination among these aspects in relation to dance practice.

I enter a 'conversation' with dance practitioners and researchers whose views feed the study and offer meaningful underpinnings, and I dialogue with anthropologists of

practice. Insights deriving from careful anthropological exploration of practice offer ways to contemplate how dancers' experience that is embedded in practice fosters knowing – or, to use social anthropologist Trevor Marchand's argument, in what manner 'skilled practice expresses complex knowledge and accordingly demands recognition as "intelligent"' (2008: 248). Besides the concerns about the nature and importance of practice that guide what is meant here by 'practice', zooming in on our case study and its particularities will provide an insight into Thomas' process of sharing the practices developed by ZOO with dancers outside the company. I outline the perspective from which processes of knowing and not knowing are approached so that improvisational skills can be addressed later. What results is the ontological basis on which to further study the implications and epistemologies of practice, process and performance in improvisation choreography.

Practice is a term that seems to be more than just a term or a word. It is pregnant with processes. It vibrates. It hosts strategies, progressions, engagements and ways of being, thinking and acting that are essential in humans' movement towards discovering, uncovering, finding out, getting to know what to do and how to do it, and accomplishing intentions. It is linked to things transforming and evolving. I see it also as a particular place or locus of meaningful experience, of discovery, of learning. Spatiotemporality is pertinent here – practice gives situatedness to meaningful experiences as much as it relates to an intrinsic durational aspect – usually not a short-lived duration, though a practice can be transient and have irregular rhythms. But an irregular rhythm is still a rhythm. Whatever a practice has to offer, its benefits penetrate the person's being in the world, at times gradually, at times swiftly, and they are absorbed by the practitioner as she practices. As we will see in evidence from literature and artists' accounts, for that to happen it must be a sustained engagement, be visited and revisited, if not on a daily basis at least consistently over stretches of time. In my research, practice is key.

Practice has been present from the outset of this inquiry, both as an activity and as one of the first terms to be investigated. Is this a practice-led, practice-based or practice-as-research project? What is practice? Isn't every ongoing activity that is undertaken within a study – through the lens of that particular study, by which meaningful experience can be lived and skills developed that contribute to its progress – a practice? In my perception of how I interact with continuous reading and writing

practices, video annotation practice, observation practice, movement practice and reflective practice, the role of practice can shift from being the ignition to being the fuel, the vehicle, the locus of knowledge. I have concluded that the *intention* guiding and orienting my engagement with purposeful activities – my practices – is the component that makes a case for defining this study as rooted in and informed and shaped by practice. Moreover, practice is key here in that it is *the* activity that the artists contributing to the study engage with while making dances, in exercising their intuitions, in designing their creation processes, in discovering and uncovering answers to their artistic questions. It is also a method, a means whereby we can know.

In their introduction to the volume *Performing Process* (2018), dance scholars Hetty Blades and Emma Meehan speak about practice within the context of their inquiry into performance as an ongoing process and not only as a finished product. Exposing the mechanisms of practices and processes to others outside the creative endeavour has become part of contemporary dance-making, and through sharing practice, and giving process centre stage within performance, dance artists draw attention 'to the labour, thinking and actions that combine to generate the event' (Blades and Meehan 2018: 9). The authors add that '[p]ractice might not be conceived of by the artist as a process of working towards finishing a product, but rather an ongoing search for refinement, or operating in a state of exploration' (2018: 9). In Blades and Meehan's writing, key characteristics of practice and its 'uses' in dance come through. The continuity factor is expressed in terms of 'an ongoing search for refinement', and the processual mode in which this refinement is sought is identified in specifying the state dancers operate in as a 'state of exploration' (2018: 9). For my purposes, the focus lies to a great extent on practice as method, process and performance, as part and parcel of every performance, since, in improvisation choreography, practising does not stop once a piece is created. On stage, dancers 'perform practice' in that each performance involves them experiencing the practices they engaged in during the making.

In her video *Self-interview on Practice*²⁸, dancer, choreographer and scholar Chrysa Parkinson, who has herself worked with ZOO, attempts to 'define the concept of practice more precisely' (2011) and explores the notion of 'the underlying thing' that she does, which, albeit continually changing, defines her training, processes and

²⁸ This video is an exploration of Chrysa Parkinson's reflection on practice through drawings and the audio of a self-interview, performed by her in voice-over.

productions. To Parkinson, if practice is a structure it is a volatile one, and she places her questioning also in relation to her engagement in pedagogical processes. One relevant notion she puts forward is that dance students, for example, redefine being good at what they are pursuing by redefining what it is they are doing – ‘they use their education to change the field they work in’; in their learning process, they ‘arrive at a level of achievement through something more than just training’ (2011). Becoming good at what one does through training is meaningful if one works with functional ways of processing information, something Parkinson also sees in all the other artists she works with. In a concluding thought, she says that the way in which one processes information is one’s practice, and she affirms that people use the term in at least three different ways: practice as an active thought or a filter; an activity performed regularly – ‘if you do it often it’s a practice’; and repeated trials and attempts (2011). It is worth mentioning that, though the production setting we look into here is not in essence a pedagogical one, Thomas’ relationship with the dancers involved mechanisms also present in teaching, especially because the Ballet de Lorraine dancers were not familiar with Thomas’ methods and had to go through a process of learning his modes of working.

Parkinson’s artist perspective and reflections on practice in some way portrays the fluid use of the term at the time she conducted this self-interview – between 2008 and 2009 – but it also lays open the nature of practice within contemporary dance cosmology: ‘Is an active thought or filter a practice?! I’m not sure’ (2011). Taking the example she gives of ‘active thought’ or ‘filter’, it seems she wants to refer to practice as a lens through which dance artists approach what they engage in and with, granting practice a status of ‘perspective’. In a certain sense, this suggests that the practitioner’s practice influences her perceptions and shapes her understanding of what she encounters in the world. Practice would then be setting the context, or the vessel, within which dance is lived, and in that sense it would have a delimiting contextualising function. In these terms, besides facilitating the development of skills, practice leads to a particular way of perceiving the world, a lens. Practice as the trigger of a transformation process that involves learning skills and developing a worldview? Perhaps. Notably, worldview, meaning an artist’s positioning with regard to life’s bigger picture, is itself an element of how practices develop and what they become, so there is mutual determination between these two elements. Whether worldview comes before practice or practice is generative of worldview will vary. As Parkinson remarks, ideas change actions and vice versa:

Sometimes I use the idea of fiction. If I superimpose the idea of fiction on my actions, they are contained and limited by that definition. I can't get out of that idea till I drop it. [...] or the way that Thomas Hauert connects force, and space and people – when I work with him, I'm working with a perception that finds a way to act itself out (2011).

Parkinson cites dancers and choreographers Jonathan Burrows and Eszter Salomon to convey the idea that every practice has a set of chosen restrictions, or parameters. For Burrows, there is a sense of proportion and relationship – there is integration of some aspects of life, but some things are left out. For Salomon, there is intentional resistance to information and influence (Parkinson 2011). Clearly, developing and shaping artistic practice requires knowing both what it is and what it is not. Still, artistic practices are not monolithic, even if they evolve to becoming definable; this is so for the simple reason that artistic inquiry presupposes continuous inquiry, and that in itself is likely to make it porous to its surroundings:

Once a practice is static, it's no longer functional, it becomes a marketable object, a product. Practices have to stay unstable, volatile [...] I'm a performing artist, I change, I get old, I fall in love, I move to another city, I get injured, I develop skills, I develop knowledge, I lose interest, I get seduced. In order to guide me through, my practice has to change (Parkinson 2011).

With regard to the significance of repeatedly engaging in an action, practice may involve repetition, and the exercising (in the sense of 'carrying out') of specific activities. However, 'repetition', due to connotations that often carry meanings of automatisisation, may not be used to describe what happens in improvisatory practice and performance. The use of terms such as 'ongoing', 'enduring' and 'recurrence' may prove more suitable, especially where the idea of re-occurrence articulates the notion of moving into, of entering a particular space again and again. Within this dimension of practice, the practitioner is reaffirming her intention. As to the aspect of continuity, a further question arises regarding the difference between practice and training. Parkinson's view is that training has definable goals, whereas practice consists of less goal-oriented tasks: 'if you're training, you're definitely trying to learn, you're goal-oriented' (2011).

Perhaps this notion of trying and training is too closely correlated with goal-oriented activities which are, in dance, characteristic of dance technique training. The terms 'training' and 'technique' are, in the daily life of dancers, used pretty much interchangeably. Colloquially, training relates to dance technique – what some call

codified systems or techniques (e.g. Barr 2009; Blades 2013; deLahunta, Clarke and Barnard 2012; Holt, Pickard, Preece, Reed and Childs 2015; Parviainen 1998; Roche 2016) – whereas practice is more broadly used to refer to less encapsulated proposals that have a rather experimental, subjective, interrogative and perhaps more malleable character.

Dancer and choreographer Ingo Diehl and dance scholar Friederike Lampert argue that there has been a shift in the understanding of dance techniques, with their being 'no longer perceived as codified systems' due to 'any given technique's potential to change and develop' (2014: 13). My experience, however, is that these so-called dance techniques – in not only ballet but also modern and contemporary dance – are more often associated with the idea of training than with practice, and are viewed pretty much as systems to which dancers adjust their bodies, ways of being and operating while partaking in the training. In contrast to the investigative and experimental character conveyed by the term 'practice', training has a goal-oriented connotation. Some of the more widely known contemporary dance techniques have no doubt evolved since their emergence, and each teacher brings their individual approach into the technique. Yet this does not necessarily cancel out dance techniques' status as clear systems of precepts, made explicit and named, that include beliefs, methods and specific movement elements. Performer, dance teacher and researcher Gill Clarke has stated:

Technique, in a way, is only some skills and tools that help somebody do what they want to do. We need to think about what we call technique as a means to an end (Clarke, Cramer and Müller 2014: 203).

In this study's cosmology, 'technique training' is often connected to a teacher *teaching* it, whereas 'practice' is linked with a dancer *sharing* their practice. If training and technique have the correlation I suggest, Clarke's words seem to support Parkinson's view: 'I just don't think you can specify the goals of a practice the way you can those of training' (Parkinson 2011). Dancers can no doubt train in specific skills and target certain exercises as part of their practice, yet what determines what these two (at times united) activities involve is the essence of what is being pursued. From my dance artist perspective, combined with those of other artists, practice implies a porous space where, and a method by which, meaningful experience takes place, where we come to know in myriad ways, and develop, skills by means of attempts and accomplishments, made possible by entering – and continuously re-entering – this space.

Expanding the scope of perspectives on practice, I now draw on the work of anthropologists researching as participant observers who have conducted fieldwork by learning a skill. They share an approach to their ethnographies that is characterised by practice as a way to understand the nature and specificities of the making of athletes, performers and craft apprentices, to then theorise about this. My personal pathway differs from that of these anthropologists, in that I had learned dance improvisational skills prior to approaching them here through the lens of ethnography. Marchand discusses recent confluences of practice theorists, phenomenologists and cognitivists concerned with creating a more 'inclusive space for "thinking about knowing"' and the relevance of practice in processes of making knowledge (2010b: 1). He cites Aristotle's *Nichomachean ethics* to affirm:

As a species, we are composed, in part, of innate capacities – perceptual, cognitive, and motor – that engage us with the world of which we are a part, and thereby enable us to survive, adapt, and thrive. By contrast, 'arts and virtues' are not endowed, but realized and reinforced in practice (2010b: 1).

According to this view, practice affords experiments, attempts and accomplishments whereby faculties and knowledges specific to artistic practice can be strengthened and absorbed: the cycle of coming to know, or of 'making knowledge' as Marchand articulates, takes place in and through practice. Marchand goes on to say that 'knowing is inseparable from everyday life and practice' (2010b: 15) and, citing Ingold, stresses that everyday activities provide the framework that forms knowledge – knowing being coincidental with our moving through the world. He argues that intelligent and intelligible performance are outcomes of the operation and confluence of different domains of knowledge, coordinated within our indivisible whole. Yet questions arise as to how this coordination takes place (2010a: xi):

What drives improvisation in activity? [...] How are different ways of knowing variously communicated and interpreted by participating members within fields of practice? And crucially, how might we appropriately account for the necessary but ever-changing relations of learning to the physical and social environment in which it unfolds (2010a: xi)?

Marchand addresses mainly apprentice-style learning and the renewed attention that anthropologists are placing on the question of embodied learning, as he calls it, as 'a prime site for connecting theories of knowing to practical doing' (2008: 246). He affirms that sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work on everyday practice has been influential in this

'renewed reflection on "on-site" formation of person' (2008: 246). Fieldwork undertaken on the making of athletes and performers and on the nature and specificities of craft apprenticeship have highlighted the peculiar character of being immersed in apprenticeship: in addition to facilitating technical know-how, '[it] structures the practitioner's hard-earned acquisition of social knowledge, worldviews and moral principles that denote membership and status in a trade' (2008: 246). Although various of these studies focus on ways of learning that are mimetic and repetitive, and hence unlike the process my research looks into, the working contexts of these anthropological studies are similar to dance in that they involve 'skilled physical activities [...] communicated, understood and negotiated largely without words' (2008: 247). Marchand acknowledges that spoken language plays a significant role in practice and learning (as it does in my case study), being used to convey conceptual ideas and values, indicate where to focus, and negotiate and coordinate courses of action (2008). As will become clear from the fieldwork data, dialogue and negotiation were paramount in the making of *Flot*.

Unlike Thomas' work with Ballet de Lorraine, craft apprenticeship involves the use of hand tools in a relationship where they 'become an extension of the limbs and fingers, and regular practice results in coordinated integration of mind, body and tool' (Marchand 2008: 260). In *Flot*, dancers deal with one another, music, costumes, the space (studio or stage), the set design and their co-workers, but no hand tools. Yet, the process of dealing and negotiating with these components of the dance, some of them constantly shifting, is in various ways similar to that of tools becoming an extension of a practitioner's organism. Although a fellow performer's body is not a tool, it is a living organism with various dimensions – one of them being materiality – with which dancers must work to craft shapes and relationalities. Just as using a tool in craftsmanship involves the expansion of one's peripersonal space²⁹, so too does improvising with one or more partners. Instances of this are when a fellow dancer becomes an extension of self in the materiality and immateriality of psychophysical³⁰ co-presence in creative collaboration, and when the materials of a set design must be integrated into the

²⁹ Cognitive neuroscientists Justine Cléry, Olivier Guipponi, Claire Wardak, Suliann Ben Hamed describe peripersonal space as 'the space that directly surrounds us and with which we can directly interact' (Cléry et al. 2015: 314). In their study on the plasticity and dynamics of peripersonal and extrapersonal spaces, they conclude that an individual's peripersonal space is affected by 'repeated exposure to a given sensory-motor context' and is also 'capable of instantaneous adjustment' to sensory-motor as well as emotional and social contexts (2015: 323).

³⁰ The term 'psychophysical' was broadly used by Frederik Matthias Alexander and is also seen in Phillip Zarrilli's writings (e.g. 2007) after theatre-maker Konstantin Stanislavsky (2007: 637).

movement scores, negotiated with and skilfully handled. Materiality, thus, has a key role in dance-making, even if a work does not involve the manipulation of tools.

In her work on materials in the making of craftwork and art, Stephanie Bunn, an anthropologist with an artistic background, writes that ignoring the central role of material in making results in associating it with a technique or technology, in doing something *to* the material with the aim of creating an object (end product) through a goal-oriented approach (2011: 21). She goes on to say that '[t]his ignores the action of making, which is a working *with* rather than a doing *to*' (2011:21, original emphasis). In her writing, Bunn refers to raw materials, as in a potter working with clay or a sculptor with ivory, and not to movement as material and not to dance-making. Still, a parallel with dance can be established when she suggests that 'in making, sensing and acting *merge*' (2011: 24, original emphasis), and that this merging happens not only in the making of craftwork and sculpture but also in dance and social touch, in fact in any activity that involves our body engaging with its surroundings. Also relevant here is Bunn's idea that this merging happens 'in both listening mode and active mode', and that the process involved therein is 'working with intuition' (2011: 24). She explains what this involves by citing woodworker and writer David Pye, who 'sums up this intuitive mastering beautifully as the "workmanship of risk", as opposed to the "workmanship of certainty"' (Pye 1968: 20 cited in Bunn 2011: 24). She adds that

while the maker in his or her work may be continually exercising judgement, dexterity and – most importantly – care, they have to let go of the will to control. It is a moment of stepping forward into the unknown. You cannot hold on to what you know, or look back (2011: 24).

Moreover, just as I have explored so far, in this mode of working, Bunn argues, it is impossible to separate the whole being from the environment (2011: 24). This links directly to Thomas and ZOO's ways of knowing and creating, to the central role of relationalities of self, other and environment, of co-presence, distributed thinking and co-making. Referring to the writings of psychologist James Gibson (1968) and anthropologist and linguist Gregory Bateson (1973), Bunn speaks about 'a circuit of mind which extends beyond the body, outside the limits of the skin' (2011: 25), for example when a blind person perceives the pavement through a stick as she walks, a notion similar to the idea of the expansion of a person's peripersonal space to include materials in her active scope of perception and action (Blakeslee and Blakeslee 2008). Stating that this flexibilises the idea of body boundaries, a point she attributes to both

Gibson and Bateson, Bunn extends this notion to the directness of the craftworker's fingertips feeling into materials through direct contact (2011: 25). In contemporary dance, direct contact often involves a wide area of the body's surface, and all the senses.

From here, as a way to hinge the above with what follows, I refer to Chrysa Parkinson's words on sustained experience:

Because my practice is based in performance, I have to do the thing to understand it, and it's tricky because I have to learn to listen and watch people without absorbing their experience too quickly into my own if I wanna learn something new, but I can't learn new things without doing them. The *experience* of a *sustained physical practice over years*, for example, is something no one except ZOO ever proposed to me, and this thing about paying attention to movement first, that's from ZOO. It runs through everything I do now (2011, added emphasis).

Also linking in with the above is a Sufic maxim by 13th-century Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi³¹: 'He who tastes not, knows not' (Rumi cited in Shah [1964] 2015: 68). This opens up a reflection on the notion that experiencing (tasting) brings us to knowing. Hence, can it be said that 'experience' works as a bridge connecting 'practice' and 'knowing'? I see points of juxtaposition between this proposition and the anthropology and dance practice of the authors I dialogue with. One point of juxtaposition I observe links with Mark Harris' anthropology. To Harris, knowing is 'an achievement of work, experience and time' (2007: 1). Experience, in this perception, precedes knowing.

As mentioned previously, throughout this research I engaged in ongoing movement practices as part of the autoethnographic approach to my investigation. On one day dedicated to writing this section, while searching for ways in which to answer the questions about the intersections between practice, experience and knowing, I went for a short walk.

³¹ According to writer on Sufi lore Idries Shah, Jalaluddin Rumi was a Sufi teacher who lived and taught in Asia Minor. He founded the Order of the Whirling Dervishes and has considerably influenced Western ideas and literature (Shah [1964] 2015: 140).

movement practice

i was writing experiencing the articulation in words of what 'practice' is. then i go for a walk. i reflect, while walking, on my next section called 'experience'. and in this walking-reflecting, i 'see' experience as the result of practice. through practice i... or let's say through continuous practice of certain... [long silence, exhale] through practice [laughter], i experience certain things, and that experience brings me to knowing certain things. and so the thought came that experience is like the bridge between practice and knowing.

i sit on a trunk of what was once a tree, i look at a little stream that runs very close to the trunk where i'm sitting. i have the impulse to write down my thoughts but decide to record my voice. this practice i undertake now is of just looking at trees, grass, stream, water flowing down. i'm on a hill, look at the sun, birds flying around, people walking past. [long silence] and i think that what i experience generates the knowing. the aspect of practice establishing a rhythm of visiting and revisiting an activity solidifies or helps me absorb what is there to be known about myself, about the other(s), about the environment as we interact. i think that, without the experience of engaging in practice, there is a type of knowing that is not necessarily useful for knowing how to go about full-body practices. so in that sense the experience of moving is different from the experience of reflective thought not connected to physical activity – let's say, 'stationary thinking' [laughter]. if it's a practice of thinking about rolling on the floor, the thoughts i have or the understandings i have or the knowledge i generate through this thinking will be put to proof, to probe, if [and when] i actually roll on the floor. so thinking of writing is not the same as writing itself. the actual activity of writing places me in the position of articulating thoughts [in written words] – that articulation implies movement that is not present solely through thinking. and i think that's it for now.

(voice memo, 09.04.2020)

Practice, as space, provides an environment for experience – not just any experience, but meaningful ongoing experience. Briefly going back to Parkinson's reflections on practice, becoming good at what one does through training is meaningful if one works with functional ways of processing information (2011). To this I would add Harris' fitting remark that '[n]ot all experience becomes knowledge, and not all knowledge becomes articulated into theories' of knowledge or language (2007: 4).

In her study of mat-weaving in India, social anthropologist Soumhya Venkatesan calls attention to the refinements of long-term experience and stresses that observation, imitation and trying a certain activity a few times do not suffice for a skill to be absorbed. She then draws attention to the improvisational aspect of weaving, saying

that '[t]he ability to improvise in relation to the uneven thickness of a thread, the position of the knot, and so on, comes from experience and situated practice' (2010: 161). Likewise in dance, the materials in the practitioners' immediate environment, such as the features of a studio or stage, may be uneven and require prompt adjustments in movement; fellow dancers' bodies are malleable and changing. Meaningful experience in practice, with its situational constituents, is a factor that enables coming to know, the knowledge gained allowing the development of skills, and hence skilled cooks, painters, dancers, weavers.

Therefore, expertise in the improvisatory requires knowing how not to know. Knowing *that* and knowing *how*³² (Ryle 1945: 4) in dance is experiential. As well as knowing *that* and *how*, improvisers in group settings deal with ways of responding to the emerging unknown of improvised performed interactions. One becomes expert in knowing how to deal with not knowing what follows and how precisely the following moment unfurls. In that context, the dancer must have at their disposal abilities that nonetheless permit them to respond creatively to ever-shifting circumstances.

Having initially considered 'knowledge' as part of this section, I came to understand that I would rather speak about processes and ways of knowing than about 'knowledge' itself. Admittedly, what counts as knowing and knowledge is 'a huge philosophical question' (Harris 2007: 4) and it lies outside the scope of this thesis to find answers, or approximate answers, to this issue. Yet it is paramount to propose terms and points of reference suitable to the nature of the study and what it engages with. Professor of Philosophy of Dance Jaana Parviainen suggests that 'the traditional epistemological idea of knowledge as propositional knowledge is insufficient to explain the modes of knowing in the dance' (2003: 22), while also stressing the situatedness of the knower in cultural, social, spatiotemporal and kinaesthetic terms (2003: 12). For my purposes, the gerund form 'knowing' suggests an active engagement. Its use implies a viewpoint closer to the way in which we experience and come to know about self, other and environment as we move – and as we create and perform dance – than the use of

³² Philosopher Gilbert Ryle observed that the distinction between 'knowing that something is the case and knowing how to do things' (1945: 4), even though this difference is something we all experience, has not been fully considered in philosophy. He states that theories of knowledge focus on truths or facts, and philosophers either ignore 'the discovery of ways and methods of doing things or else they try to reduce it to the discovery of facts', assuming that 'intelligence equates with contemplation of propositions and is exhausted in this contemplation' (1945: 4). In Ryle's view, theorists have ignored what it means 'for someone to know how to perform tasks' ([1949] 2009: 17).

the term 'knowledge' commonly present in academic discourse. 'Knowledge' is a charged expression that more often than not refers to a thing rather than a movement. Adopting the vantage point of considering gaining knowledge as a movement changed how I proceeded with the study, and hence how this thesis unfurls. This turn implies an understanding of coming to know, or 'becoming knowledgeable' (Ingold 2010: 115), as process and is tantamount to the ways of knowing of improvisers.

Mark Harris affirms that a "way of knowing" is the movement of a person from one context to another rather than different kinds of knowledge' such as knowledge from intuition, from a skill or the senses, from inference and so on (Harris 2007: 1). To Harris, debates on kinds of knowledge often leave out the bond between a person's knowing and the world – 'a person does not leave their environment to know, even if she is dealing with the most abstract of propositions' (2007: 1). Further, a way of knowing 'is more a path to knowledge in terms of an apprenticeship' (2007: 1), which implies learning. What is known and not known in improvisation choreography is in direct relation to people, place and moment. Harris' claim that 'any knowledge is inevitably situated in a particular place and moment' and that it 'is always changing and emergent' (2007: 4) also foregrounds the situatedness of knowledge (2007: 10).

Here, prioritising terms such as 'knowing' and 'coming to know' favours the notion that knowledge 'is grown along the myriad paths we take as we make our way through the world' (Ingold 2010: 115) and supports 'an expanded notion of knowledge that exceeds propositional thinking and language and centrally includes the body and skilled performance' (Marchand 2008: 245). We are thinking about how knowledge is made through dance-making, but we are also recalibrating the term in alignment with current anthropological approaches to this process (see e.g. Harris 2007; Ingold 2000, 2010; Marchand 2008; Venkatesan 2010) to contemplate ways of knowing of dancer artists.

Processes of knowing and not knowing are an integral part of improvisation, as they are of life itself. Much is said about not knowing in the act of improvisation, with 'not knowing' generally referring to how the improvised unfurls as it happens, and 'knowing' relating to previous knowledge a performer draws on as she improvises (e.g. Bannon 2019: 44; De Spain 2014: 4). Yet, as dance artists 'reimprovise' improvisation, the requirements in terms of competences of professional dancers seem endless. Noticeably, in this cosmology performers do not arrive at knowing by learning some

skills and that is it. In this regard, Harris stresses that knowing the diversity that emerges through perceptual, physiological and behavioural change is important because each of these facets may open up the 'black box' of knowing how: 'people do not just learn a skill and somehow perform it' (2007: 13). Perhaps that works for cycling: some say you never forget how to ride a bike once you have learned to. However, the transformational process is not unravelled simply by acknowledging the experiential and tacit nature of riding a bike. Various anthropologists studying practice and knowledge (e.g. Bunn 2011; Harris 2007; Ingold 2000; Marchand 2010b) highlight that the indissoluble relationality of individual(s) and environment is the locus where the dynamic process of knowledge-making arises through unmediated perceptual engagement.

In the context in focus, knowledge is never completed or fully accomplished – a dancer never really arrives at knowing what and how but is in a state of constant research – knowing is transient and renewable, and improvisation is to a certain extent uncertain; it is certain up to the moment when it is brought into question. Since the practice of improvisation as choreographic strategy implies an ongoing learning process, the particular anthropological views I dialogue with are on the whole suitable. In that sense, Mark Harris' proposition to pursue knowing as an ongoing process rather than considering 'knowing as certainty' (Harris 2007: 4) and his urging of us to 'move away from methods understood as formal procedures and tools' (2007: 12), suggested also by Stephannie Bunn (2011: 24), appositely apply to my purposes.

That the practice of dance contains tacit components, is context-sensitive and involves knowing how, as well as what and that, is undisputable. So, in focusing on the case I study, in which the dancers of Ballet de Lorraine first had to become acquainted with Thomas' modes of creation and learn specific abilities that the majority of the group were not skilled in, I turn to skill. I will build upon explorations of how skills are learned and sustained, also referred to as skill acquisition and retention. I will also address the transformation of skills. Whether I use the term 'knowing' or 'knowledge', I am referring to the process of coming to know or 'becoming knowledgeable' (Ingold 2010) as a practical and continuous activity.

2.3.1 Skill

Since this study is developed in a professional dance context, I address skill as something that is learned and performed to a point of high refinement and expertise, termed 'expert skill' by dramaturg, dance historian and former dancer Freya Vass-Rhee (2018: 219). To delve further into the key terms here, I draw on current anthropological notions of skill, especially as postulated by Tim Ingold, an author whose work has been widely referenced in Dance Studies for its relevance to inquiries into dance practice (e.g. deLahunta, Clarke and Barnard 2012; Walter-Høeg 2018; Welton 2013).

For the present purposes, a vision of skill acquisition and retention, and skill transformation, that recalibrates the way we think about our relationship to activity in terms of conceptualisation and operation should include what Ingold describes as a 'pre-mechanistic' view of the practitioner 'immersed with the whole of his being in a sensuous engagement with the material' (2000: 295), a view shared among the anthropologists with whom I dialogue. Clearly there are no hand tools in *Flot*, nor the production of objects. Yet, as mentioned above, dancers deal with what we call materials, tools and ingredients³³. Dancers often work in pairs and groups to assist one another in experiences that, should they work alone, would not be possible. These include stimulating the other through touch, manipulating limbs and moulding movements on each other's bodies through hands-on interactions. Hence, some of the ideas connected to craftsmanship and apprenticeship presented by anthropologists of practice provide scope for the understanding of skills and learning processes in dance.

Contemporary dancers collaborate with a variety of choreographers as their professional trajectory evolves and, as part of this cosmology, learning new skills is a constant for the very reason that they work with myriad approaches and strategies, applying known ones and discovering others as they go along. Equally constant is the process of adapting and adjusting, in other words transforming, previously acquired skills. In his writing on fields and expertise in the context of interdisciplinary projects he has undertaken, Scott deLahunta refers to 'shifting centres of gravity under constant adaptation as ideas of all descriptions get pulled into their orbits' (2010: 24) – in my

³³ Thomas often uses 'ingredients' to refer to what dancers deal with in creating/performing his work. Also, ZOO dancer Sarah mentioned various culinary terms and used cooking analogies in her interview, confirming that the culinary process is a shared space of analogy within the company.

view, a very suitable parallel to the continuously shifting importance of the numerous skills dancers utilise in creation and performance.

In an ethnography conducted within our cosmology, namely on The Forsythe Company's creation *Whole in the Head* (2010), Freya Vass-Rhee focuses on the enhancement of both physical and 'collaborative performance skills' (2018: 220). Her article starts by referring to previous studies on the acquisition of expert skill in contexts where insights into distinctions between novice and expert learning are presented. She contends that the types of practice addressed in these studies³⁴ carry the assumption that 'skill acquisition necessarily involves known and clearly specified goals' (2018: 220) such as winning a game or learning a movement phrase, and that teaching and learning are unidirectional processes due to 'dichotomies of role distribution (director/subordinate, mentor/student) or specialism-oriented roles' (2018: 220). In Vass-Rhee's view, the majority of previous studies fall short of addressing 'skill acquisition in a class of deliberate activities in which outcomes are emergent instead of predetermined', including creation processes such as improvisation and generative approaches to performance (2018: 220). Vass-Rhee adds:

Within the latter of these, works and modes of working are moving targets whose trajectories are shaped by the collective embodied knowledge and interaction of the creative team. Devised dance and physical theatre distinguish themselves from other forms of theatrical devising due to the intrinsic role of somatic engagement in the creative process (2018: 220).

Similarly, Thomas conceived and developed a concept for *Flot* but the realisation or implementation of ideas, the actual making of the work, was a collaborative endeavour in dialogue with the dancers. In her article, Vass-Rhee concludes that the creation of *Whole in the Head* produced 'a deep dramaturgy of embodied complicity' where, rather than sustaining movement generation, 'sustaining community' (2018: 229) was central to the work.

Following Ingold's stance, what is meant here by skill is not confined to 'techniques of the body, but the capabilities of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment. As properties

³⁴ Among the studies Vass-Rhee references are Chaffin and Imreh (2002) on classical piano playing, William and Cox (2014) on team sports, Hutchins (1995) on ship navigation and Tribble (2011) on acting.

of human organisms, skills are thus as much biological as cultural' (Ingold 2000: 5). Ingold makes a second point here, which is that 'becoming skilled in the practice of a certain form of life is not a matter of furnishing a set of generalised capacities, given from the start as compartments of a universal human nature, with specific cultural content' (2000: 5). He believes skills are not passed from one generation to the next 'but are regrown in each, incorporated into the *modus operandi* of the developing human organism through training and experience in the performance of particular tasks' (2000: 5, original emphasis). Thirdly, the perspective required for a study of skill demands situating the practitioner, from the outset, 'in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of his or her surroundings', what Ingold calls the 'dwelling perspective' (2000: 5). He argues further that humans come into being 'as organism-persons within a world that is inhabited by beings of manifold kinds, both human and non-human. Therefore relations among humans, which we are accustomed to calling "social", are but a sub-set of ecological relations' (Ingold 2000: 5).

Dancers need adaptive skills. Skills in improvisation choreography are not, and I borrow Mark Harris' words, 'part of a toolbox of technical proficiency' (2007: 7) but faculties that are adaptable and responsive to not fully predictable responses from other collaborators (e.g. other dancers, artists from other fields participating in creation and/or performance) and shifting circumstances (studio or performance space, the presence of an audience and so on). The kinds of skill dance artists need to possess are distributed through dimensions of self/other/environment, and evidently there are numerous skills overlapping at any given time.

For dancers, heightened perception of oneself alone does not fulfil all the requirements of dance-making and performing; it is essential, but it is preparative work, from which myriad complexities must unfold. Self-centred explorations of one's own living organism and its motions with a focus inward – one of the dimensions of somatic practices often applied in dance – are only part of the story. This knowing of 'self' must be sustained in action while in co-presence with 'other' and 'environment'. Ingold writes that the success of hunter-gatherers' way of life, for instance, depends 'upon their possession of acutely sensitive skills of perception *and action*' (2000: 289, added emphasis). Although this reflection does not relate directly to dance-making, dancers' performance similarly depends on the acquisition and maintenance of enhanced perception in action. It does not suffice to develop exceptional perceptions of

self/other/environment if that faculty is not available to be directly integrated into movement. So the 'and action' bit of Ingold's view is highly significant to our cosmology.

Ingold highlights five dimensions of any skilled practice, the relevance of which will become ever more obvious as we look closely into the various dimensions of Thomas' collaborative making process later in the thesis. The five dimensions are described as follows:

First, intentionality and functionality are immanent in the practice itself, rather than being prior priorities, respectively, of an agent and an instrument. Secondly, skill is not an attribute of the individual body in isolation but of the whole system or relations constituted by the presence of the artisan in his or her environment. Thirdly, rather than representing the mere application of mechanical force, skill involves qualities of care, judgement and dexterity. Fourthly, it is not through the transmission of formulae that skills are passed from generation to generation, but through practical, 'hands-on' experience. Finally, skilled workmanship serves not to execute a pre-existing design, but actually to generate the forms of artefacts (Ingold 2000: 291).

Digging into Ingold's oeuvre for elements that help create a framework for understanding dance-specific baselines and distilling them from his inquiry into mine, I pick out his notion that skill is a form of knowledge as much as of practice: 'it is both practical knowledge and knowledgeable practice' (2000: 316). Skill is 'tacit, subjective, context-dependent, practical "knowledge how", typically acquired through observation and imitation rather than formal verbal instruction' (2000: 316). Still, Ingold acknowledges other dimensions of skill acquisition beyond imitation and observation when he says that a skilful practitioner's way of knowing is her acting in the world; the contact with materials, mediated or not by tools, is the means whereby 'technical knowledge is gained as well as applied' through 'the attentive touching, feeling, handling, looking and listening that is entailed in the very process of creative work' (2000: 316). One dimension of observation that I will explore further as I interact with the fieldwork data, is that skill acquisition does not always involve active observation or imitation or implicates intentional communication through touching, feeling and listening. It also takes place through being and working together collaboratively, and affords a type of learning by absorbing modes of being, thinking and acting through means not exclusively attributable to imitation, observation or the use of the senses. There is a learning in dance collaboration – arguably not exclusive to dance practice – that is in the midst of conversing, moving and creating together and is neither imitative

nor observational; nor does it happen solely by means of verbal instruction or touch – it is *in* the being together and the action themselves, in co-presence and co-action.³⁵

Anthropologists of practice speak about processes of enskillment as typically involving observation and imitation. In the process of becoming a skilled improviser, however, imitation – understood as a mimetic reproduction of another’s actions – is less involved. This is so because of the nature of the skills needed to create improvisation. The dancers I speak about are professionals and they have been through years of training, so certain skills such as the capacity to promptly generate as well as learn movement material and reproduce it are self-evident.

Processes that are often related to research into skill are retention and acquisition. The question arises as to how much exposure to the situation of practice is needed for skills to become second nature, for the learning process, albeit nuanced, to be considered accomplished. In my view, ‘acquisition’ suggests that once a skill is acquired we enjoy both dexterity and successful performance of that skill, for good. However, in improvisation choreography learning skills is a nuanced, dense and open-ended process, in which methods of learning by imitation or mimesis, and persistent repetition of specific, predefined actions – customary in various physically driven practices – do not apply. What about skill retention? As time passes, if an acquired skill has not been practised the individual may fail to perform it. Although they may recall how it was acquired and performed, the skilled performance of that faculty might be challenging to access or no longer be fully retrievable, some evidence of which emerged during my fieldwork and to which I will return in Chapter 5.

Greg Downey, an anthropologist drawing on recent research in psychology and neurosciences, attempts ‘a neuroanthropological account of the cultural tuning of imitative learning’ (2010: 22). Although his study of capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial³⁶ art that is learned through imitation, repetition and reproduction of the master’s moves, does not apply to improvisational practices in dance and the learning process that

³⁵ This idea, on which the thesis is based, suggests that collaborative dance practices and process happen in, and also generate, co-presence. The term ‘collaboration’, formed from terms related to the communal and to labour, arguably falls short of conveying the idea of artists *being* together, which in itself is generative of learning processes or skill acquisition, in my view, through channels we do not fully comprehend or have names for.

³⁶ Downey describes capoeira as an Afro-Brazilian martial art and dance (2011).

Ballet de Lorraine dancers went through in the making of *Flot*, certain insights in Downey's inquiry are relevant to an understanding of the current topic:

Skill learning is not the internalization of a shared 'sense' of transmission of a reified cultural structure. Rather, enskilment is the patient transformation of the novice, the change of his or her muscles, attention patterns, motor control, neurological systems, emotional reactions, interaction patterns, and top-down self-management techniques (2010: 35).

Downey goes on to say that studies of physical practices such as sport, dance and musical apprenticeship make it 'clear that skill is not simply the "embodiment" of "knowledge", but rather physical, neurological, perceptual, and behavioural change of the individual subject so that he or she can accomplish tasks that, prior to enskilment, were impossible' (2010: 34). I will return to this topic of the change or transformational process that is involved in collaborative creation in dance later in my discussion.

With regard to sustaining skills developed in the creation process over time so that performance can happen as faithfully to the work as possible, in the way it was conceived, the temporal aspect must be considered. Harris highlights the time element in processes of knowing by saying that if we consider knowing as intrinsically temporal, 'we need to recognize, first, the different durations of kinds of knowing, second, the ways these times are constituted by our informants, and third, the continuities, or not, between knowing the past and the present' (2007: 16). Briefly, all three aspects are of importance in my case study because the time element has been proved to play a key role in acquiring and sustaining skilled performance in improvisation choreography, where outcomes are only partially pre-designed. Harris remarks, from the viewpoint of the initial training of an anthropologist, that this training, 'if it is of sufficient length and intensity, is constitutive of a "new organ of understanding"' (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 120 cited in Harris 2007: 17). This is an affirmation that could hold true for dance. Are there organs of understanding or perception specific to improvisation choreography and, if so, what are they and how are they developed?

In my experience, there is a fourth aspect that is crucial to improvisation and that is forecasting the immediate future which, combined with 'knowing the past and the present' (Harris 2007: 16), is part and parcel of a dancer's choreographic strategy. Previous experience and gained knowledge (past), the very moment as it is, and

anticipation of possible immediate outcomes (future) merge to form the microcosm of the improvisatory.

Communicating artistic skills and knowledge

As previously highlighted, the communication of knowledge and the learning process in focus do not take place in an educational or apprenticeship environment. My collaborators are not only expert dancers; they are expert learners, since continuous learning is intrinsic to the contemporary dance profession. Some anthropologists use the expression 'cultural transmission' (e.g. Bloch 2005; Cohen 2010; Marchand 2010b) to refer to the process I want to highlight here. Anthropologist Emma Cohen explains it as being the 'emergence, acquisition, storage, and communication of ideas and practices' (2010: 184), as a process strongly shaped by the physical context in which it occurs. Maurice Bloch ponders that the process of cultural transmission 'is not a matter of passing on "bits of culture" as though they were a rugby ball being thrown from player to player. Nothing is passed on; rather, a communication link is established' (2005: 97). This perspective of a 'communication link' provides a much wider field of possibilities for mutual learning.

Moreover, Ingold stresses in his chapter in *Making Knowledge* (the same volume Cohen has contributed to), that similarly to many of his fellow contributors he is convinced that "'transmission" is quite the wrong word to describe the ways in which people come to know what they do' (2010: 116) or communicate practical knowledge to others. Both Marchand and Ingold mention the general dissatisfaction with the notion of 'transmission' among the anthropologists contributing to the volume. As Marchand stresses, although 'transmission' has been commonly used in the social sciences to refer to the process of teaching and learning, 'or for the operations of socialization and enculturation across generations' (2010a: xii), its connotations are not necessarily unproblematic. In their critical assessment of the term, Marchand and the authors in the volume *Making Knowledge*, discussed 'its appropriateness for accurately describing the myriad of complex ways in which knowing is articulated, acquired, and transformed in situ, involving communities of actors engaged in co-ordinated (and sometimes discordant) practices and communication' (2010a: xii). In their view, transmission may denote 'mechanical reproduction and homogenous transferral of facts and information from one head (or body) to another' (2010a: xii). Such a connotation would be unfit for my purposes and, since I sympathise with alternative

ways of addressing the process in focus, I intentionally use the expression 'communicating artistic skill and knowledge' and not 'knowledge transmission'.

Albeit immersed in relations with the other and the surroundings, knowing is unique to each individual, an event determined by particularities of the practitioner/knower, and thus is the process of sharing this knowing with others. As Marchand points out, our experience of the world, the how and what we can know, which includes knowing ourselves, is 'always and necessarily a product of our species-specific perceptual apparatuses, cognitive architecture, and biological constitution, which, together, give us life and enable us to survive' (2010b: 11). This could offer an alternative way of thinking: that a person can communicate what and how she knows but cannot in fact transmit, as in pass on, her knowledge to another person. What and how the other will know is a transformed version of what and how the first person knows. Pondering what processes of cultural transmission implicate, Marchand alludes to Bloch's remark that the receiver recreates the original stimulus by integrating it 'into a different mental universe' (Bloch 2005: 97). This integration happens, I would add, in a different being altogether, with an operating organism that – evidently – includes 'a different mental universe' (Marchand 2010c: 97) unceasingly in interaction with the surrounding world – hence this integration occurs on a scale larger than the mental sphere as it involves or engages all dimensions of the person.

In his investigation of a carpentry instructor's skilfulness in operating a tool and communicating his knowledge and skilful action to an apprentice, Trevor Marchand says that while 'sound is the principal medium of exchange of propositional thoughts and ideas in spoken language, vision is the primary medium of exchange between practitioner and observer. In the workshop, the instructor *shows* the trainees what to do: "*Watch this!*"' (2010c: 99, original emphasis). As mentioned before, Thomas uses verbal instruction as well as demonstration of the practice through personally engaging in it; however, he does not want the performer, to use Marchand's words, to 're-enact the feat' (2010c: 99). Relevant here are questions of the relationship between visual observation and action, as Marchand notes. He claims that, when we watch someone in action, 'observed skills are not merely being processed by visual cognition and "stored" as images that can be subsequently replayed in the mind's eye to guide imitation' (2010c: 99). Additionally, there is no guarantee of success in re-enacting

another person's expert performance by reimagining it visually (2010c: 99). Marchand suggests, however, that

watching another person's practice acts upon our motor-based understanding of the task. Visual imagery of bodily movement serves as input to our motor domains, where it is parsed into its component postures, gestures, and actions. These are mapped incrementally onto motor representations and an interpretation *from* the body is constructed (2010c: 99, original emphasis).

In contrast to in Marchand's investigation, improvisation deals with individuals co-creating a dance that has not been set, with ever-changing spatial relationships (within the room and among dancers themselves). Choreographers communicate ways of knowing and skills key to their creative process by facilitating dancers' exploration on their own and with others by proposing a 'guided discovery' (Downey 2011: 80) whereby even if a certain degree of mimesis occurs, 'the possibility of error, failure, idiosyncrasy, or unintentional innovation in the process of each novice's guided discovery of skills' (2011: 80) is a constant and happens all the time. If there is no specific physical shape or form as outcome, and the activity is open-ended, repetition of observed movement and simulated motor imagery of the exercise does not necessarily apply. What does apply is Midgelow's understanding of improvisation as 'ways of going about things' (2019; 2017), where 'the improvising researcher or learner operates in a purposefully developed state of curious unknowing' (2017: 130).

With regard to communicating to the dancers the parameters that guide the practice, the essentially non-memetic nature of improvisation choreography cannot be stressed enough. That it is essentially non-reproductive of specific movements does not exclude the aspect of recurrent trials and continuous practice. Dancers repeat without repeating. They enter the space of the practice again and again, insisting on abiding by the guidelines and intentions but rather as scaffolding, as approach, as method, as mode of being and operating, and yet they engage in inhibiting the tendency to reproduce their own known solutions to the equations that arise in the improvisatory, or those they observe in the person facilitating the practice. Even the use of the well-known tool of 'marking'³⁷ moves and positioning in space is, according to Thomas

³⁷ In his inquiry into 'marking' as thinking with the body, cognitive scientist David Kirsh notes that marking is the execution of 'a dance phrase in a simplified, schematic or abstracted form. [...] When marking, dancers use their body-in-motion to represent some aspect of the full-out phrase they are thinking about' (Kirsh 2011: 179).

(interview 1), not possible in improvisation choreography because there is no specific movement to mark – there is just a certain number of agreed parameters or a set of constellations. He admitted, however, in this same conversation, that some aspects of the overall piece of work can be marked or not performed full-out for the purpose of, for example, ‘spacing’ during the setting-up of the work on stage, or when going through the running order of a piece.

Taking a dance practitioner’s view on communication of artistic skills and knowledge, Chrysa Parkinson states in a video interview that one basic thing about transmission in dance is that it is oral, that it is also mimetic and that it is maybe a third thing:

it’s hyper synthetic, so when I learn from someone else, I am often not even aware of how I have assumed or consumed their information, their body, their timing. I mean, there’s so many people in my body now, [...] their sense of momentum is different from mine but I had to learn it to be in unison with them. And that’s dancers; that’s super lateral learning. [...] When I work with transmission, I feel like I’m always working between a sort of analytical separating out, so that I can really work on a very simple coordination, like what is it to ‘push’? Just ‘what is pushing?’ And then on the other side, I’m working with a hyper synthetic... my imagination, my memory, how I’m constituted culturally, is also in ‘pushing’. And [...] I have to coordinate and include all of that and in order to solve a problem, I have to differentiate and separate out. [...] They [the dancers] need to be able to synthesize and they also need to be able to analyse and separate, and so you have to kind of balance those two things (Parkinson, in Sporádes 2019).

In her article ‘Repeating Rosas danst Rosas’, Laura Karreman explores ‘dancers’ articulations of embodied experience’ to better understand ‘practices of dance transmission’ (Karreman 2015: 98). She takes the choreography *Rosas danst Rosas* by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker as her case study, analyses the documentation of the work in *A Choreographer’s Score*³⁸, and interviews dancers who have taught this repertoire piece to other dancers. She writes:

When the performance is taught to new dancers, the company primarily relies on a combination of physical demonstration and verbal explanation by experienced dancers in the studio. As in many other dance companies, video recordings of previous stagings can be important mnemonic devices when a work is revived (2015: 102-103).

³⁸ ‘The series *A Choreographer’s Score* consists of three volumes that were co-authored by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Bojana Cvejić: *Fase, Rosas Danst Rosas, Elena’s Aria, Bartók* (2012), *En Atendant & Cesena* (2013) and *Drumming & Rain* (2014)’ (Karreman 2015: 98).

Flot is not a restaging of a piece of Thomas and ZOO's repertoire whereby a group of dancers different from the original cast learn an existing work, and for this reason Karreman's analysis only partly correlates with my case study, yet some of the aspects she raises convey the complex and finely nuanced nature of ways of knowing and 'practices of transmission' (2015: 105) in dance. One of these aspects is the dancer's observation below, which interestingly evidences that being familiar with a practice does not presuppose the ability to communicate what the dance is and how one knows it – this requires a shift to an outside position:

Because I was part of the creation process, the performance was so evident for me. I thought I knew many things, but I didn't. In the beginning I didn't know how to teach it and I had to analyse the piece first. Then I got used to explaining it (Ikeda 2014b) (Karreman 2015: 103).

Also, the nuances and subtleties of dance performance, and hence the complexity of the process of sharing knowledge, is made clear by Karreman when she says that interviews with the dancers acknowledged the authority of the structure of the piece, yet revealed aspects that allowed the performance of the work to be perceived as a 'constantly changing, living tissue' (2015: 105). One further example from this article is how dancer Elizaveta Penkova taught a movement phrase in a workshop. While performing the sequence, she said:

Move your hands away from each other as if you're stroking a water surface, then lift them up and let the water fall from your fingertips. Now you put pressure on your arms and you move upwards. Not only your breath is moving, all your muscles are breathing. Your arms keep pushing into the floor. Then your head suddenly moves: 'Somebody turns on a light'. Then you realize: 'Nothing is there' and you sink down, while letting go of the breath (Penkova 2013a) (Karreman 2015: 104).

Karreman comments that '[t]he figurative language of this description is very powerful' (2015: 104). In my view, the power of the language conveys the performer's awareness that the dance is not only the score in the document, or the sequence of movements she can demonstrate. Much more than her knowledge and skills is needed to perform this first movement of the piece. The figurative is possibly an instance of a relation to this movement sequence that only this dancer knows about, a relationship developed by her because she has felt the need to impart that meaning to the choreographic structure. In the example, what she knows about performing this choreography (not

part of the document containing the choreographic structure), comes through in a cohesive way that unites figurative descriptive language and movement.

I would like to add here a few words on the interplay of self/other/environment. As Stevens and her colleagues have noted, '[i]n dance, one of the most immediate contextual factors is the other dancers with whom one rehearses, dances and performs' (Stevens et al. 2019: 26), and dancers and choreographers 'frequently develop aspects of the work in a collaborative and distributed manner' (Stevens and Leach 2015). Experiences are not purely personal, encapsulated in individuality. Even in the most remote corner of isolation, relationality cannot be fully obliterated. Pondering further on how to study the life of dancers beyond polarised views, beyond the artificial separation of life, thought and action (nevertheless useful in certain realms of analysis), my fundamental point is about the junction of these dimensions, their mutual definition and our inescapable condition of involvement in diverse environments (Ingold 2000: 292). Regarding the borders and porosity of self, other and environment, a fitting interrogation is raised by Robert Lax (1999: 196-199):

where do i be gin	where do you be gin	where does earth be gin	where does the sky be gin
where do i leave off	where do you leave off	where does earth leave off	where does the sky leave off ?

My main concern in this chapter was to clarify the references I draw on for my inquiry into the processes of making improvisation choreography, the development of skills and of ways of making available one's artistic knowledges to other dancers. I introduced the dancers I collaborated with for this study, contextualising their work settings, and also outlined key terms in improvisational dance-making, notions of practice, experience, knowledge and skill. What I would like to take along to the next chapters is the notion that a study of how ways of knowing are shared so that they can be absorbed, incorporated and assimilated in a transformed, unique way and form by the other, needs to be regarded

as the establishment of a 'communication link' (Bloch 2005). Here, the notion that the one who knows passes on knowledge to those who do not falls short in terms of scope. The perspective I take, using Marchand's words, 'rather than being suggestive of hierarchical and methodical transfer, [...] fosters thinking about knowledge as a dialogical and constructive engagement between people, and between people, things, and environment' (Marchand 2010a: xii). In this process, communication flows among the experts involved, and they could all be inscribing learning curves, even if of different sorts. As Freya Vass-Rhee points out, 'whereas the education of novice performers centres on building fundamental skills, experts develop both advanced technical practice and, crucially, the skill of complicit thought and action within shared practice' (2018: 226). Finally, the question as to what highly skilled improvisers must know is unavoidable. Are there such things as indispensable knowledges of improvisation choreography?

3 Methodology and approaches

This chapter contains the set of fundamental beliefs that constitute the paradigms of my research: the premises that guide the way in which I, as a participant observer and practitioner, see the world and operate in it (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a: 13; Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011: 103). I assume that the real-life processes in focus comprise multiple realities, which implies the study's constructivist or interpretive paradigm. Taking a relativist standpoint, the reality of this investigation is considered to be constructed 'intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially' (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011: 103). In addition, the understandings resulting from this inquiry were co-created by the collaborating artists and myself³⁹, which is indicative of subjectivist or transactional ways of knowing (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a: 13; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba 2011: 103).

In order to investigate collaborative dance-making with a special focus on heightened perception of self, other and environment, I enter the research process as part of the artistic community, and acknowledge that behind the theoretical underpinnings, the methods I use and my analysis, stand my personal biography and experience as a seasoned dancer, choreographer and dance teacher. I speak from within the dance community, from an interpretive perspective that inevitably embraces my gender, social context and ethnicity, through the lens of research. Driven by artistic practice, this is the particular standpoint that configures 'the research act' (Denzin and Lincoln 2011a: 11) I engage in.

I am looking into the social event of collaborative creation processes in dance and I adopt ethnographic methods of data acquisition while structuring my inquiry cycle of self-reflection in close conversation with artistic practice and first-hand knowledge. In progressing my investigation, the research design evolved into a hybrid model in the sense that it was not predetermined but rather grew out of the research process itself. Emergent choice of approaches is a common practice in artistic production; the conception of the what/how/when to be explored is often processual, defined in/through the creative act itself. This course of action draws upon my background, and on the belief that emergent designs are effective because they grow out of practices of inquiry.

³⁹ This research project was developed in conversation with my supervisory team, hence the understandings I report are also outcomes of my interactions with my Director of Studies Scott deLahunta and my second supervisor Karen Wood.

In my project, data and theory are co-constructed as a result of interactions between researcher and participants, situating it within a post-positivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln 2011b; Thornberg and Charmaz 2014). The research design is hybrid in that the research act is chiefly rooted in and informed and shaped by artistic practice – my own and that of my collaborating artists – interwoven with methods borrowed from the Social Sciences. I adopt arts researcher Brad Haseman’s notion of practice-led research: ‘creative practice is both ongoing and persistent; practitioner researchers do not merely “think” their way through or out of a problem, but rather they “practise” to a resolution’ (2010: 147). To Haseman, ‘practice-led research’ is an effective term to define an approach that enables practitioners to initiate and pursue research through practice (2010: 147). I add ethnographer Laurel Richardson’s view that ethnography is ‘always created through research practices. Science offers some practices, literature, creative arts, introspection, and memory-work offer others’ (2000: 254).

With regard to data analysis, except for the use of video annotation as method, the choice of Grounded Theory was not decided upon in advance. It emerged as a fitting approach to analysis and to the construction of a conceptual scaffolding, as explained in Section 3.4.1. There was no theoretical framework, but rather a discovery-oriented approach was employed while moving through the contexts I visited, a stance that was also true regarding the documentation and video annotation practices, the ethnographic experience and the autoethnographic explorations.

Through this mode of inquiry, the research carries in itself traces of a sociopolitical positioning, namely, that I see the individuals I observed as unique human beings, and I acknowledge their specific contributions both to my research project and to the creative processes in which they co-worked. I see them as *other* individuals, but not from an *other* community since I have experienced the context they partake in from various perspectives – a gaze I consider to be a strength of this study. I see them as *collaborating artists* who will co-create the comprehensions that may emerge throughout the study, and not merely as *informants* who provide me with valuable data, which I analyse and interpret to elaborate conclusions. My aim is to position others not as objects of study but ‘as co-performers of knowledge, *co-present* in the time and process of knowledge production’ (Spry 2011: 500, original emphasis). I intend to amplify their voices in a manner that aligns with efforts to de-hierarchise a value system wherein the choreographer’s voice has

primacy in relation to that of the dancer-performer. In so doing, the writing echoes the actual context of contemporary dance-making, in which performers act as co-makers of the choreographic work (e.g. Laermans 2012; Stevens and Leach, 2015) – albeit to different degrees depending on the artistic project – and are co-agents in the generation of ways of knowing in the collaborative.

Through the language I opted to use around this relationship or social transaction, I made explicit (firstly to myself and later to the collaborating artists in our conversations during the data-gathering process) the nature of the transaction and the significance of their own contribution. With their agreeing to be regarded as collaborating artists, expressed verbally and through their signing of consent forms, this relationship was nurtured. This helped create a collegial relationship that facilitated mutual trust and, thus, the sharing of experiences and nuances therein that are not always easy to express. Further aspects of this collaboration relate to the creative dimension of the language used in the thesis, and my approach both to our interactions and to the articulation of my findings. My practice of 'languaging' (Phipps 2007: 12) in the thesis has shaped its terminologies and meanings, the development of which the collaborating artists undeniably contributed to. I approached the data collection, analysis and synthesis processes with an openness to these dancers' experiences but also to their ways of verbally conveying meaning, and their practice- and creation-specific sensitivities and metaphors, acknowledging their creative participation in the endeavour and in how I articulate my findings.

Within this paradigm, reflexivity may be an issue; hence the emic-etic view was accompanied by my disposition to enter the field with a reflective stance, and also develop skills to sustain this across the study as a whole. Also, self-observation has been key in reflecting upon the perception processes dancers experience in improvisation choreography, and upon what is involved in sustaining long-lasting states of conscious awareness of self, other and environment. Yet, this has not been the same mode of observation as in my artistic practice. What differs is the choice of autoethnography as a method, which provided both a lens and a framework that have kept me actively observant of the overly subjective, or rather, of the personal that may be unattentively biased. This choice of method has delineated subjectivity and helped me filter or distil assumptions through a conscious effort to continually return to the research context and the ethnographic material.

3.1 Ethnography

As the primary method of Anthropology, ethnography is dedicated to describing in detail ways of life of humankind. It involves immersion in a specific cultural or societal group over a significant period of time to observe and document events, interactions and experiences⁴⁰ of those participating in a social event, providing the basis for research that engages with the identities, behaviours, values and interests concerned (Daniel 2019: 246). My interest in getting to know and making available artists' intuitions, practices and discoveries informed the choice of an ethnographic lens, and I enter the field as part of the cultural community I am investigating. This approach involved primary features of ethnography such as observation of processes and intensive fieldwork (Denzin and Lincoln 2011b; Patton 2002), informed by literature and yet conducted in a discovery-oriented manner, as I have not been trained in ethnography's systematicity, theory and history (Madden 2010: 110). As a researcher-practitioner, I place myself on both sides of the processes analysed and establish an *emic* as well as an *etic* viewpoint: the insider's perspective and the outsider's view (Patton 2002: 84). Addressing qualitative research and evaluation methods, Michael Patton writes that this relationship has been questioned on every level, and argues that the etic stance offers an important degree of detachment and counterbalances the emic viewpoint (2002: 84).

In their description of the actions associated with the interpretive paradigm, Lincoln and colleagues affirm that 'researchers must understand the social context and the culture in which the data are produced to accurately reflect what the data actually mean to the study' (2011: 113). Within this paradigm, reflexivity may be problematic (2011: 115), hence the emic-etic view must be accompanied by the researcher's disposition to enter the field with a reflective stance, and sustain this across the study. In the context of this project, I have made efforts to navigate the friction between emic and etic modes with the support of autoethnographic methods, and as practitioner-researcher to unleash the complementarity of these perspectives.

Questions arise as to whether a practitioner-researcher's extensive professional experience biases her research practice, or whether it offers depth to the analysis and synthesis processes of the study. Perhaps the answer is that it does both. In their writings

⁴⁰ The occurrences discussed here, such as 'constant presence' and intuition, are studied indirectly, but not by measuring the activity, or through standardised tests, statements about current feelings, or other indicators of psychological and physiological states (Hartig et al. 2011).

on the limitations of the researcher as the primary instrument for gathering data and carrying out analysis, Professors Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell ponder that ‘the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that can have an impact on the study’ (2016: 16). While considering these shortcomings, the intent should be to identify biases and monitor them within the study’s framework, bearing in mind the researcher’s interest rather than trying to eliminate ‘subjectivities’ (2016: 16). Alongside the specific lens or theoretical framework that informs the research, monitoring bias potentially makes clear factors influencing data interpretation and discussion. Merriam and Tisdell refer to Alan Peshkin, who has stumbled in his own subjectivity and, in his own words, has come to two conclusions:

First, I decided that subjectivity can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers’ making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected (Peshkin 1984, pp. 276-278). Second, I decided that in subsequent studies I would actively seek out my subjectivity. I did not want to happen upon it accidentally as I was writing up the data. I wanted to be aware of it in process, mindful of its enabling potential while the data were still coming in, not after the fact (1988: 18).

Like Peshkin, I have actively sought out subjectivity in my artistic practice; likewise in the present study, which led to the integration of autoethnography as a method of inquiry. If embracing one’s subjectivity can be a way to support one’s unique contribution to research, as Peshkin states, it could be argued that the creative aspects of research – manifest in actions and practices involved therein such as interpretation and writing – are part of this subjectivity. Acknowledging each individual’s creative processes as unique, allows one to re-signify subjectivity in research and hence the notion of bias. In my case, the challenge has been to recontextualise my own subjectivity. As I will explore later in Chapter 5, my interest in approaching the ‘general’ through the ‘personal’, to then return to the ‘general’, had to be translated, so to speak, and transported from my artistic practice to the academic context of this study.

Yvonne Daniel, a Professor of Dance and Afro-American Studies, highlights that during the 1960s and 1970s pure objectivity came to no longer be considered possible or even desirable in ethnographic studies and was replaced by awareness and transparency of researcher bias (2019: 247). She adds that the notion of reflexivity – ‘the inclusion of the researcher’s subjective perspective and ongoing reflections as the research progresses’ (2019: 247) – has since then been incorporated into data reporting. This, and further advances in ethnography – for instance, critiques of power relations between researcher

and participant – have caused changes in the writing process as well; writing has moved ‘towards transparency and reflectivity, as opposed to distance and objectivity’ (2019: 248).

Reflecting further on researcher bias, rather than just allowing my professional experience to ‘flow’ into the thesis, the choice of an autoethnographic approach entails recognition of the value of a longstanding practical knowledge in dance. My intention has been to impart depth to the inquiry while using a well-established method to support the narrative and the poetic. While my decision to add autoethnography to the ethnographic approach was partly influenced by the autobiographical nature of most of my artistic work over the past twenty years – which admittedly sometimes reinforced self-centredness and biases – it also mirrors the intention to frame subjectivity with the rigour of a method widely used in the social sciences and acknowledged for balancing ‘intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity’ (Adams, Holman and Ellis 2014: 2).

Since the demarcation of the real-life setting to be studied, its boundaries (the making of *Flot* and ZOO’s practices) and the study’s intensity and developmental factors characterise a case study (Flyvbjerg 2011: 301), a few points regarding this method are worth noting. Professor of Dance Studies Jo Butterworth explains that the case study method enables one aspect of a problem to be explored in some depth within a limited timeframe, allowing the researcher to focus on a specific instance or situation in order to identify or seek to identify interactive processes in operation (2009: 165). This can favour what Patton calls ‘individual interpreted mini-narratives’, which offer explanations for small-scale contexts located within particular framework ‘with no pretensions of abstract theory, universality, or generalizability involved’ (Patton 2002: 8-11). Case studies are also considered ‘intensive analyses’ of single units, such as a person or community (Flyvbjerg 2011: 301).

Economic geographer Bent Flyvbjerg highlights how although case studies have been criticised because, among other reasons, they potentially tend to conform with the researcher’s biases (2011: 309), they have the advantage of closing in on real-life settings and they ‘test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice’ (2011: 309). Among the strengths of case studies as argued by Flyvbjerg are the depth of view this method conveys, the possibility to understand both context and process, the potential elucidation of a phenomenon and the fostering of new research questions and hypotheses (2011: 314). There are advantages and disadvantages to case studies, as with any method, but if these are taken into account this approach offers the possibility of a

nuanced observation of reality and of 'concrete, context-dependent experience' (2011: 303) through prolonged proximity to the studied cases, and via feedback from participants. This is thus a fitting structure within which to carry out my aim to better understand creative co-presence and co-action in micro- and macrocosms of improvisation choreography.

Setting the case study

The terms 'purposeful sampling', 'recruiting' participants, 'information-rich sample' and 'rationale for inclusion', which I came across during my Master of Science studies, seem somewhat out of place in an interpretive inquiry, as they elicit associations with positivist paradigms. Yet, these terms refer to a process that reveals important methodological aspects with regard to the rationale underpinning the selection of cases and the choice of context in which the questions can be researched, which in turn guide the purposeful search for possible contributors to the study.

Thomas and ZOO's working approach is essentially collaborative, and they shape their creative practice and choreographic process by focusing on exceptional modes of being and moving (Section 2.2). They are thus an information-rich case that offers this study valuable, in-depth views on my topic. Their practices include skilled dance technique integrated with abilities related to other highly refined aspects of self, and ways of operating in improvisation choreography. The 'rationale for inclusion' of this particular artist and his company's methods is based on what they seek to attain through, with and in their artistic inquiry and practice. They do this by means of an integrative approach to the various psychophysical aspects of self that nurture an 'exceptional quality of perception' (Hauert 2018, personal correspondence, translation from the original French).

Prior to the process described above, ethical approval was sought from, and was given by, the Coventry University Ethics Committee. Informing the twenty-two dancers about my project in advance, so that they could consider volunteering before rehearsals started, was not possible as I did not have access to their contact details. Our first contact took place on Thomas' first day with Ballet de Lorraine (see Fieldwork one). All the dancers and the director, co-director and rehearsal director were informed about the nature of the investigation through a participant information sheet (Appendix I). Among other points as to the nature of the study, this sheet stated that non-anonymity could not be granted as dancers might be recognised in the video. Four dancers volunteered to collaborate, one of whom dropped out of the production a few weeks after it started due to an injury and

consequently left my study. The three remaining volunteers agreed to share their experience through interviews. As the majority of the company dancers did not volunteer to be interviewed but can be seen in the video footage, two different consent forms were handed out, one for volunteer participants and the other for non-participants, and all dancers have signed one or the other⁴¹ (Appendix II).

3.2 Autoethnography

An additional method to ethnography was considered at an early stage of the project. I assumed it would be fruitful for an investigation into collaborative creative processes of other artists to first of all establish a firm, clear standpoint as a researcher and practitioner. This idea was fuelled by readings on qualitative research, especially the writings of Tami Spry on performative autoethnography. It seemed that adopting a reflective autoethnographic approach would enrich both my experience as researcher and the research itself. I did not venture into this idea though; it remained in a sort of 'embryonic' stage. Only later, as my reading and writing practices intensified, did I realise how strong the need for a sort of reflective hindsight was, and that the recurring question of 'what brought me here now?' would have an impact on questions such as 'where does the research journey head to, and how should I undertake it?' These could not remain unanswered if I were to find an entrance into the more theoretical facets of the study. The passage that inspired this choice reads:

Autoethnography provides an apparatus to pose and engage the question of our global lives. [...] We must continue to develop writing from/with/of the co-performative body as co-present with others, the body as epistemologically central, heuristically inspirational, politically catalytic. 'In performative writing,' writes Madison, 'we recognize that the *body* writes. Critical ethnography adheres to radical empiricism: the intersection of bodies in motion and space' (2005, p. 195). We must write from within the entanglements of co-presence, from the rapture of communion, from the un/comfortable risk and intimacy of dialogue, from the vulnerable and liminal inbetweenness of self/other/context (Spry 2011: 498, 507).

Also, as I set out to use ethnographic methods, an approach that was unfamiliar, I pondered about the unavoidable implication of the knower in coming to know. Positioning myself was challenging. The topic I opted for relates directly to my own practice and personal interests, and my motivation to join the RV project was based on the possibility

⁴¹ Documents related to data-gathering, including the participant information sheet and the informed consent forms, were submitted to the Coventry University Ethics Committee and approved in the first phase of the research in February 2018. The signed forms have been kept in a password-protected compartment and scans of the originals are kept in password-protected computer files.

of using the video annotation prototype to investigate a matter of my own interest. Right from the first months of this study, I was faced with having to dedicate many hours to reading and writing. This involved long stretches of stationary activity, of sitting. I was soon confronted with my own impossibility to carry out the study without integrating movement practices into the research continuum. Conversations with my supervisory team pointed to the idea of movement as method and of keeping a journal as a way to document the autoethnographic experience. Once this approach was adopted, the ongoing movement practice (singular) chosen for this purpose was my own dance practice, developed over the previous 35 years. I was not surprised to soon realise that moving through the world, and observing myself and my surroundings, was happening almost exclusively through the lens of this research. This is an experience I know from previous creation processes in which the topic of the choreographic work infiltrated all corners of my life, day and night. Bike rides to and from work, teaching dance, practising yoga, even the simplest movement routines like walking along corridors, all triggered different modes of thinking about the topics investigated here, and different modes of self-observation. This realisation led to a widening of the scope of my practices, and any movement activity I engaged in had the potential to be written or journalled about, a process that gave rise to one of the writing modes in this thesis (Section 1.2).

Embracing various ways to engage in movement, self-observation and reflection made space for more creative journaling. Critical reflection on intuiting, practising and discovering in creating dance started to shape the autoethnographic entries in the thesis, composed as short reflections of a poetic nature. Thus, interacting with the concepts presented in Chapter 2 and consciously drawing upon my own experience as a resource, I propose to think also reflectively and biographically (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 243) to set the stage for the observation of other artists' creative processes and technologies in regard to their approach to highly skilled perception and action. According to Butterworth, artists' reflexive awareness occurs through a 'synthesis of craft and experiential knowledge, which heightens consciousness' (2009: 160), whether or not the person practices as an artist or a practitioner-researcher.

Autoethnography in dance studies appears, for instance, in the writings of Professor of Dance Jill Green in her article on the tensions between experience and social construction in somatic theory. She sees autoethnography and narrative as key methods in post-positivist research and highlights the self-reflexive nature of these methodological tools.

She does not apply such tools to study herself in the field; rather, by being her own subject/participant, she explores questions on the 'construction of beliefs about dance, somatics, and life' (2015: 8). Green's article explores differences in theory, and differs from my approach here, but her view on boundaries and categories through the perspective of her own trajectory in and through constructivist paradigms, drawing on her experience as a somatics practitioner, exposes the potential of autoethnography in dance research.

In hindsight, I see my choice of this method as similar to what Jones, Adams and Ellis describe as 'coming to an experience and a moment in time when excluding or obscuring the personal in research felt uncomfortable, even untenable' (2016: 21). Using moving as method has meant embracing the complexity of my engagement with the world, but also the straightforward and at times unmediated way in which I get to know what I know, which implies movement. I very much undertake this research through and with my moving body.

3.3 Procedures

The data in this study stem from video footage taken by me of the rehearsals of *Flot*, fieldnotes recorded in annotated videos and in word-processing documents, audio recordings of interviews with the collaborating artists, and journal entries. Further video data come from performance documentation carried out and edited by a professional video documentarist engaged by Ballet de Lorraine⁴². The company's administrative team granted me access to a copy of the full-length documentation exclusively for the purposes of this research, for which both parties signed an agreement.

3.3.1 Data-gathering and fieldwork

Data-gathering on the making of *Flot* lasted from May 2018 to June 2019. It started with fieldwork carried out at CCN Ballet de Lorraine in Nancy, France, between May and November 2018, in different periods from the first day of rehearsals of *Flot* on 7 May to the premiere on 14 November 2018. Observation and documentation of the creation process of *Flot* and of its premiere took place in the dance studios at the choreographic centre and at the Opéra national de Lorraine, respectively. The main method of documentation was

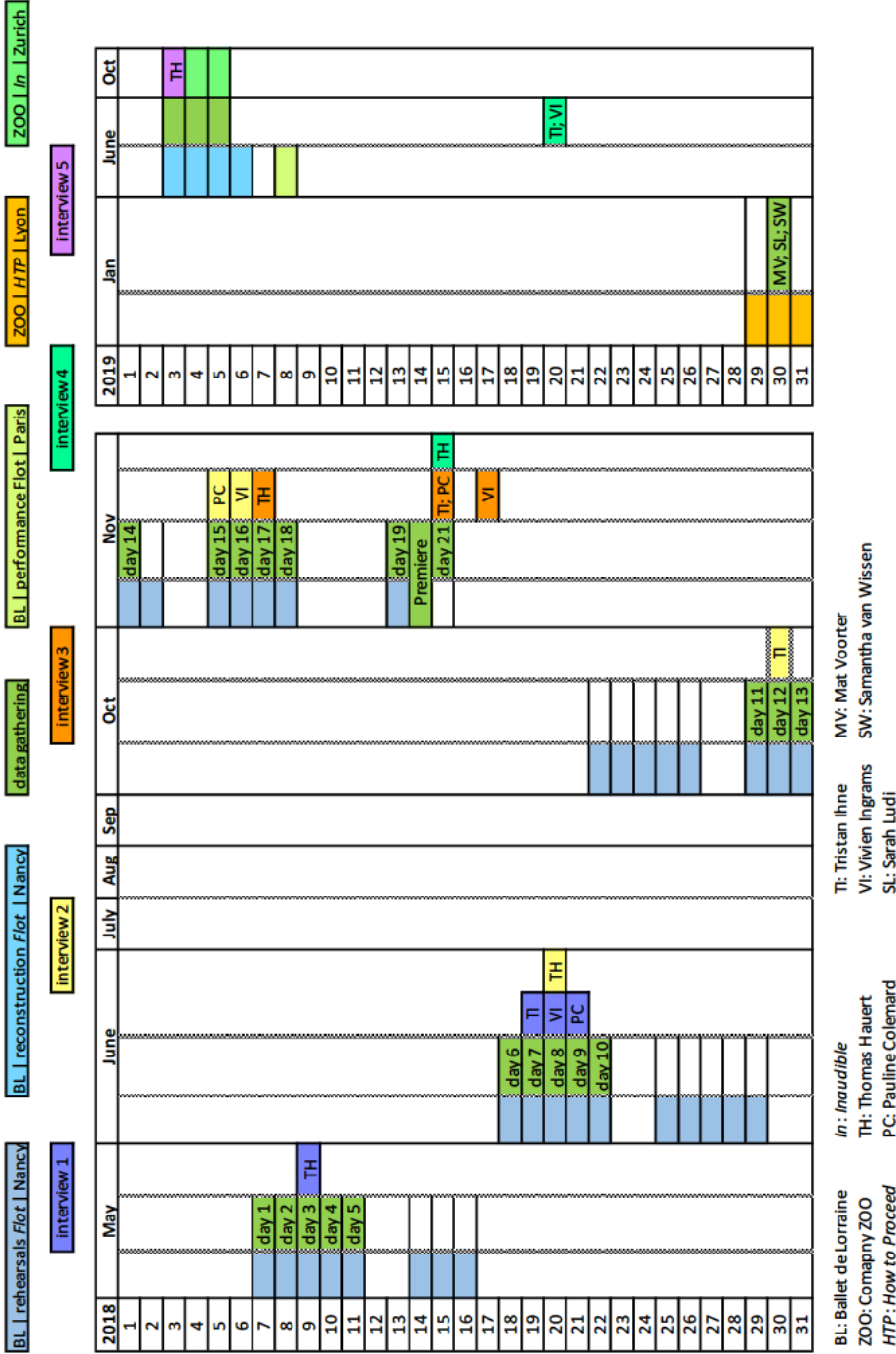
⁴² Performances of *Flot* (2018) were documented and edited by Bérangère Goossens / les films du point de vue; the copyright owner is CCN Ballet de Lorraine.

audio-visual recording. Live video annotation and a few handwritten notes comprised the fieldnotes, and interviews with the collaborating artists provided accounts of their experience.

Before describing the fieldwork process, I will mention that this study contains three sets of ethnographic data: the creation process and performance of *Flot* (May to November 2018), interviews with three of ZOO's dancers (January 2019) and data gathered on the occasion of the reconstruction of *Flot* in June 2019, reported in Chapter 4. Interviews with ZOO members and my visit to Ballet de Lorraine in 2019 were not initially planned. These emerged as an additional course of action I considered relevant because it could contribute to a more in-depth view of Thomas and ZOO's working methods. In my account of the fieldwork, the days are numbered in line with my research process and not the overall production period. Thus, interviews and video recordings are ordered chronologically from day one to day twenty-one, the latter being the last day of data-gathering, at the premiere of *Flot*. Thomas worked with the company for seven weeks over a six-month period – a total of thirty-three days (see Table 1).

I pondered what the key periods of the creation would be and I thus established the intervals so as to observe the beginning, middle and closing of the process, and also the premiere. This decision was also informed by first-hand professional experience of creative and production processes – considering the importance of the first encounters between Thomas and the dancers, it was likely that the first week would be crucial to observing how he introduces and explains his practices and I therefore planned the first data-gathering week to begin on Thomas' first day with the company. I visited rehearsals five times, mostly in five-day blocks spread across the six months of production.

TABLE 1 OVERALL DATA-GATHERING AND FIELDWORK TIMELINE



Day 1 to 21 correspond to the fieldwork on the creation process and premiere of *Flot* (2018). Further data-gathering that falls outside the fieldwork period is not numbered.

On Sunday 6 May, 2018, I arrived in Nancy, France. Email exchanges with Valérie Ferrando, rehearsal director of Ballet de Lorraine, had helped me organise my stay and I booked a room at the hotel where Thomas was staying, a five-minute walk to the venue. Caroline Vermeulen, who manages ZOO, had sent me the schedule so that I could plan my fieldwork. Rehearsals started on 7 May, with most of them taking place between one and five o'clock, after the company had taken ballet training in the morning and rehearsed repertoire pieces. Towards the end of the process, this routine changed to accommodate rehearsals of other pieces that featured in the same programme as *Flot*.

Also included in Table 1 are the reconstruction of *Flot* and the interviews with Tristan and Vivien after the performance in Paris, France, in June 2019, the meeting with ZOO dancers Mat, Samantha and Sarah for our interviews in Lyon, France, and the performance of *How to Proceed* in Zurich in October 2019 – on which occasion I met Thomas for a follow-up interview.

Video documentation and live-annotation

Although the use of video documentation and annotation were a given due to my participation in the RV project, how the documentation should be undertaken was not set. How should I define my gaze into the event through the camera? What perspective should I assume? Will the presence of the camera have an impact on the artists? How many cameras are needed to draw out relevant information? These and other related questions needed to be addressed before I could enter the field. I hence planned and undertook a three-day pilot to simulate video documentation of a rehearsal⁴³, with the intention of making informed decisions about my perspective in the studio, the camera position and other issues. This pilot was extremely valuable; it pointed towards possible solutions to a few questions, raised new ones, and revealed complexities of adopting the ethnographic approach coupled with the use of video. I am familiar with the use of the video camera in creation processes and the presence of its sometimes invasive gaze as I have used it for various purposes in the studio, and to document performances for both archival and dissemination purposes. Still, this familiarity did not eliminate the challenge of undertaking research with this method.

⁴³ In September 2017, Jenny Beyer, a dancer and choreographer visiting Zurich for a residency at the Tanzhaus Zürich, agreed to let me observe part of the creation process of her then new creation *Fluss*, which premiered at Kampnagel in November 2017. This was a group piece for four dancers, including herself. I observed them during three days for about two hours each day.

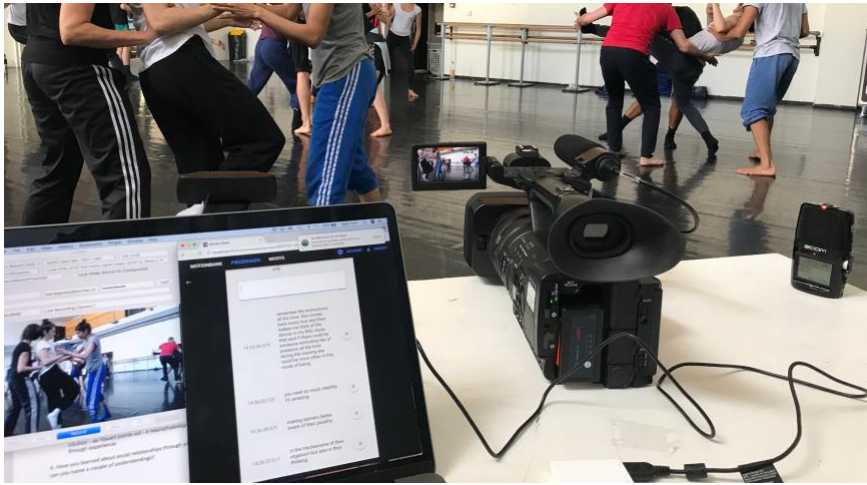
In conversation with the artists who took part in the pilot, it became clear that the presence of an observer had an impact on them, especially when I moved around in the room, positioning the camera in different places as they rehearsed; they reported that this had interfered directly with the event. There is a notion in qualitative research that what is observed is allowed to happen 'naturally' (Merriam and Tisdell 2016: 7). However, this pilot showed that 'naturalness' did not remain undisturbed. Dancers in the pilot spontaneously commented they were affected by the observation and felt they went into performance mode once they knew the camera was recording, which reportedly influenced their choices – a well-known outcome of research involving participant observation and video documentation. As Sabrina Habib and Ramon Hinojosa have noted, 'awareness of being involved in research may encourage some participants to behave differently', whether to 'construct behaviors consistent with what they perceive the research to want, or to avoid constructing behaviors that would portray them in a negative light' (2015: 43).

Although only one camera was used for the pilot, I had been advised to take two for the actual fieldwork in Nancy – one high-definition camera for good image quality, and one webcam to operate the annotation programme on the laptop⁴⁴. Bringing together this advice and the pilot experience, I concluded the cameras should remain as still as possible and have the same perspective, since my intention was to cause as little interference as possible to Thomas and Ballet de Lorraine. Besides, handling two cameras and annotating at the same time would be a complex operation – adding camera movement did not seem feasible in this setting. These factors also helped define the position of the cameras in relation to one another and to me, and hence video recordings were made with the cameras placed at arm's length, and side by side, thus with almost the same perspective (Figures 1 and 2). Where I would install my equipment in relation to the dancers remained an unanswered question and could only be determined once at the choreographic centre⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ The selection of suitable video equipment was informed by talks with members of the RV team, by the Motion Bank team (who advised me as to what type of camera to use to make recordings using Picemaker for the live-annotations) and by the pilot.

⁴⁵ My position in the room and the equipment set-up could be discussed with the rehearsal director only on the second day of fieldwork. An extension lead, a chair and a table were brought to the studio and placed in a corner so as not to disturb the area used by the dancers.

FIGURE 1: FIELDWORK – VIDEO DOCUMENTATION



Rehearsal of *Flot* at CCN Ballet de Lorraine, 9 May 2018 (day 3). Photo: Marisa Godoy.

There are two types of annotation in my data: annotations made during video recording, simultaneously to the documentation – known as live-annotation – and annotations created posteriorly, added to existing video footage – called post-annotation. Live-annotation played the role of note-taking during the fieldwork. My process was tentative, while at the same time moving towards the development and maturing of annotation strategies, and of a workflow that involved specific approaches to post-annotation as analysis as well as a mode of writing. In his writings on ethnography, Raymond Madden refers to the ‘mind’s eye’ to suggest the presence of an inner ethnographic seeing, but also of a more globally embodied experiencing of the event. In my observation, the mind’s eye acts less like a background in one’s mind and more like a permeating connective tissue. This helped probe some anticipations of the relationships and meanings of what I observed and how I responded (self-observation) in this global experience wherein the sensory and physical are not separate from ‘mental frames’ (Madden 2010: 110). These responses were interrelated and entered into a dialogue with the artists’ accounts, the audio and visual data, the journal entries and the literature, building up the body of data that informed analysis and interpretation and elucidated the inquiry.

I entered the field equipped with a laptop, a high-definition video camera and tripod, a webcam and the Motion Bank annotation software Piecemaker⁴⁶. To live-annotate with Piecemaker, I had to be online throughout the rehearsal. The internet connection in the choreographic centre Ballet de Lorraine, however, was not stable and the recording with Piecemaker was sometimes interrupted, sometimes not possible at all.

Live-annotation was very helpful in the process of discovering what to note. This project being my first experience of fieldwork (though my interests were pretty clear and my research questions were becoming ever better defined), I was somewhat lost regarding sorting out my thought processes and deciding what belonged in the annotations. Drawing on approaches I adopt in my artistic practice, I decided to integrate my flow of thoughts and type freely, not prejudging whether a specific thought was directly connected to the research questions. This experience showed me that I was indeed immersed in the project and was looking at the event through the lens of the research – sometimes more intently, sometimes less – and that an analytical predisposition had already installed itself. Approaching any thought as potentially relevant and integrating very personal observations brought into the analytical post-annotation process a richness that I was glad to encounter. Certain reflections that seemed at first senseless, but were nevertheless noted at the early stages of annotating live, turned out to be so relevant that they have made their way through to the discussion chapter.

The movement involved in live-annotation is swift and facilitates registering thoughts as soon as they appear. Annotations can be edited, allowing for mistakes to be dealt with later, thus the flow of thoughts can be typed without much preoccupation. In contrast, when there was no internet connection in the studio it was a curious experience to make notes in a Word document and at the same time write down the time entry of the video recorder for each note I made. I realised how quickly the live-annotation practice had turned into something self-evident to me.

⁴⁶ Piecemaker is a digital tool for the generation of text-based annotation that allows for live- and post-annotation of time-based media. Each annotation is linked to a particular moment in the media in question. The first version of the software was created by The Forsythe Company for internal use. Developed by then company member David Kern (Rittershaus 2020), it was later used in the Motion Bank research project (Ziegler 2017: 43). The tool's specificity to the needs of dance practice and production makes it unique; its newer versions are designed to be convenient and low threshold (Rittershaus 2020). My use of the tool followed interactions with the Motion Bank team in the early stages of my research, especially through my Director of Studies, and later through David Rittershaus, who gave me advice about the software installation and other relevant details.

In the studio, I also analysed what I saw and thought, even if only sketchily. Processes such as making immediate connections between what was being observed and my own experience, and between that and my reading and writing at the time, were unavoidable. What emerged as a fitting, meaningful approach to annotation was the registration of thoughts occurring in the moment with a loose filter, allowing for snippets of analysis and interpretation (which I noticed were intrinsic to observation) to flow parallel to descriptive entries. Madden suggests that, as we observe, ‘in the real time of “seeing”, we can be inside and outside, and so it should be’ (Madden 2010: 110). Not only did I experience this shift between inside and outside on that occasion, but I also noticed some features that resonated with first-hand experience of creating and articulating movement ideas, of experimenting in the studio, which came together with my tentative ethnographic gaze and annotation practice. It seemed that the analytical mode *had* to be operating throughout observation, with some early stages of coding already taking place as I annotated. Initial categorisation attempts, present in the live-annotations, offered the forthcoming post-annotation a basis for the organisation of meanings and for further trials, with recurrent names or themes revealing possible avenues to follow, and others proving fruitless. In his analogy between category-making and caring for a plant, lecturer on Writing Skills Desmond Thomas says that, after representing main and subsidiary themes, the researcher can decide ‘which branches should be pruned and which should be allowed to flourish’ (Thomas 2016: 178).

FIGURE 2: FIELDWORK – VIDEO DOCUMENTATION



Rehearsal of *Flot* at CCN Ballet de Lorraine, 9 May 2018 (day 3). Photo: Marisa Godoy.

Interview data

Interview is a well-known method that potentially furnishes an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Patton 2002). With the intention of achieving clarity and concision in my questions, I sought the advice of my supervisory team in the process of writing the semi-structured interview guide. As a result of this interaction, I was made aware of biased elements in the guide and took steps to 'minimize preconceiving the data' (Charmaz 2014: 106). I made efforts to reduce bias in both the written guide and the one-to-one interaction itself, while not completely avoiding conversational elements. In agreeing to be interviewed, the artists showed a certain degree of trust in me as interviewer and researcher. It was thus important to me to care about the atmosphere that was being created, to keep it friendly and not too distant. In hindsight, I identify an issue regarding what Kathy Charmaz describes as giving 'research participants a space, time – and human connection – to reflect on the events anew and to clarify meanings and actions while providing rich data that spark analytic insights' (2014: 80). The dancers were not aware of my actual research questions and I explained that no specific answer was expected from them and that my interest lay in their experience. One interview with each dancer and with Thomas was planned for each visit, yet the actual number of interviews was dictated both by the artists' availability and by variations in the process.

During my first five-day stay in Nancy, I interviewed Thomas on the third day of rehearsals in a café close to the studios. Since the dancers had received the participant information sheet on day one, I waited a couple of days to address them regarding their interest in contributing to the research. This meant that we could only book the interviews for my second visit in June. Lasting an average of 40 minutes, the interviews with the dancers were carried out on CCN Ballet de Lorraine's premises, whereas those with Thomas took place in different locations, depending on his availability. The last interviews with Tristan and Vivien were conducted remotely⁴⁷. I have considered the interviews with Mat, Samantha and Sarah (ZOO) another set of data – as it is not related to the observation of a creation process and it constitutes only one-off interviews, which are hence not numbered in Table 1. We met in Lyon, France, at the café in the cultural centre where they were performing, with each interview lasting between 30 and 40 minutes.

⁴⁷ Pauline left the company right after the first set of performances at the Opéra national de Lorraine. She did not perform *Flot* in June 2019 and was therefore not interviewed a fourth time.

Verbatim interview transcriptions were produced. All collaborating artists received an email with their transcripts to check whether what was written was accurate and in line with their experience. This measure, referred to as ‘member check’, aligns with qualitative research concerns about validity, located under the criterion of trustworthiness (Saukko 2003: 20, 59). Verbatim transcription captures utterances such as *er*, *uhm* and *um-hum*. Since reading interview quotes that include such speech fillers can be difficult and can interrupt the reading flow, I edited the quotes presented in the thesis to ensure a smoother reading (excerpts of the verbatim transcripts are provided in the appendices). I informed the artists of this procedure and added that, should I not receive any comments on the transcripts by a defined date, I would assume they agreed with the contents. Most of them replied stating their agreement, some did not. In Thomas’ case, I also offered to share with him the main findings of my research and of the RV project, as well as my presentation at the closing conference of the RV project in January 2021⁴⁸.

After the premiere and the subsequent performances of *Flot* in November 2018, Ballet de Lorraine was invited to show the piece in June 2019 in Paris. This meant that it had to be reconstructed. Since one of my research questions relates directly to sustaining over time the modes of being and operating required to perform improvisation choreography, I saw this reconstruction of the piece as an opportunity to observe the company’s process in that endeavour, and hear about Tristan’s and Vivien’s experiences. Ballet de Lorraine agreed to my visit on the three days reserved for this process. Thomas was not involved in the rehearsals, which were led by the company’s rehearsal director, but he was able to attend the first show in Paris. In a virtual meeting, I interviewed Tristan and Vivien a few days after the performances. I also interviewed Thomas to learn how his experience of the performance had been. This interview happened some months later, on the occasion of ZOO’s visit to Zurich to perform *Inaudible* (2016) in October 2019.

⁴⁸ The conference ‘The Art of Video (in) Research’ took place virtually on 14 and 15 January 2021. I was a co-organiser and co-moderator in the conference, and I also presented my research at the event.

Autoethnographic data – Moving as research method and journaling

Once the autoethnographic method was adopted as a way to integrate reflections and elaborations resulting from continual movement practice, I engaged in purposeful journaling. While I still took notes on various matters related to the research, the nature of journaling soon settled into something that was distinct from general notes. Journaling was carried out through various media, mainly manually in notebooks but also on smart phone applications as written notes and as voice memos that I later transcribed. Journal entries were often short, condensed insights or questions that arose as I moved – in movement practices in the studio, on my bicycle, in the corridors at work. I often paused my activity to register emerging thoughts:

thinking is movement

when we speak about a train of thoughts, we certainly do not mean a train halted at a station, but one that moves in a direction towards a destination.

we also speak about a flow of thoughts, which by definition implies movement.

these formulations come to my mind as i stand up from my chair at my working desk and walk away from the computer to get some water.

as i press the button of the water dispenser to fill my bottle and wait till it's full, my musings still move within the recurrent question of what my movement practice could bring into this research. and i have, in this very moment, to recapitulate that insights that occurred in moments such as this were the elicitor of the idea to carry out an ongoing movement practice, and see what a purposeful practice of movement using the lens chosen for this study would generate.

(10.07.2018, smart phone note sent to myself as email at 16:00 during a short break to go get water. on this day i did yoga at 9:00 and my own movement practice for quarter of an hour at lunch time)

Journaling was a free space of writing down or speaking out as thoughts manifested, with their own order and logic. It disrupted the expository writing and thus worked also as a way to loosen the intricacies of academic reflection, writing structure and terminology.

3.4 Approach to gathered data and analysis method

Once the fieldwork was planned, the variety of media in the research demanded a realistic and clear approach to the data and the analysis process. Dealing with different methods of analysis for each medium would have potentially scattered the process of extracting meaningful insights from all the information I gathered.

Although I interacted with literature on video analysis in qualitative research, for example the writings of Hubert Knoblauch, Bernt Schnettler and René Tuma (2014), the diversity of approaches to video data I came across led to the decision to opt for one single overall method that could guide the exploration of the interview content, as well as the video material and my ongoing movement practice journal entries. I had set myself the task of searching for patterns in the data and considering what these patterns meant, a process characteristic of Grounded Theory (GT) as method of analysis, and which was then adopted as a suitable approach. This process included a creative stance and a relationship to the data that followed rather intuitive modes of thinking/acting, similar to artistic approaches to analysis and synthesis. Locke has named this dual mode of operation 'rational controlled' and 'irrational free-playing' modes, which she sees 'as necessary tension in grounded theorizing' (2008: 565). She further affirms that, though little has been said about it, 'the imaginative, open-ended (discovery) aspect of our thinking' is what GT procedures and practices 'are designed to elicit and provide a scaffolding for' (2008: 565). In order to look into the data, GT worked as a converging lens through which the exploration of the different data sets occurred. Not that GT would converge everything onto a single point, but, as it is a method with similar characteristics to the way in which my research developed – explorative and discovery-oriented research practices – it offered a well-established *modus operandi* for an undertaking that requires methods other than the artistic.

In a general sense, the approaches and practices I engaged in were driven by a practice-led line of inquiry but progressed with two different approaches, ethnographic and autoethnographic. This involved distinct procedures and generated data of different natures. Thus, between my second and third visits to Ballet de Lorraine in June and October 2018, the first steps towards analysis of the interview transcripts were taken, which afforded clearer relationships between interview content, the video material and live-annotations. Moving back and forth from interview transcripts to video footage to annotations to literature in an iterative process helped refine the creation of categories that built the corpus of my analysis, synthesis and discussion.

3.4.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is currently considered the most widely applied qualitative research method (Bryant and Charmaz 2008; Clarke and Friese 2008; Denzin 2014). It entails the simultaneous collection and analysis of data, on a continuum where the researcher

engages in persistent interaction with data while remaining involved with analysis, thus profiting from the reciprocal relationship between these aspects in the construction of theory (Bryant and Charmaz 2008; Thornberg and Charmaz 2014). GT was developed in 1967 by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss who, according to Ian Dey, emphasised 'the virtue of generating theory through interaction with data' that is 'obtained through social research to generate ideas' (2008: 172). Since then, GT has been applied and revised by various researchers who, in turn, have developed more contemporary versions of the method (Bryant and Charmaz 2008: 1; Clarke and Friese 2008: 363; Thornberg and Charmaz 2014: 153).

Constructivist Grounded Theory – a 'second generation' remodelled version of GT – resonates with the nature of my study and provides a suitable structure for data analysis. Developed by researchers including Antony Bryant, Jane Mill, Ann Bonner, Karen Francis and Kathy Charmaz (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014: 153), Constructivist GT addresses recent postmodern concerns with relationality, reflexivity, positionality and difference (Clarke and Friese 2008: 363). Aspects of the original GT, such as the notion that the data 'could speak for itself' (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014: 154) and its rather positivist discourse and terminology were questioned to make room for a version ingrained in pragmatism and relativist ways of knowing (2014). Constructivist GT aligns with this study's paradigms, namely, that there are multiple realities and multiple viewpoints on these realities, and that data and theory are co-constructed as a result of interactions between researcher and participants (Denzin and Lincoln 2011b; Thornberg and Charmaz 2014: 154). It is believed that the extensive use of GT particularly in practice professions has produced substantial advances in these practice fields (Bryant and Charmaz 2008: 1). The following factors rendered GT a fitting method⁴⁹ with which to analyse my data: my disposition to enter the field with an openness to what was there to be perceived, experienced, discovered and interpreted; the priming of a relational dynamics between self, other and environment; and the search for emerging patterns and areas of intersection among the elements that constitute the field within which my inquiry is situated.

⁴⁹ I was unaware that the course of action I was interested in following had been theorised as Grounded Theory, and it was only in conversation with my Director of Studies Scott deLahunta that I came to look into GT as a possible method of analysis, and hence to opt for this approach.

I devised an interpretive practice informed mainly by the writings of Kathy Charmaz, Norman Denzin, Ian Dey and Karen Locke. The common ground I identify in their work, which applies to the reality I look into and how I relate to it, is their engagement with postmodern concerns and with the creative dimensions of GT's analytic practices, their interpretive perspective, and their commitment to a writing style in grounded theorising consistent with such positionings. Examples that particularly speak to my own views are Locke's notion that 'theorizing takes place within the confines and reach of an embodied researcher' (2008: 566) and Denzin's view that '[w]riting is simultaneously a method of discovery, a method of interpretation, and a method of analysis', that in making sense of what we learn as researchers we write 'tales from the field' that are 'performances; that is, they are stories we perform for another' (2014: 569).

Today we have moved from writing thick descriptions of the world, to performances which put the world into motion. We have moved from a paradigm which says the world is a text to be read or analysed, to a paradigm which says the world is a performance. The performance model privileges experiential knowing, participatory epistemologies, intimacy, and involvement as forms of understanding (Denzin 2014: 570).

Although the method's name suggests fully fledged theories arising from GT studies (Timonen, Foley and Conlon 2018: 4), the outcome is in fact often 'greater conceptual clarity' or 'a framework that links concepts but falls short of a fully elaborated theory that covers all aspects, stages, consequences, and likelihood of a process or a phenomenon' (2018: 4). Antony Bryant, a professor of informatics and writer on qualitative methods, contends that a grounded theory can hardly claim this status at its initial stage; it becomes one with time and once it has received the attention of others (2017: 99). Hence, my intention aligns with the view of achieving conceptual clarity (Timonen, Foley and Conlon 2018) and creating a *framework* or *model* (Bryant 2017: 99) to better understand my topic of inquiry.

Applying Grounded Theory

Having identified the above, and gradually familiarising myself with GT analysis as I engaged with the gathered data, I set out to transcribe the interviews with Thomas and the Ballet de Lorraine dancers. 'Opening up' the data (Timonen, Foley and Conlon 2018: 5), and identifying recurring terms or units that suggested possible codes were the first steps. This happened, alternately, through the transcription of the first set of interviews conducted in the initial phase of the creation process of *Flot*, and through reviewing video documentation and live-annotations from rehearsals. With this initial review of video

footage I also aimed to identify and select sequences related to the research questions in order to carry out the video-cued recall⁵⁰ interviews I wanted to test out in the second phase of fieldwork.

As I was familiar with interview transcription but admittedly unexperienced in video data analysis at the stage I describe here, it seemed suitable that I deal with the interviews early in the process. Thus all interviews from the first phase of fieldwork (May/June 2018) were transcribed before I entered the second phase (October/November 2018), which informed the observations that were still to come, in line with the GT intertwined observation-analysis continuum.

Moving closer to the data was marked by informal but systematic note-making on the same document during transcription, a strategy known as 'memoing' (Charmaz 2014: 165; Dey 1993: 302; Wiener 2008: 302), using brackets to differentiate the artists' words from my memos. There was no predefined rationale behind this strategy; the certainty that every thought related to the material was part of a reflective process that was worth noting right away, otherwise relevant emerging connections might get lost. Soon annotation practice as analysis ran parallel to the transcription process and, as a hash tag (#) and a search feature were then introduced to the RV tool, I started to add headings to my memos preceded by a hash tag. Memos on the written document and tagging in RV merged into an action that helped identify the recurrence of certain units across the different types of data and facilitated coding. According to sociologist Carolyn Wiener, giving memos a heading has importance in theory building because it makes it easier to sort memos further on in the process, and also to see where they 'cross-cut' (2008: 302). In these memos, I intuitively wrote freely what came to mind in relation to the interviewees' accounts, and sometimes assigned numerous tags to the same memo, leaving detailed analysis and the definition of where it belonged to the later stage of 'focused coding' (Charmaz 2014: 138). In GT, this approach involves unconstrained writing, inhibiting the

⁵⁰ In my initial interactions with the RV tool, I imagined including what I thought of as 'audio annotations'. These would be audio recordings of the dancers watching the video documentation of rehearsals and commenting on what they recalled, or on thoughts associated with their experience. I was interested in the dancers' recall process as triggered by watching the video. For this purpose, the selection of sequences focused on the learning process of Thomas' methods, and the practices he proposed at the beginning. While live-annotating in May/June, I signalled points in the video that seemed relevant for the video-cued recall interviews, marked them in the editing software Premiere and showed these scenes to the dancers in our second interviews in October 2018. The whole idea, however, proved tricky and impossible to implement in the RV platform. Although the audio has not been used in the annotated videos, these interviews have been transcribed and their content analysed.

'internal debate over the issue of significance', and it is regarded as a 'central requirement of memo writing' (Wiener 2008: 302).

On hard copies of the transcripts, I used colour markers to underline, highlight and assign different colours to various emerging themes. Through this, and by actively naming the data (Charmaz 2014: 115), similarities started to arise, codes were defined and temporary categories were named. It is said that GT has a strong causal inclination, yet allows for the study of relationships between categories (Dey 2008: 181). Due to the nature of my inquiry, my focus lay precisely on emerging patterns and their relationships, not on causality. Asking the question of 'which patterns are worthy of recognition, or further conceptual analysis', as suggested by writer on qualitative research Ian Dey (2008: 177), helped the process of constant comparison that is characteristic of GT. Dey has pointed out that '[r]eading and annotating are processes which aid the "digestion" of our data. [...] they are two facets of the same process of absorbing information and reflecting upon it' (1993: 87).

Moving in closer to the data and, as suggested by sociologist Karen Locke, bringing their 'concrete details into focus', I drew upon the artists' expressions as guides to the nature of their experiences (2008: 571); a more targeted exploration of the gathered data directed the inquiry towards issues that were relevant and/or problematic to the artists and the context in focus (2008: 571). Anthropologist Stephen Spencer argues that analysis 'does not start, or stop, at a point in a linear research sequence' (2011: 133). As I combined reading with reporting gathered data, and entered the actual process of analysing the data stemming from the first period of fieldwork, Spencer's words above corresponded to my reviewing of and describing the data, diving deeper into this plural, complex and at times complicated process. This was the point on the research continuum, as well as the place in the thesis, where analysis proper was targeted – described, reflected upon, taken forward and articulated – yet, the analytical mode had permeated every phase of the research. As Spencer puts it, '[t]he process of research is necessarily self-referential; much analysis begins with the ideas and beliefs which underpin the approach, the question and the research strategy chosen' (2011: 133).

Norman Denzin speaks about 'the writer-as-performer' and observes that '[m]oving from the field, to the text, to the performance, to the reader is a complex, reflexive process' (2014: 571). He goes on to say that the writer introduces a 'particular and unique self'

(2014: 571) to the text, who asserts some authority over the topic she interprets. Also addressing the authority of the researcher, Flyvbjerg contends that case studies entail 'proximity to reality' and generate a learning process for the researcher – 'a prerequisite for advanced understanding' (2011: 310). He adds that this comprehension is achieved when the researcher places herself within the context being studied and when she possesses the skills required to participate in the activity described. This enables the understanding of 'the viewpoints and the behavior that characterizes social actors' that will engender valid descriptions of the social event (2011: 310). Thus, Chapter 4, on reporting and analysing data, condenses and consolidates the mini-analytical processes that were ignited at the outset and continued throughout the research journey.

As recurrent patterns crystalised, as the data-comparison process gradually moved towards category definition, close reading and viewing of the video footage – as well as 'close listening' of the interviews – gained importance. Connections between the artists' statements materialised and permeated the way in which I viewed and annotated the videos. It is clear that the questions I asked biased to a certain extent the artists' answers and influenced the appearance of certain terms. Ian Dey contends that 'any "data", regardless of method, are in fact "produced" by the researcher' (1993: 16). A deeper interaction with the audio recordings and transcriptions therefore became imperative in this process, and this eventually exposed the particularities of the dancers' experience and/or personal views – combined with self-reflection, this helped reduce biased assumptions as I went. Repeatedly listening to certain excerpts – carried out also at the end of the study, while writing the discussion chapter – revealed aspects that were not available during transcription and coding. In their paper on the challenges of using GT, Virpi Timonen, Geraldine Foley and Catherine Conlon call attention to creative processes involved in GT analysis, saying that 'connections must develop from close readings of the data that might not be apparent at face value' (2018: 7), with comparison of data against data to identify similarities and disparities between sets marking an important aspect and the 'key premise of coding'; the question 'what is this data doing in relation to this inquiry?' (2018: 7) must be a recurrent one.

The final stage of the category building that led to the conceptual framework was a process of iterative naming and renaming and grouping and regrouping of categories, intensive reflection and repeated reading of the written material I was generating. It also involved listening to the interviews once more.

Approach to video footage – Annotation practice as method of analysis

I explored post-annotation in three distinct ways. First as practice, from the annotator's perspective, and second as dissemination material, adopting the viewer/reader's viewpoint. Thirdly, since the act of annotating requires instruments, and the annotated materials my research is concerned with need spaces or platforms for others to view them, I also researched tools created for the annotation of time-based media and for publication in dance. Here I describe how annotation was implemented and with what purposes. Reflections on the various aspects of my annotation practice, as well as questions arising in this process, will feature in one track dedicated to this, within the RV projects integrated into Chapter 4 and 5.

A hard realisation at this stage of the project was one that has been pointed out by various researchers: video analysis is laborious, and analysing one hour of footage may require tens if not hundreds of hours (Xiao and Mackenzie 2004: 128), which can be intimidating (Habib and Hinojosa 2015: 42). I cannot stress enough the importance of my iterative clarification of the focus of the study, of recalling the research questions and of applying the method of analysis I opted for. Getting lost in the material and in the technical complications of working with a video annotation prototype was a constant risk.

Having started the coding process on the interview transcripts, I moved to post-annotation, and then back and forth between these two types of data, developing a workflow that joined transcription with the exploratory and interpretive character of video analysis (Habib and Hinojosa 2015: 43) in the RV tool. One particularity was the parallel use of two online annotation platforms. Live-annotations had been stored in Piecemaker and post-annotation was done in the RV platform, which meant importing into the latter the live-annotations as I watched the video documentation. Viewing the live-annotations as they appeared in Piecemaker had a curious effect on the post-annotation: the very design of this annotation space that I had used during fieldwork triggered memories of the moment of observation in the studio, and at times caused me to relive what precisely in the event had prompted a certain annotation. Moving between these two spaces was laborious yet beneficial, because I revisited some aspects of the fieldwork experience.

In my research, I do not analyse movement carried out by itself. The study looks at collaborative creation processes, what they involve, and investigates choreographic

parameters that are not only structural and spatiotemporal but also touch upon and compose with the somewhat tacit capacities operating from the innermost spheres of individual dancers. These innermost aspects then expand to the wider scope of the shared events and experiences. Movement is of utmost importance; however, the focus lies on how movement is improvised collaboratively and what that involves. In this regard, GT was an effective approach in combination with the possibility of pausing the video and annotating, repeated viewing granting access to information that fell outside the scope of attention in the studio. These are known characteristics of video-based research and they greatly assist in the creation of theoretical and conceptual insights (Habib and Hinojosa 2015: 43).

One affordance of annotation is the transcription of audio data in the video. Viewing and annotating, which included the transcription of verbal interactions, allowed for the systematic observation of verbal and non-verbal exchanges in the rehearsal. Annotating afforded different ways of looking at the data and also different actions in relation to the material, facilitating the constant comparison that is considered the 'heart' of GT and described by Habib and Hinojosa as

the practice of continual, systematic comparison of word-to-word, line-to-line, case-to-case (i.e., individual to individual), case to category (i.e., individual experience to themes and subthemes), and categories to categories (i.e., themes to themes) along their various properties and dimensions (2015: 45).

Concerning the purpose of this practice, I not only analysed video data by means of annotation but had the additional task of annotating the video material in a prototype annotator and reflecting on its affordances and utility, on each feature it contained, and also envisioning additional ones that could be developed for implementation – to me a whole new, uncharted territory. This was my role in the RV project and I had to report back to the software developers on the outcomes of using the tool. To use an illustrative term, I had to wear various hats as I post-annotated. Switching from questions related to my topic – 'what are the data telling me?', 'how is Pauline interacting with Thomas?' – to questions related to the development of the tool – 'why can't I delete the tags I don't need anymore?', 'why is the tool not saving my changes?', 'what features are likely to provide a meaningful viewing experience?' – required changing swiftly from one perspective to the other and this added complexity to the practice of post-annotation.

My forming of the categories and synthesis of the findings to build a conceptual framework was assisted by my drafting an 'annotated video article' in the RV platform. As part of the RV project, one of the outputs of my research was expected to be published as Research Video. For this task I focused on the 'improvised unison' practice (Section 4.1.1) and produced an edited video composed of various excerpts from both rehearsals and performance documentation. This material was further developed for a presentation in the closing conference of the project, a process during which a number of unclear relationships between the categories were elucidated, along with how to relate these to the literature. What I wish to convey is that the journey of annotation practice was marked by very distinct stages, perspectives and actions, all contributing to both the development of a hybrid thesis format and the outcomes of the GT analysis.

3.5 Video annotation as mode of writing and reading

Here I speak about the presentation of data (reporting) and the use of annotated video not only to exemplify, describe and illustrate – for example, providing images of the practices explored in the studio – but also to develop an argument or indicate a piece of evidence. In this regard, I consider the annotated video material that is integrated into the thesis as imparting detail and depth to the analysis and discussion. My description in text form within the manuscript has a certain scope and reach, as do the annotated videos. Yet, the latter offer the reader a dynamic, time-based and visual interaction with and an insight into ineffable aspects of the creation process. The annotated videos also offer a view into my annotation practice and fieldnotes, aspects of my interaction with the RV tool, as well into the data analysis/synthesis process.

Part of my research involved studying a selection of projects in which video annotation is a central method of analysis and is used also as a publication format⁵¹. This helped develop methods of data-gathering, analysis and representation and to locate my study in relation to current research. Although not an exhaustive exploration of such projects, it brought to the fore a basic distinction between my use of annotation and that of existing

⁵¹ Examples of the studied online publications are 'A Digital Essay on Performance' (2020) by Peter Hulton (available from <http://arts-archives.org/introduction/>); 'Visualizing Embodied Research: Dance Dramaturgy and Animated Infographic Films' (2018) by Stephan Jürgens and Carla Fernandes (available from <https://jer.openlibhums.org/articles/10.16995/jer.4/>); and the Motion Bank Online Scores *Two* (2013, available from <http://scores.motionbank.org/two/#/set/sets>), *Using the Sky* (2013, available from <http://scores.motionbank.org/dh/#/set/sets>), *Between Us* (2019, available from <https://betweenus.motionbank.org/#/>) and *Threaded Fine* (2020, available from <https://threadedfine.motionbank.org/#/>).

publications containing annotated video. Despite their points of intersection with my project, none of them weaves the textual context of a manuscript with annotated video that is accessible online. In practising annotation and creating the dual mode of presentation used for this thesis, various questions arose regarding the purpose and utility of video annotation in sharing research outcomes – exemplification, illustration, argumentation, indication of evidence, description, audio transcription.

As described previously, live-annotation afforded me the chance to mark and comment on studio-based processes as they unfolded. The post-annotation was itself a specific mode of writing, engendered as I viewed and reviewed the video documentation multiple times. Unlike live-annotation, this process was non-linear in relation to the material and made it possible for me to closely link one observation to another in my in-depth writing and viewing. The written thesis itself was another kind of writing practice, as the narrative required again a linear kind of approach, and it was not always easy to intermingle my video annotation data with the numerous questions that arose as the overall thesis also evolved. Sometimes these differences, between textual contents presented in the thesis and those in the annotated videos, were difficult to reconcile.

To convey the specificities of the annotation practice and present this aspect of the analysis process to the reader/viewer, I decided to distil the writing made in the online tool from the writing generated on the Word document page. After various experiments and drafts that aimed to create the structure of this hybrid research output, I refined the content of each track in the annotated videos' timeline, and named these as follows:

- SECTIONS, indicating the segments of the video in terms of rehearsal events
- PRACTICE DESCRIPTION, providing information on each practice (related to Chapter 4)
- COMMENTARIES, that have a discussion-like character (related to Chapter 5)
- FIELDNOTES, containing the most relevant fieldnotes made in Piecemaker
- POST-ANNOTATION PRACTICE, whose contents relate to the use of the prototype, and to 'memoing-like' responses to the video data.

Transcriptions of what was said in the studio were initially recorded in the RV platform as annotations. At a later stage, through my realising the importance of this data and the

better suitability of using subtitles to represent what was said in the studio, the content of the transcriptions was used to generate subtitles⁵² in a video editing software.

This chapter presented the methodology and the methods used to explore and synthesise the data I gathered. Some aspects of the integration of the RV projects and their contents have been explained, and will be further elucidated in the video 'RV TUTORIAL 2'. This tutorial is a preparation to the actual experience of viewing/reading the annotated videos I created. In Chapter 4, I will report the data that stemmed from fieldwork and journaling, intertwining descriptions with narratives of ethnographic work, autoethnographic entries and annotated video material. I provide an insight into the co-creation of *Flot* through what I observed in the studio, in subsequent repeated viewings of the video footage and in conversations with the collaborating artists.

Both Chapters 4 and 5 contain integrated annotated videos that the reader will come across while reading; these are references to specific sections with time code. However, that is not the optimal way to explore the annotated video materials since it embeds the links in a linear narrative, and the annotated videos are themselves edited for a non-linear viewing and reading experience. In view of this, I propose an 'interlude': before going onto Chapters 4 and 5, the reader is invited to explore the annotated videos for what they themselves offer, as a landscape of information that has been crucial to the research. The RV projects can be regarded as forming a 'virtual chapter', as it were, and are a selection of the overall video documentation containing the making process, and the generative practices (or strategies) that form *Flot*. These strategies – the 'careful scientist', the 'metal wire', the 'assisted solo', the 'improvised unison' and the 'complementary' – are outcomes of ZOO's longstanding creative practice.

Here, I suggest reviewing the video 'RV TUTORIAL 1', and then watching the video 'RV TUTORIAL 2', which you downloaded from the SWITHCdrive server. After this, read the beginning of Chapter 4, up to the end of Section 4.1.1, just before the generative practices are described. At this point, the reader can move to the annotated videos in the steps indicated below.

⁵² In this selection of annotated videos, only the most relevant verbal instructions, indications and exchanges are conveyed as subtitles.

1. Open the RV platform (<https://rv.zhdk.ch/>) in Google Chrome
2. Open the RV projects in the order they appear in the folder, taking about 20 minutes to explore each project, as suggested in the second tutorial:
 DAY 2_180508
 DAY 3_180509
 DAY 5_180511
 DAY 7_180619
 DAY 6_180618
 DAY 16_181106
3. Go back to the manuscript and resume reading Chapter 4. Throughout this chapter specific times in the video are referred to, and the reader can go back to the RV projects to explore the annotations accordingly
4. After Section 4.1.2, I suggest watching the video documentation of *Flot* in the project FLOT_PERFORMANCE (clearly indicated at the end of section 4.1.2)
5. Resume reading Chapter 4 and move to Chapter 5, which contains further references to annotated videos.

TABLE 2 VIDEO FILES

FILE NAME	DURATION
DAY 2_180508.rv	01:04:16
DAY 3_180509.rv	01:03:09
DAY 5_180511.rv	01:00:00
DAY 6_180618.rv	00:41:27
DAY 7_180619.rv	00:56:26
DAY 16_181106.rv	00:50:44
FLOT_PERFORMANCE.rv	00:39:34
RV TUTORIAL 1.mp4	00:06:38
RV TUTORIAL 2.mp4	00:11:34

This list shows all the video files stored in the SWITCHdrive folder.⁵³

⁵³ These projects contain original audio from the rehearsals, including copyright protected music used by Thomas Hauert. I was advised by Coventry University's Doctoral College to keep the original audio for the first thesis submission, and deal with the audio data after the viva voce examination.

4 In the field of collaborative dance-making – Macro- and microcosms of improvisation choreography

In this chapter I turn to the making of *Flot*, the microcosm Thomas created in collaboration with Ballet de Lorraine, presenting both written narratives of fieldwork and reports of gathered data, and online annotated videos in the RV platform. I also address the macrocosm that Mat, Samantha, Sarah and Thomas, together with other members of ZOO, engendered. Practices, processes and performance are explored in a hybrid mode of presentation, researching the question of how dance materials can be appreciated through time-based data, and how working with video can elucidate my inquiry. The RV projects present my video documentation, exemplifying the practices Thomas proposed in the making process, while also providing evidence for the ideas explored in my discussion. Moreover, these projects are the space of my annotation practice, wherein the reader/viewer can appreciate a synthesis of the various layers of interaction the prototype affords. Most of the fieldnotes (made as live-annotation in Piecemaker) are also provided, offering the viewer the opportunity to correlate live- and post-annotations and thus to gain an insight into the analysis continuum.

4.1 Thomas and Ballet de Lorraine in the making of *Flot*

Fieldwork one

Nancy, France, 7 May 2018. I join the first day of rehearsal of *Flot* and fieldwork for this study begins. Most of the faces in the room are new to me, and most of them are likewise new to Thomas. He and the dancers of Ballet de Lorraine had not met before, except for two dancers who participated in a workshop given by his company at Ballet Junior de Genève⁵⁴ where they previously studied. The dancers have already taken their morning ballet training, have rehearsed repertoire, and now reconvene in the studio after lunch break. Petter, the company director, introduces Thomas and myself to everyone, and mentions I am a researcher who is going to observe the creation process. The occasion is thrilling but it feels awkward to be in this position. There has been no opportunity to speak to the dancers about my project beforehand, so I just sit on the floor and observe – computer open on my lap, typing notes. The video cameras and audio recorder remain untouched in their cases. At this point in my research (in fact in my life) a totally new terrain opens up for exploration. Entering new terrain suggests – and even promises – possibilities of new discoveries, a thrilling prospect. But it also throws the

⁵⁴ The Ballet Junior de Genève was created in 1980 as a pre-professional company that offers the dancers the opportunity to work with established choreographers and gather experience to enter their professional life (École de Danse de Genève 2016).

explorer into unknown territory, exposes her to unexpected challenges and limitations, some of which are uncomfortable, some unnegotiable and unsolvable. The expectation of meeting my potential participants and having time to explain the research in detail is my first unfulfilled expectation. Ballet de Lorraine is a large company with a tight working schedule realised under time pressure. By the time I can speak to the dancers, it is the end of their working day, they seem to be tired and some of them are in a hurry to leave: family arrangements, go to university, and so on. I rush to explain my research, hand out the participant information sheet and the consent form for them to read, and consider if they would like to join, and please let me know. This was day 1.

In her article entitled 'Schooling an Ensemble', Vass-Rhee noted that 'dancers new to Forsythe's ensemble faced a phase of adjustment not only to the company's ballet-derived yet deeply somatically informed "idiolect" but also to the relative autonomy of devising under Forsythe's direction' (2018: 224). Similarly, and also because Ballet de Lorraine is a company with a rather traditional structure, chiefly engaging with 'form-generative modes of working' (2018: 224), Pauline, Tristan, Vivien and their fellow dancers first had to go through a phase of exploration of Thomas' practices and generative approach. The overall process not only required them to learn new skills by way of Thomas' practices and making process, it also proposed a transformational process and a shift of paradigm. This transformational process relates to the innermost dimensions of each individual and affects their movement generation. The paradigmatic shift involves the notion of practice as performance, not as a regular set of exercises that loses importance once the piece is finished. I briefly mention these aspects here and will explore them further in Chapter 5.

In her writing on practice, reflecting on where and when expert practice occurs, Susan Melrose signals 'that expert practitioners also practise performing arts practices, as **research** or not, in the workshop and throughout the rehearsal period, as well as in the performance event, and sometimes well beyond it' (Melrose 2006b: 99, original emphasis). Thomas' ideas and worldview permeate and manifest in every strategy, in every interaction, in all dimensions of self/other/environment, and in every scene of *Flot*, something choreographer and scholar Matthew Nelson addresses in saying: 'the movements I choose to practice reflect who and how I want to be' (Nelson 2013: 156). Professor of Dance Ann Cooper Albright speaks of improvisation as a philosophy of life, a way to relate to experiences with 'a willingness to explore the realm of possibility, not in order to find the correct solution but simply *find out*' (2019: 25, original emphasis).

Certain distinctions between practice, process and performance may pose challenges to the integrity of this work, which could lead to the role of the different layers involved in the microcosm *Flot* being overlooked. Both the transformational process and the shift of paradigm demanded of the dancers a great deal of flexibility in their ways of being, thinking and moving, and a high level of readiness to negotiate with their own interests and Thomas' artistic intentions. In moments of intensive negotiation in setting the parameters of the piece, the dancers seemed to be pushed to the edge of their capacity to interact, negotiate – think for themselves but also as one organism – and make decisions collectively.

The idea of transformational processes connects to what I outlined in Section 2.3.1 on becoming skilled, citing Greg Downey as saying that the study of physical practices such as sports, dance and musical apprenticeship 'makes clear that skill is not simply the "embodiment" of "knowledge", but rather physical, neurological, perceptual, and behavioural change of the individual subject so that he or she can accomplish tasks that, prior to enskilment, were impossible' (2010: 34). Added to this is the 'constitutively endless unfolding of practice' – something noticeable in the devised theatre of certain performance-makers, pursuers of 'ongoing enquiry through the work' (Melrose 2006b: 100).

4.1.1 Generative movement practices

The practices or strategies reported here are the result of ZOO's questioning of the type of dance practice they used to engage in back in 1998, when they got together to work as an ensemble. I treat each of the practices separately but also indicate how they relate to one another, the 'careful scientist' and the 'assisted solo', for example, feeding a great deal of what happens concerning movement generation. I also reveal how ZOO and Thomas developed these approaches to creation, collaboration and performance, and, later, how they feature in and shape *Flot*.

The 'careful scientist'

The 'careful scientist' is a practice in which various articulation points in the body are mobilised in different and also divergent ways concomitantly. Thomas explained the movements to be explored in the joints in the shoulder, elbow and hand. He described

four possibilities of articulation but did not use the anatomical terms of adduction and abduction, flexion and extension, supination and pronation, and rotation. For instance, adduction and abduction were referred to as 'changing direction' of the arm at the shoulder joint, and extension and flexion was considered one option. Initially, dancers practised the 'careful scientist' slowly and meticulously: becoming more conscious of the kind and range of mobilisation that is possible in each joint is essential in this practice. In Thomas' words, the aim here is to 'surpass the movement patterns that have become habitual' (Motion Bank 2013). Thomas has said that he is

interested in opening up the possibilities we access as performers when improvising. [...] [this training exercise] focuses on working alone without an external trigger and performing different actions simultaneously on two sides of the body. [...] The body has a tendency to stop one action when starting a new action. With this exercise and others, we are interested in training ourselves to continue a particular task even while our attention is busy initiating another movement, something like juggling (Motion Bank 2013).

As rehearsals progressed, Thomas asked the dancers to involve other body parts – they first practised the 'careful scientist' with only the arms, then with the legs, adding in exploration of the full range of motion. Coordination became more and more complex towards the end of the first week, as dancers had to articulate all four limbs simultaneously, each realising a different type of movement. In the first days, Thomas proposed repeated shifts between working alone – for example doing the 'careful scientist' – and working in pairs and trios, proposing exercises that seem to have been the preparation for the other strategies: the 'metal wire', the 'assisted solo', the 'improvised unison' and the 'complementary'.

Thomas explains that he is interested in enhancing dancers' possibilities of accessing improvisation, and says that the 'careful scientist' 'is designed to challenge habitual patterns of coordination and attention, as are many of our training exercises' while 'performing different actions simultaneously on two sides of the body' (Motion Bank 2013). In *Two* it is said that this

exercise requires following a small set of joint movement rules which dictate the ways a performer's arms may move. [...] Because the options are so discrete and constrained, the number of possible action sequences can be calculated. As we have discussed here previously, the movements are limited to: upper arm pointing, shoulder rotation, elbow flexion, forearm rotation (2013).

Yet, strictly from a neutral anatomical position, the number of possible actions in the shoulder joint – in the Online Score defined as two actions called ‘upper arm pointing’ and ‘shoulder rotation’ – total eight: abduction and adduction, horizontal abduction and adduction, flexion and extension, and internal and external rotation (Figure 4). Also, every flexion in the joint implies the possibility of an extension, hence the number of possible actions in the elbow joint are actually two, not one, as Thomas suggests with the term ‘elbow flexion’. What has been named ‘forearm rotation’ is in fact pronation and supination, again two and not one possibility of articulation.

FIGURE 3: ANATOMICAL TERMS OF MOTION IN THE ARM

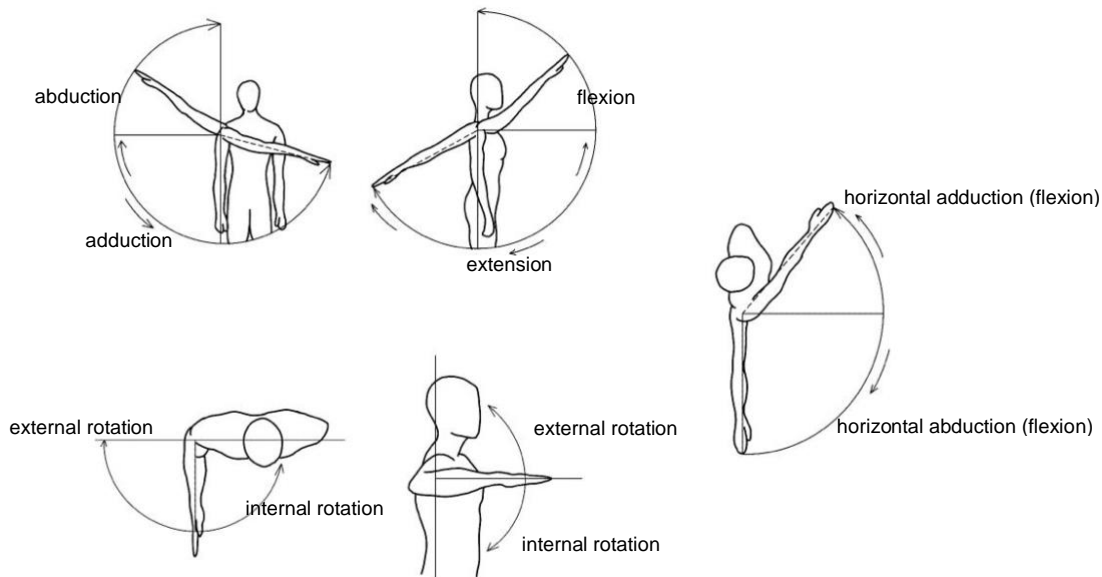


Illustration by Ilia Rüegg (used with the author’s permission).

My interest is in looking at what is actually happening in the arm, not to calculate the number of permutations that are possible for the performance of the ‘careful scientist’. I am concerned with the complexity of the choice-making process and the cognitive effort this practice demands. While Thomas speaks about intuition as being fundamental to his practice and performance, the ‘careful scientist’ contains aspects that gesture to the development of rather counterintuitive modes of thinking and moving – a considerably strenuous activity that ZOO members Samantha and Sarah called my attention to in our interviews. Sarah reported to me the exhaustive nature of working with coordination that

has to be carefully created and meticulously kept within set parameters that go against intuitive action, even for someone like her who is an experienced professional dancer with a wide range of movement vocabulary and expert motor control. Samantha told me about the challenging aspects of this strategy and how she has integrated it:

Yeah, I think the scientist, the careful scientist is a tricky one, for me personally is difficult. But I found a way. I really do it as a practice, as I would do my yoga practice for example. You practise to practise and you're not busy with the result, or you don't want [to be]. And then, even though I see 'ah, I make mistakes', I mean I make a lot of mistakes, I would do it again. Just practising (Samantha).

When teaching this practice to the Ballet de Lorraine dancers, Thomas described the actions in a simple way. His focus was on the dancer's experience of the action and not on the naming of it. The actions seem to be limited to four options even though, from an anatomical viewpoint, the exercise presents a larger number of choices. Lengthy practice is required in order for the process to be embodied and become second nature. Albeit cognitively strenuous – one is continuously analysing what one is doing – what it facilitates is the ability to conceive of coordinations that are not the ordinary ones, thus influencing movement generation through counterintuitive practice.

As the description below shows, in addition to executing non-symmetrical actions with both arms (point 1 below), the performance is problematised by desynchronising the duration of the action for each arm – flexing the left elbow for five seconds (one action) while rotating the right shoulder for two seconds and then supinating the arm for another two (point 2). The choice of action and its duration are being reset every couple of seconds.

In *Two* (Motion Bank 2013) the rules for this exercise are explained as follows:

'Avoid symmetry and opposites in the two arms to:

1. Execute different actions on the left and right simultaneously.
2. Build up to overlapping timing on the two sides of the body by initially starting and stopping both sides at the same time and then eventually working up to overlapping motion (change the actions in both arms at different times, so that the action in one arm continues while the other changes).
3. Work to add complexity by changing durations and amplitudes for the different movements, trying to separate all these parameters left and right.

4. After practicing the upper body, movements in the legs, hips, and knees can be added for a greater challenge' (Motion Bank 2013).

In this video sequence of the second day of rehearsals, Thomas explains the exercise [DAY 2_180508 – 00:15:08]. Later in the video, he asks the dancers to do the exercise again, focusing on uneven duration of movements [DAY 2_180508 – 00:41:32]. The dancers do this [DAY 2_180508 – 00:43:24], and when they stop, Thomas asks them what they find difficult; a few dancers share their experience, as can be seen in the video [DAY 2_180508 – 00:46:23].

Fieldwork two

Nancy, France, 8 May 2018. It's day 2 and with everyone's consent I start recording the rehearsals – though not all dancers want to participate in the study and be interviewed. Valérie, the rehearsal director, organised a table and chair where I set up my cameras and computer in a corner of the room; the zoom audio recorder is placed close to Thomas' 'corner' where the sound equipment and his computer are; from there he plays the music tracks, and there he often stands and speaks to the dancers. Cameras and audio recorder turned on, live-annotation recorder and application open: this discovery-oriented practice of observation and video annotation of Thomas' collaborative process starts. My eyes – and all my senses really – open up for a totally new way of participating in collaborative dance-making – only observing. But not *observing* to then interact as part of artistic practice, give feedback, question the making, the motivations, the modes of being/performing as I'm used to, but an *ethnographic observing*. Just, observing is not merely looking at an object or event that is outside of one's own organism and, in this specific case, with some pre-established research interests and consequent lenses. What precisely should I observe? Does self-observation have the right to be annotated? I soon notice that apart from observing the dancers and Thomas, I observe very closely my own thoughts and my responses to what happens. I observe others engaging with self-investigation and feel sort of thrown back into myself. At the end of the day, happiness: three dancers come to speak to me and volunteer to collaborate in my study.

The 'metal wire' and the 'assisted solo'

In these two practices, the dancer's focus shifts from the individual work of enhancing awareness of self to the space of interaction between self, other and the surroundings. Other dancers as well as aspects of the environment, such as space and music, gradually gain in importance as the points of intentional relationship with these elements grow and

are integrated in sourcing movement. I start by exploring the 'metal wire', an exercise involving two or three dancers wherein one or two of them (the assistants) provide inputs to the other (the soloist) through touch, to move the body area being touched. Based on this interaction, the 'metal wire' is a means of creating solos – at an early stage with a low level of complexity – and it has fewer variations when compared with the 'assisted solo'. The idea of a 'metal wire' is visible in that the soloist moves similarly to a wire that is being bent or curved without resisting or initiating movement. Through repeated viewing of the video material and annotations, the 'metal wire' starts to show itself as the bridge between the 'careful scientist' and the 'assisted solo'. It integrates the types of articulation that dancers explored on their own in the 'careful scientist' and adds the *other* as co-creator of awareness, multi-attentional focus and movement. In this sequence Thomas explains the 'metal wire' with Pauline [DAY 2_180508 – 00:05:10] and later in the video one can see the exercise being explained as a trio [DAY 2_180508 – 00:22:00], and then carried out by the dancers at 00:24:54. Later still the 'metal wire' is performed with a continuous rhythm [DAY 2_180508 – 00:55:33].

Generating movement material with the help of one or more assistants is perhaps the most important practice in the whole process, not only due to its wide use as exercise but also because various versions of it flowed almost directly into the choreographic work (a version of the 'metal wire', which Thomas also called 'isolations' at one point, was the basis of *Flof's* last scene). I perceive this characteristic as a lack of a sharp distinction in Thomas' work between 'making' and 'performing', or between 'practice' and 'performance', and I will return to this in Chapter 5.

What characterises the 'assisted solo' is work in pairs or trios wherein one dancer – the soloist – often with her eyes closed, is stimulated by one or more dancers – the assistant(s). Thomas uses the term 'manipulate' but I think 'stimulate' better describes what happens in this practice. Manipulation suggests the use of hands to grab, direct or shape, but although Thomas introduces this practice with simple touches of the hand, he later often asks assistants not to use their hands and not to hold or grab the soloist. As complexity is gradually added to the practice, they are asked to use as many points of bodily contact as possible without prioritising the hand. The assistants impart different intensities, speeds and directions to the touch.

Describing the assisted solo as ‘a creative tool and training exercise’ (Motion Bank 2013) is only partially accurate. The ‘assisted solo’ is a studio practice that facilitates creating movement with the help of one or more partners, but it is also an important choreographic element, appearing in various of ZOO’s pieces in different constellations and acquiring the most varied meanings or roles within each work [DAY 5_180511 – 00:14:53 and 00:18:40 > THE ‘ASSISTED SOLO’]. It is used as a training exercise when introduced to dancers not familiar with ZOO’s methods. Beyond that, it constitutes one of the fundamentals of the relationality in ZOO and Thomas’ work, a key practice charged with meaning in their unique modes of co-presence and co-action, whose implications arguably relate to a much wider conceptual aspect than simply being a tool for inventing movement – implications I shall explore in Section 5.1.2. The video documentation of day 5 shows how Thomas guided the dancers from the ‘metal wire’ to the ‘assisted solo’.

As Thomas explains in his workshop booklet (Hauert 2019), the idea of the ‘assisted solo’, performed as a duet by a soloist and one assistant in its basic version, has been developed by the company over the years to the extent of becoming the framework for a rather complex trio version wherein two assistants impose forces and directions on the soloists to initiate movement, also creating shapes by using the ‘metal wire’ concept. This variation may involve ‘more dynamic impulses in which momentum is passed from the assistant to the soloist’ (Hauert 2019), and more than three people constantly changing roles. Thomas goes on to explain that the task of the soloist is to integrate all those forces into a dance and give it a shape, staying as true as possible to the impulses provided by the assistants. Interaction with music can be an additional source of complexity here. In the most complex form of the ‘assisted solo’, several types of touch and impulse are combined.

Thomas speaks about certain skills or qualities both as being developed during and as prerequisites for his practice. One example of this is ‘creativity’. In a section of his booklet dedicated to the ‘assisted solo’, he states that ‘[f]or the soloist, many parameters remain open, which means there is space for creativity or, even, that creativity is required for it to work’ (Hauert 2019). Further on in the booklet, he says that ZOO’s working modes aim to create order that emerges from disorder, to source form out of the formless, and to create a group out of the individuals who co-act in the choreographic, ‘while leveraging the exceptional quality of perception, attention and concentration made possible and required by improvisation’ (2019) – here again indicating that while the work facilitates the

development of exceptional skills ('quality', to use his word) these skills are also a requirement, and arguably indispensable.

The 'improvised unison' and the 'complementary'

The 'improvised unison' involves two or more dancers aligning in such a way that one of them is positioned at the front with her back to the other(s). The person at the front leads the generation of movement material while the other(s) attempt to move in unison with her. This practice, as used by Thomas in the creation of *Flot*, has two versions. The first version, practised initially on the spot without travelling, requires that the person at the front generates movement while the ones behind try to be in unison [DAY 3_180509 – 00:02:36 > THE IMPROVISED UNISON > STATIONARY]. It gains complexity when the leader starts to turn around her axis, and its challenges reach another scale when all dancers involved improvise movement while travelling in space. The idea is not to attempt to copy the leader's movements, which would imply realising movements with a delay, but rather to try and move in synchronicity with whoever is leading. This means each person is also taking the lead herself and generates material as soon as, by turning around her axis, she finds herself furthest forward. These shifts in leadership happen in a question of seconds and immediate adjustment is a constant and a must. The level of alertness required here is enormous. In this sequence, Thomas explains how to add the turning around one's axis [DAY 3_180509 – 00:16:04 > EXPLANATION – TURNING]. Once travelling in space is added, dancers are free to kneel, jump, roll and so on. In this video sequence, Thomas demonstrates with a dancer the 'improvised unison' with turning and travelling [DAY 3_180509 – 00:41:59 > IMPROVISED UNISON – TRAVELLING – DEMO].

The second version involves walking and running forwards, backwards and sideways, in lines or in circular trajectories while continuously turning around one's axis – which I have named the 'walked unison'. Dancers must always face the same direction. Due to the changes in trajectory and the turning, there is constantly a new leader at the front, and dancers must continually adjust the direction they face according to whoever is furthest forward. In this video sequence, Thomas demonstrates the exercise with Vivien [DAY 3_180509 – 00:30:53 > EXPLANATION – WALKED UNISON – TRAVELLING].

The 'improvised unison' is a multifaceted practice that has various implications for the dancers in their work together, during both creation and performance. This not only relates

to creativity and inventiveness, but has an impact on processes of perception of self, other and environment, and influences the dynamics of being and making. Both versions of the practice were extensively used in the piece, and composing with these tools demanded from the group a high degree of involvement on various levels of interaction and, at times, long stretches of engagement with intricate negotiation in search of the appropriate rules of operation, especially regarding the second version (walking/running).

More details of the genesis of 'improvised unison' were given by the ZOO dancers. Three of them recalled that, when it was developed, Mat and Samantha were not involved. Sarah told me that it was created during the making of *Modify* (2004) but only later performed for the first time as part of choreographic work in *Puzzled* (2007), in which she was not involved:

In *Modify* we invented a game, or whatever you want to call it, but there we gave it the name the 'backpack'; it could be done with two or more. We were touching each other, like, I would be behind you, espousing your shape, as much as possible, with as much contact as possible including the legs, everything, like I'm your backpack. And you would be leading, and I would try to follow all your movements with as little delay as possible. And we did that with a whole range, we were six, I think in *Modify*, and there was one moment in the piece where we were the six of us behind Martin Kilvady, and he was improvising and it was very nice to do. I was mainly at the end, I was the tail and there was just like remainings of his movements but, still, it was there. And, if I'm not mistaken, I think that it came from there this idea of improvised unisono. And I know that now, when Thomas teaches it, that they start with a bit of backpacking, and then give space, and then people are detached from each other physically in space, but then, for the follower, it's exactly the same idea. Now he [the follower] is watching so he no longer feels with his skin the kinetical thing, but he watches and tries to do at the same time (Sarah).

Samantha described the distinct nature of the 'improvised unison' and the 'complementary' as being a 'totally different vocabulary or way of connecting with each other. Although the assisted solos are also very much about connecting with the dancing person in the middle – you feel their musicality, really, like, physically through touch – you also have this somehow all the time: give up and give into what's happening around you' (Samantha). When Thomas introduced the 'complementary' to Ballet de Lorraine, I was not present, making it difficult to describe in detail. It is not described in Thomas' workshop booklet either, but the name explains a lot about what is at work.

Fieldwork three

It's my first week in Nancy, Thomas and I are staying at the same hotel. Preparing for my trip, I had asked Valérie, the rehearsal director, if she could recommend a hotel. She told me Thomas was going to stay in an apart hotel close to the studio, a fifteen-minute walk, so I reserved a room there too. Thomas and I walk together to the hotel after rehearsal, it's one of the first days of the process. I mention I am happy I can cook in the room (I'm being very attentive with my diet at the moment) and say the hotel is okay, my room even has a balcony. He seems to have another opinion, not convinced about the breakfast at all. As we walk and chat about different things, we often have to go up and down the sidewalk, change direction, and cross the streets. In this fifteen-minute walk, I'm impressed with how fast he reacts to any possible change of direction I indicate with my body or my expression. I feel all carefree and inattentive to how close we are or to any indication of where he wants to walk, till I notice his eyes are all on me and ready to respond to any movement intention on my part. It is such an interesting experience. He worked on the 'improvised unison' with the dancers today and it seems to me he's still totally in that mode of immediate response, fully committed, fully absorbed in our walking side-by-side towards the same place.

We will see, as we penetrate further into the choreographic composition of *Flot*, that the complexity of each practice – some of them complex enough to learn as a single exercise – is just one layer in the overall structure of the piece. It is one thing to grasp the general parameters of one of the practices and skilfully perform it, for example the 'careful scientist' on one's own and then the 'assisted solo' in duos or trios. It is a whole other scale of knowledge to perform the guiding principles of the 'careful scientist' and the 'assisted solo' in combination with the parameters of the 'improvised unison' and to decide when to apply the 'complementary' among twenty-two dancers. As these simultaneous systems evolve, each dancer continuously shifts from solo improvisations to duos, trios and whole group engagement based on their own assessment of what the appropriate course of action is at that moment – all this on stage, and on different stages for that matter, in front of an audience, the audience being a different one for each performance. The challenges of this kind of complex operation have been written about by Ryle with reference to mental operations, and this can be applied to this context. In his introduction to *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle remarks that one thing is to know how to apply concepts of mental operations such as 'careful', 'stupid' and 'witty', and 'quite another to know how to correlate them with one another and with concepts of other sorts' (Ryle [1949] 2009: lx).

Mat gives an insight into the kinds of questions ZOO researched as they experimented with what would become the 'improvised unison'. This is a lengthy interview abstract but it

is very rich in information about how the structure of a practice is built, how the dancers intuit, experiment and question, and discover within the experience the inner workings of an emergent strategy. Moreover, Mat's account shows the different perspectives the dancers adopt in relation to what is arising, watching video footage of their trials, critiquing it from an artistic point of view, and searching to recognise potential value in the discovery:

'What kind of rapport can we have there with each other?' And then we said we keep the same shoulder relationship with each other. It could have been different. It could have been exactly the same, but the head [turns], and no, we keep the same shoulder [direction] because that makes it very traceable for the people. Then it was 'How is it if we move also together? So there [came] the unisono, but then, I think it came through the working, by watching it, that we said 'but, yeah, it's not so interesting if the person who is following is in a delay'. So then we were studying from 'ok, how does it work then to be really together to have a unisono?' So there came the task and the fun – we had really fun with it – in discovering. 'Ok, how does it work then to attack it together? What is the difference between the person who initiated and the person who needs to be "milli-with-it", in unisono?' So there we discovered that that person had to have another movement, another speed in fact, than the person initiating.

You cannot think you do the same movement exactly. No. In fact, in timing, your movement needs to change because – I now exaggerate – like this arm goes up and this one needs to catch [shows me the movement]: this is a very different movement than in fact this. So timing-wise there's something different but usually you go exactly in the same way through the space – almost – to get the catching [be in unison]. Generally speaking, one important part is we want to feel a certain excitement ourselves when we work in space. We need to be curious about it, we need to be triggered by it and then we say also as a group 'let's go, let's figure this out, let's work on this till we get this'. And also taking [into consideration]: might this be interesting for the audience or for dance in general? Like, I think we don't worry too much about it, it's more like we trust it a little bit because it fascinates us. We think we might be enough on the border of where dance is going, to understand that 'yeah, this is something that goes beyond just our personal interests', it might be an interest to more people in the dance or to dance itself (Mat).

The 'mickey-mousing'

ZOO's inspiration for this choreographic approach to music was the way in which music was composed for and played in the early Walt Disney cartoons. It proposes that dancers devise an interpretation of the music they dance with, not by reacting to the instruments but by acting as an additional musician as they play/move with the composition. According to Thomas, 'mickey-mousing' can apply to any piece of music. In *Flot*, the music is a

recording of Serge Prokofiev's Waltz Suite, Opus 110⁵⁵. I was not present in rehearsal when Thomas introduced this approach to the dancers, and day 7 of fieldwork was the first time I saw Ballet de Lorraine exploring it. I immediately recognised it, as I had seen it live on stage in ZOO's piece *Inaudible* (2016). Thomas also showed the dancers video excerpts from *Inaudible* to highlight certain aspects.

For Thomas, when he watches dancers doing the 'mickey-mousing' he feels like he can 'read' their interpretation of the music (interview 5). He described his memory of responding to music in his childhood as an experience of immediacy, and added:

I think that's really how I danced for most of my childhood, and I knew this is that feeling of my body channelling those sounds, textures, the rhythm. So with all those variations I think there is an interesting expectation of what you do when you hear, what you would imagine that needs to be done. [...] You can twist it and I think that also creates humour sometimes, or it makes it look awkward, or it says something about the relationship with the music (interview 5).

As Thomas stresses, one can 'really go there [...] and that can take many different senses or colours' (interview 5). I asked about anticipation in the 'mickey-mousing', something he had mentioned in the studio, and he added that the idea involves moving as if one were an instrument in the orchestra, or the conductor:

I always found it really strange when the conductors do things before the music, and then there is this kind of delay of the orchestra. I never understood, but apparently – somebody told me – it's the German school of conducting. [...] And in Germany [Thomas makes a sound like 'tun'] and the orchestra plays that mysterious lapse late, it's very strange (interview 5).

Prokofiev's Waltz Suite was carefully studied in the studio. Thomas proposed that everyone draw on a piece of paper while listening. Through shared listening, different parts of the music were identified and names were given, creating a shared vocabulary they could refer to later. This video shows the beginning of dancers' becoming acquainted with this approach, in which we can see Thomas and the dancers studying the music together [DAY 7_180619]. 'Mickey-mousing' defines the way in which Prokofiev's Waltz Suite was treated and performed throughout *Flot*.

⁵⁵ The recording is performed by the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Marin Alsop (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021).

4.1.2 Dimensions of composition – The *Flot* toolbox and its set and open-ended components

In October 2018, Thomas began composing into scenes the different cells he had worked on with the dancers in June, still experimenting with the music tracks. He had a first version of the modified music produced by Bart Celis (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021) and was busy ensuring that the adaptation was fitting for *Flot*, assigning tracks to the emerging scenes. Music, costumes and lighting design were components of *Flot* that Thomas did not discuss with the dancers. Their collaboration flowed strictly within the choreographic composition. At this stage, the piece's running order was set, a process marked by intensive dialogue and negotiation within the group. For this, the dancers had to actively engage in discussions and express the challenges of implementing the floor patterns combined with the specific spatial progressions Thomas proposed.

FIGURE 4: VIDEO STILL (*FLOT'S* PERFORMANCE)

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Flot (2018) by Thomas Hauert in collaboration with Ballet de Lorraine, video still © Ballet de Lorraine.

The challenges resulting from the number of dancers involved were addressed by Pauline, Tristan and Thomas in interviews. Aspects of how much to participate or intervene, when to take part in open discussions and what to contribute had to be dealt with. In other words, developing a sense of appropriate action in this dimension of co-making implicated a different type of intuitive operation, attention and distributed thinking from the one in the actual dancing. This relationality, common in what I regard as a choreographic approach, was formative in *Flot*.

Studying the information I gathered through observing Thomas' ways of working and knowing, and through his, Pauline's, Tristan's and Vivien's accounts, I created a list of the main elements that form the 'toolbox' dancers use to perform *Flot*. This list was discussed and reworked in detail with Thomas in an interview on the day after the premiere. I present the points we discussed under two headings: 'set' and 'open-ended' parameters. Viewing the annotated video of the performance of *Flot* at Opéra de Lorraine in November 2018 (duration 40 minutes) can be elucidating for an understanding of how these set and open-ended parameters operate [FLOT_PERFORMANCE].

TABLE 3 FLOT'S PARAMETERS

Set parameters	Open-ended parameters
<p>Music: 'mickey-mousing'; deviate from lyricism; reinterpret elements of the music with movement; give musical elements another taste; divert or break element; play with it; music cues marked the beginning of solos, trios, quintets and unisons.</p>	<p>Timing: in the 'walked unison' for tight group, line, carpet and stop; in solos, trios and duos; some elements are part of the structure but timing varies.</p>
<p>Modes of being: constant presence; hyperalertness; constant readiness.</p>	
<p>Modes of operating (thinking/moving): distributed; multi-attentional focus; 'polyphonic'; group thinking; avoid habitual movement and phrasing; move asymmetrically; move in unison; complementarily; connecting with others.</p>	<p>Modes of operating (moving): the actual movement material generated on-site in real time, according to previously set parameters (exceptions: running in the 'catapult', walking in the line and in the 'walked unison').</p>
<p>Spatial relationship: 'walked unison' (tight group, line, carpet and stop); entering and exiting the stage; how to perform the 'catapult' and form the first line; position of soloist in the line; the 'snake'.</p>	<p>Spatial relationship: in solos, trios and duos; position in the line and in the 'snake'.</p>
<p>Spacing: how the 'catapult' starts; from where to enter and exit the stage.</p>	<p>Spacing: order in the 'catapult' and joining the line; individual choice from where to enter and exit the stage (through which slit in the backdrop); spatial progression solos, trios, quintets and sextets.</p>
<p>Roles: solos, trios and quintets</p>	<p>Roles: position in the line; solos in the large group scenes when initiating or breaking out of a group 'improvised unison'</p>

Flo's set and open-ended parameters.

Fieldwork four

It is summer in Europe. It's Monday, the start of my second visit to Ballet de Lorraine and my sixth day of data-gathering. There is a train strike in France that left me waiting for a connection to Nancy this morning for hours. I arrive late at the rehearsal and have no time to fetch the table to the studio, and ask the technician for an extension cable. The camera batteries will soon die out... It's an agitated restart of fieldwork. Thomas is speaking only French with the dancers. My French being so poor it hardly exists, I understand only some words. They worked for another three days in May after I left Nancy. Now the piece gradually takes shape. Thomas clearly starts structuring it, bringing in the piece of music he wants to compose with. They study it together, make drawings and notes, give names to the different parts of the music. Interesting: the situation is so familiar to me, yet I feel like an outsider. The agitation of arriving late because of a strike (I didn't know whether I would get here at all), the language barrier, the technical difficulties, the notes on the paper I feel too timid to get close to look at, all makes this restart a bit awkward; things feel as if misplaced.

4.2 The macrocosm – Mat, Samantha and Sarah on ZOO's approaches and processes

If there is one characteristic I would attribute to the macrocosm 'ZOO', a quality I feel emerged during this research process, I would name it 'never-ending research'. Experiment, experiment, experiment, question after question after question being researched in collaborative dance-making and performance. In the company's shared space of language, created collaboratively as they go along, culinary terms have formed a common ground on which to speak about what they create, their experiences, processes, negotiations. In Sarah's view, what is needed to create and perform ZOO's works is a 'state'. This state 'includes many things, but the addition of all those *ingredients* gives something different than the addition [of the parts]' (Sarah, added emphasis). She goes on to say:

When we develop something, I am still very busy with the list [ingredients] in my head, somehow jumping from one thing to the other with my attention. But with practising, very soon comes the joy of not being alone doing this, and inputs of what I see and what I feel kinaesthetically. And then, very soon, that creates a kind of *sauce* that links already the different points on the list. So this already blurs it a little bit, which is good. And then little by little, when it gets to the performing mood, then clearly it becomes a *soup*, in a good sense, a *good soup* with all of that in it, but then I don't verbalise anymore in my brain some directions or task. It becomes something else than the words, the list. Now, when we work on things, we're clearly refining the list and re-insisting on the *ingredients* that tend to disappear, or we're discovering *new vegetables* in the *soup*, and we think 'oh, did you discover

that one? Can you also enjoy that one or should we take it out? Does it give [a] bad taste?' (Sarah).

Sarah's account depicts the distributed nature of collaborative performance. How exactly new discoveries are integrated, how ingredients are replaced or enhanced, how the work continues to unfurl is not always explicit, not always verbalised in ZOO, and this is the case also in other macrocosms in contemporary dance cosmology. This is not only because certain changes end up not being discussed but also because, as Sarah explains, not all processes lend themselves to being addressed verbally:

Sometimes we share it verbally, Thomas for sure, if he watches a video and sees something that lacks or sees something new that he wants us to enhance – that will be told, that will be spoken out and maybe there is a discussion, and there is a practice. Now, it can also happen that one of us has also something that pops up in mind, like 'it's a long time we haven't thought about that'. But I would say this is a *little* part of what is going on, what is expressed – because, clearly, we are developing the thing together through experience, through performing, and we don't, for sure, speak about all of that. So there is this common knowledge that we're all aware of, and would in no ways be able to speak about (Sarah, added emphasis).

While projects are chiefly initiated by Thomas, ZOO does not cultivate a hierarchy of power but rather one of functions and complementary roles (Thomas, interview 1), with no central authority. Each person's contribution and responsibility are valued and acknowledged. Samantha noted that Thomas 'makes the final decisions, he has all the weight and pressure on his shoulder of the end result and all of that' (Samantha). In answer to the question of whether she sees herself as a dancer-choreographer, she said:

I must say, I see myself always as a dancer. For example in ZOO, I really appreciate it – because it shows respect towards the creative and artistic work and choices we make, in the creation [and] also on stage – that we're mentioned as dancer-choreographer, but I would never use the word 'choreographer' for myself. I like to be a dancer like how I can be a dancer in ZOO. So I have all that freedom, I have also all that responsibility, but for me I stay a dancer, yeah. I've done other work where I'm a dancer and I don't have that freedom or I don't have the feeling of contributing, and that's not a nice way of being a dancer (Samantha).

In the following sections the focus is not on single practices of the company. Rather, these sections represent the outcome of the analysis process according to GT, and they are named and constructed according to the categories deriving from the procedures set by this method of data analysis, as explained in Chapter 3.

FIGURE 5: PHOTOGRAPH *HOW TO PROCEED*

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Samantha van Wissen and Mat Voorter in *How to Proceed* (2018), ZOO/Thomas Hauert © Bart Grietens⁵⁶.

4.2.1 Time, periodicity, duration and intensity in practice

It may seem obvious that the more one practices the better one becomes at a given task, yet the importance of the time factor in terms of recurrence, of a practice duration that allows for continuity, may be overlooked or underestimated when considering what is needed for skill retention and transformation. Samantha's account of dealing with the difficulties of the 'careful scientist' typifies everyday practice over a long stretch of time as a trigger of change:

Like, in a creation, we would do it every morning, then you also feel – after like a month and a half, or two months – you really feel there's something happening. And [then], at least with me, there is a change (Samantha).

Along the same lines, Mat described how the recurrent practice of the 'assisted solo' has an impact on how memory of the assistant's action becomes incorporated and absorbed:

What I wanted to say is, like, because we have done this, we've practised it, it's also possible that after you have practised it over time, that you don't need to have the real people anymore, you also really can go into having the imaginary ones with you. So your body memory is there, [so] you can do it like that. But that happens over time (Mat).

⁵⁶ Photograph included in the thesis with written consent from the dancers and ZOO through email correspondence.

I asked Samantha what happens to her in the 'assisted solo' after the assistant(s) leave her alone to improvise. I report here a sequence of exchanges between us to highlight how she developed her account; as I wanted to make sure I did not misunderstand her, I explicitly asked her what she meant by some of what she said:

I remember that in the beginning we would first practise a lot that they [the assistants] were there. It's not from the beginning that the outside people would step out. You do that after some time of practice so you have really, like, physically that experience. For me it's very important that I can somehow click off the brain. And I don't know how it works but somehow have imaginary people go on giving me impulses, without really thinking 'he's moving my shoulder' or 'she's doing this to me', but somehow finding a way of not planning a movement, which is difficult of course, but I cannot really explain how. It would be interesting to know what makes that. I think it's the amount of undergoing that kind of moving, like, with the people being there, being there, being there (Samantha).

I asked whether she meant how long the assistant partner stayed with her in the interaction, whether the duration of the experience mattered. Samantha replied that this was a factor, but not exclusively in relation to the moment of the practice, and she added:

I think even not on that moment but, like, I experience it in weeks, for example. Yeah, yeah. It's for me very important that your body really gets used to this, like the physical experience of information which is not logic to us. Like, if we would move ourselves, they are not logic because the outside people do their thing, they're not looking, like 'ah, what is the other doing and how can I help that?'. No (Samantha).

Two relevant aspects are evidenced here. One is the duration and the recurrence of periods of time of the experience, which bring knowing how to be and how to operate in the practice, with all of its shifting features. The other is the insistence or constancy of another (not temporal) factor, that of co-presence – 'people being there, being there, being there' (Samantha). There is an interest in the company in working with non-propositional knowledge, with aspects or processes whose nature is not known to the dancers but which they nonetheless experience or feel are occurring.

4.2.2 Innermost spheres and intuition – or when *la mayonnaise prend*

Writing about internal processes such as intuition is challenging as they involve tacit elements of experience, of our ways of knowing and what we get to know, making them graspable on some levels yet difficult to evidence and articulate on others. Expressions such as 'it's difficult to explain', 'I don't know how it works', 'I cannot really explain how' or 'it's difficult to put into words', used by the dancers in the interviews, signal the tacit nature

of certain field-specific experiences and ways of knowing. In their attempts to articulate what intuition is to them, dancers often searched for words, engaging in reflection and pausing for long periods.

I embarked on this study without a previously defined theoretical underpinning and mindful of the risks of pulling together multiple research domains. Having defined Dance Studies and Anthropology as the main areas of reference, I engaged also with literature on cognition, concerned with terms that emerged during the investigation, such as 'intuition', 'presence' and 'hyperalertness'. At this stage, however, the feasibility of including an additional study area, such as Cognitive Psychology or Phenomenology, was questioned. Bringing the research questions to the fore helped determine my perspectives, while the scope of the research and the available timeframe were important factors I considered.

Dance artists often use different words to speak about the same thing, their wording being entangled with their experience. Looking into ZOO and Thomas' approaches, the central importance of intuition and presence to their processes was evident. Moreover, fieldwork observation exposed processes of memory-making through practices that were intended to build the scaffolding for the improvisational modes of being and operating that dancers would draw on later in the performance. With the intention of better understanding what this case study could unveil, I opted to prioritise the language used in the studio. My perspective and scope were hence defined, and I draw mainly on dance artists' experience and the corresponding literature, and on anthropological studies of practice, the latter linked to the fieldwork endeavour.

The expression 'innermost spheres' as I use it here synthesises ineffable aspects of experience that are referred to in my study, explored from the dancers' perspective and by incorporating their terms. My intention is to elucidate the practitioner's viewpoint of what has been referred to by deLahunta as 'an interior landscape' (deLahunta, Clarke and Barnard 2012: 248), and by De Spain as the 'world inside' or the 'internal landscape' (2003: 30, 31), by which he means the dancer's awareness of their own proprioception and other perception processes, and wherein 'memory and intentionality' are contained (2003: 32). The internal sensations De Spain speaks about 'can influence, and be influenced by, externally visible movements, but are, in themselves, invisible from the outside' (2003: 30). I hence opted for an expression that aims to encompass ineffable

aspects of experience and what Barnard terms 'implicational' meanings⁵⁷ (2012: 248). Referring to innermost spheres has helped me address the above and highlight what I encountered in the field, focusing on the practitioners' experience and terminology in preference to overstretching the scope of the study by including an additional domain such as Psychology or Philosophy⁵⁸.

Despite its challenges for both interviewer and interviewees, investigating the diversity that emerges through perceptual, physiological and behavioural change is important, as mentioned in Chapter 2, because each of these facets may clarify the practitioner's knowing how (Harris 2007: 13); the transformational process is not unravelled simply by acknowledging the experiential and tacit nature of intuitive operation. There are commonalities in the dancers' accounts that contribute to a better understanding of the innermost spheres involved in improvisation choreography, the importance of intuition and how it operates. My interest is not in theorising intuition but rather in using the artists' experience within this context, to discuss how creating and performing from an intuitive source takes place, a topic seldom addressed from the practitioners' perspective in academia (Melrose 2006a).

Sustaining the modes of being needed to operate according to ZOO's approach to performance involves what Samantha called 'a special kind of state'. Even after working with the company for more than two decades and having co-developed the practices that form the performances, Samantha feels that she has to spend the whole day preparing to perform ZOO's repertoire when they reconvene after their longer breaks. In this light, the challenges posed to Tristan and Vivien, in fact to all the Ballet de Lorraine dancers, who had no contact with *Flot* or Thomas' practices for six months and, in addition, rehearsed and performed repertoire of a very different nature authored by other choreographers must have been innumerable. One possible reason why it might have been especially challenging for Ballet de Lorraine dancers to get fully back into the modes required to

⁵⁷ According to Phillip Barnard in his section within this article, 'implicational meaning carries that augmented signature in what amounts to an ineffable or latent form' (deLahunta, Clarke and Barnard 2012: 255); these are deep-seated schemata forming our understandings and actions, whose content is challenging to verbalise, and often only parts of which are promptly available in propositional meanings to then be 'translated into tangible form as sentences or texts' (2012: 255). Barnard adds that poetic forms, metaphors, parables and dance 'are all vehicles for directly expressing attributes and schematic aspects of implicational meaning', and that often 'artistic expressions can eloquently, straightforwardly and compactly convey significance in the presence of considerable propositional ambiguity' (2012: 255).

⁵⁸ This process took place in conversation with my supervisory team and the approach adopted was thus agreed upon.

perform *Flot*, lies precisely in the continuity of the work in the artists' innermost spheres, a topic I will return to in Chapter 5.

Both the maintenance of constant presence or hyperalert states and the use of intuition have a fluctuating or malleable nature. There is no specific warm-up, routine or practice that can ensure the dancer will thus 'be there', will perform from an intuitive source. As the innermost spheres have a plasticity or suppleness, some of their qualities are not always available to be tapped into at once, yet there is evidence that the level of expertise or skill with which Mat, Samantha, Sarah and Thomas perform their work is proportionate to the amount and quality of their experience of the practices.

Speaking about the modes of being needed to work according to ZOO's practices, Samantha said that there is no recipe as in if she follows a certain warm-up, it always works. 'No', she affirms, and describes 'always trying to get to a certain kind of focus where I can exclude completely the judgement, so I have no distance [to] what is happening and I have to be really in the moment, ready to react on any second' (Samantha). This suggests a quality of immediacy, in terms of no mediation between the person and the experience. She further commented: 'Yeah, and they always change, you can never lean back and know it. Yeah. That's nice, I like that. It's always working and practising' (Samantha).

When asked about the challenges and the facilitators in arriving at the appropriate modes of being and operating after long stretches of time not working with ZOO, Sarah highlighted the inner dimension of being a skilled improviser. Similar to what Samantha described, quietening expectations and overly judgemental processes is key, and adopting an integrative stance towards internal self-critique contributes to being able to enter the place from which they wish to operate. Sarah speaks about negotiating with internal challenges, trying to be truthful to the task and avoiding producing just any kind of movement, which would mean a fake 'being there':

I think the challenge is to be true to the task and not fake it. That sounds really bad, it is bad. But... Yeah, the first day when we meet up, I cannot feel like it. Yeah, it's difficult. And because mainly these are tasks that demand to move a lot, and then you just move, it's not that you can stop and wait and start again. So in the process there's a lot of noise, like now, the noises outside... but this disturbance is part of getting to it. There's a lot of parasite movement, that I create for no reason, just because... So I wish I could not even pass through that parasite movement and just stop and think, and produce only things that are true to the

task or to the moment. But it's not always possible so it's about negotiating with that, allowing, with myself, a bit of parasite, 'it's ok, it's ok, it's ok. It'll be better tomorrow' (Sarah).

My point in presenting this example is that sustaining heightened perception of self, other and environment in expert dance improvisation is largely a result of innermost processes of enskillment. Having the capacity to be, think and move intuitively entails refraining from or damming up distracting thoughts that undermine dancers' nuanced perceptions, responses and inventiveness, which additionally must be in tune with the artistic intent of the piece they perform. Quietening the noises and interferences is part of the journey of entering the appropriate modes, not through rejection but by integration – 'it's ok, it's ok, it's ok', Sarah says to herself. In Alexander Technique terms, this is called inhibition, something Sarah, who is an Alexander Technique teacher, highlighted when speaking about negotiating with the 'parasites':

For me this means concretely good preparation for myself, on my own, like lying down, good warming up, good coming into contact with my own fluidity first of all, both mentally and physically, and yes also some calming down about expectations. So, yes, lots of inhibition going on, having to let it happen instead of trying to make it happen. And it is to tune with the others of course (Sarah).

This is the freedom – as in freeing oneself from overly judgemental internal processes and expectations – that is so challenging to achieve and which has such an impact on 'the operations of expert intuition in (professional) creative practice', as Melrose (2006: 75) puts it. Discerning, selecting and integrating this, putting aside that: these are delicate selection and distilling processes that, if exacerbated, create an imbalance whereby one becomes too judgemental, preventing intuitive operation and inventive flow. Through practice, as part of discovering personal mechanisms for negotiating with oneself, dancers inhibit internal pressure to be overly active in inventing movement: 'then, yeah, allowing myself to do less and, in doing less, to be more receptive, and more aware, and more in the present moment and to not try and produce something when... yeah, difficult to [explain]' (Sarah). This account shows how regulating ways of thinking and moving influence Sarah's mode of being. Further, Mat highlighted the importance of expert intuition and its challenging nature. To him it is 'very key in life and in art making. I feel very related to this', and he adds:

It's not [that] everything needs to go through a conscious mind, while I think we need to keep our conscious with us and register what's happening, but it doesn't have to pass through there before going into an action. So, for movement, it's

another kind of directness, and we don't need to *know*, we don't need to know it yet. And for me, for a development in the world, for a development in life, if you want to have progress, change, transformation... Like, science, I think it's very important in life, but that cannot be our guideline only (Mat).

At this stage of our conversation, Mat referred to the 'unknown', a topic closely related to improvisation that I covered earlier in the thesis but which I now mention from the perspective of the importance of not knowing. Mat believes intuition is precisely what we do not know, 'the mysteries which are out there', and that operating intuitively is also 'allowing that to be present and to step into that with curiosity and to let that be present'. With art-making and intuition dancers can offer a bit of this (Mat):

You know, we don't have to define it yet... And, of course, back to the first questions [regarding the names of the practices], we get to the words because we need still some language, we try to share it through the word and the language – it's a great tool to share something with each other but it's not the only way. Like, dance is another option for sharing, it's another language. So... [Laughs] Yeah, for me it's a great thing but it's difficult to put into words. But I trust. I let the intuition give me quite some guidance, also in life. Like, if my intuition says, 'I think I need to go downstairs, because...', if [I] get a sensation, you know, a kind of ring [a call], I follow that even if the reasoning would say 'but why?' (Mat).

Counterintuitive

Interestingly, pursuing the non-habitual with counter movements to that which is predominant at a given point, and pursuing it for long enough, may turn what was meant as a counter act into the predominant one. Thus, over time, avoiding usual pathways may make this very avoidance a habit in itself. Both Mat and Sarah pointed to the realisation that this habit of always avoiding had become customary and was biasing their search. Sarah explicitly spoke about the notion of the intuitive being very important in ZOO's work and, notwithstanding this, the friction between wanting to improvise from an intuitive source and dedicating oneself to counterintuitive movement generation, in her view clearly present in the 'careful scientist'. Following my question as to the role of intuition and how it operates, she replied:

Yes, it's a good question. It's tricky because in a way Thomas is always looking for breaking the habits and that's very paradoxical, I think, in that sense. What is difficult to explain is that he's looking for those different tasks and strategies that allow you to break your habits and to search for new combinations or foreign zones, in terms of architecture but also space – how you look for space, how you dance into space also, all those spatial organisations that are part of his work. For example, we tend to go always counterclockwise in space. Why is that? And we

always remind ourselves 'let's also sometimes change and go clockwise'. So all those things are counterintuitive. But clearly intuition is part of it so, where is it? (Sarah)

At this stage in our conversation, Sarah took some time to reflect on what we were discussing. She expressed again the difficulty of the question and tried to make explicit the conundrum of wanting to work intuitively and yet develop counterintuitive practices. This apparent paradox is also seen in the notion that bypassing the conscious mind is praiseworthy in relation to conscious activity. However, the desired immediacy of response, readiness, hyperalertness and constant presence in improvising has, in my view, been made available to ZOO dancers precisely through the dedicated, meticulous work of becoming conscious of self/other/environment on such a high level of operation that various elements of their improvisation choreography unfold in modes that, from their perspective, bypass analytical reflection by delegating 'control over movement and its creation to unconscious processes' (Hauert 2019). Further into our conversation, Sarah tried to articulate her experience:

Is it to do also with what is not part of language, maybe? So in that way it is very important in dance, I guess, because it's this field that doesn't stay in the... *dans la passoire* [in the sieve] of language. I've heard that, I don't remember who said that, but I found it nice, that language is the *passoire – les langues sont la passoire*. So I've read or I've heard that languages are that [sieve], some things get trapped in it but most of it... (Sarah)

I asked whether she meant that it could not be captured, to which she replied: 'Yes, exactly. So it's clearly for me something that goes through it and maybe intuition plays the role of how to navigate into that, without the words. I'm not sure' (Sarah). Sarah seemed to be addressing what she regards as the counterintuitiveness of going against one's own habits, and she added that whether something is perceived as counterintuitive differs from person to person, and yet there are commonalities: 'The "careful scientist" is clearly trying to break the symmetry, and that's counterintuitive for all the people I've met till now. I didn't see anyone that is naturally moving one arm faster than the other one, while... I mean, this combination that Thomas proposes with the "careful scientist" is totally counterintuitive' (Sarah).

With the purpose of reporting data, this chapter was dedicated to presenting the practices Thomas used in the making of Flot and some of the data gathered in conversation with the ZOO dancers. It was structured using two modes of writing: expository (descriptive and narrative) and video annotation. Further data is reported in the following chapter, but

my focus will shift towards discussion of the material, weaving together all collaborating artists' contributions and links to the references in Chapter 2. The three modalities of writing I have used so far will shape Chapter 5.

5 Discussion

On revisiting the question that drives this study, the importance of having interviewed Thomas, Tristan and Vivien after the performance of *Flot* in Paris, and the conversations with Mat, Samantha and Sarah becomes even clearer. I wanted to know how practices that arguably foster creativity in collaboration processes are constructed, what they facilitate, and how dancers can sustain the skills they have acquired. Both Ballet de Lorraine and ZOO perform new creations several times after they have premiered, sometimes in different spaces, and often with a gap of months between shows. Repertoire must sometimes be reconstructed in a question of days – in Ballet de Lorraine, various repertoire pieces are scheduled to be rehearsed on the same day. This poses challenges that involve factors beyond the skilfulness of individual dancers, and which in turn are interdependent. The question of sustaining the modes of being and operating required for the performance of *Flot*, for example, goes beyond the dancer's own capacity and expertise. It involves the coming together of the factors of time (duration, periodicity), place (the space of practice) and people (those involved in the event) – as will be discussed – in an appropriate correlation. As in Section 4.2, where I explored the macrocosm of ZOO, the following sections derive from categories constructed according to Grounded Theory, which I weave with references presented in Chapter 2. References to annotated video material appear in brackets.

Susan Leigh Foster says that '[i]mprovisation makes rigorous demands on the performer. It assumes an articulateness in the body through which the known and the unknown will find expression' (2003: 7). I would add that it assumes an articulateness in the whole being. Taking risks – artistically and conceptually as well as physically – is part of it and, as Foster says, a 'vigilant porousness to the unknown' is required (2003: 7). Yet what is the 'unknown'? If it is 'that movement' and 'that moment' – which are still to happen and therefore unknown because they are improvised – it can be dealt with on the level of expertise referred to here, and used creatively, only if it is approached and navigated from a source replete with practical knowledge. Expert dancers rely fully on acquired technical skills, which they combine, in turn, with highly developed improvisation-specific skills. De Spain draws an analogy between improvisation and a 'carnival ride', adding that

the intensity and density of improvisation causes practitioners to develop survival strategies and skills that help streamline choice-making and open doors to creative resources. One such skill is a heightened sensitivity to what is happening during

the improvisation, a layered, synchronic process of embodied cognition that I refer to as 'improvisational awareness' (2011: 26).

De Spain further refers to what helps him to slow down while improvising, find 'calm in the midst of what can feel like chaos' and be able to investigate what he terms 'the landscape of the now' (2011: 26). What helps him is an assessment of 'the components of the moment' that are necessary to 'form and filter the connections' between self and surroundings (2011: 26). When dancers are thus skilled, 'improvisation can become more than just a real-time creative engine; it can also be a tool for investigating the complex and intimate relationship between being and making, between sensation and action' (2011: 26). Possibly, as Melinda Buckwalter observes, 'this skill of being present and adaptable while dancing with a group' is what may engender 'ensemble awareness' (Campbell 2004 cited in Buckwalter 2010: 17), 'a sense of what's developing in the dance in a given moment and how the individual's movement choices play into that development' (2010: 17).

The dancers have to know how *not* to know, or be prepared for not being *fully* prepared, thereby predicting as much as possible, and as much as necessary, some of the immediate outcomes. Why is that so? Because they are composing precisely with that emerging unknown element, with movements that emerge out of their own making and that of others, in those specific spatiotemporal circumstances. In that sense, and in this space, past (acquired knowledge), present (the event) and future (forecasting) amalgamate; they are one. The choreographic structure that was composed beforehand – by Thomas in collaboration with the dancers – provides a framework for the performance, and some elements remain the same, for example the music and the costumes. Yet, every move a dancer makes can be, at once, both response and initiation. The flow of internal and external cues that dancers continuously process demands exceptional modes of being, put in operation be it in the studio or on the stage, whether with four other dancers, or with twenty-two.

5.1 Thomas Hauert's choreographic process: creating a microcosm

On a structural level, ZOO and Thomas' work deploys 'a complex network of movements connected in time and space', and can be seen 'as an extension of the tradition of abstract dance' (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). In creating what they regard as highly polyphonic improvisation (2021), not only structures but also specific qualities of being,

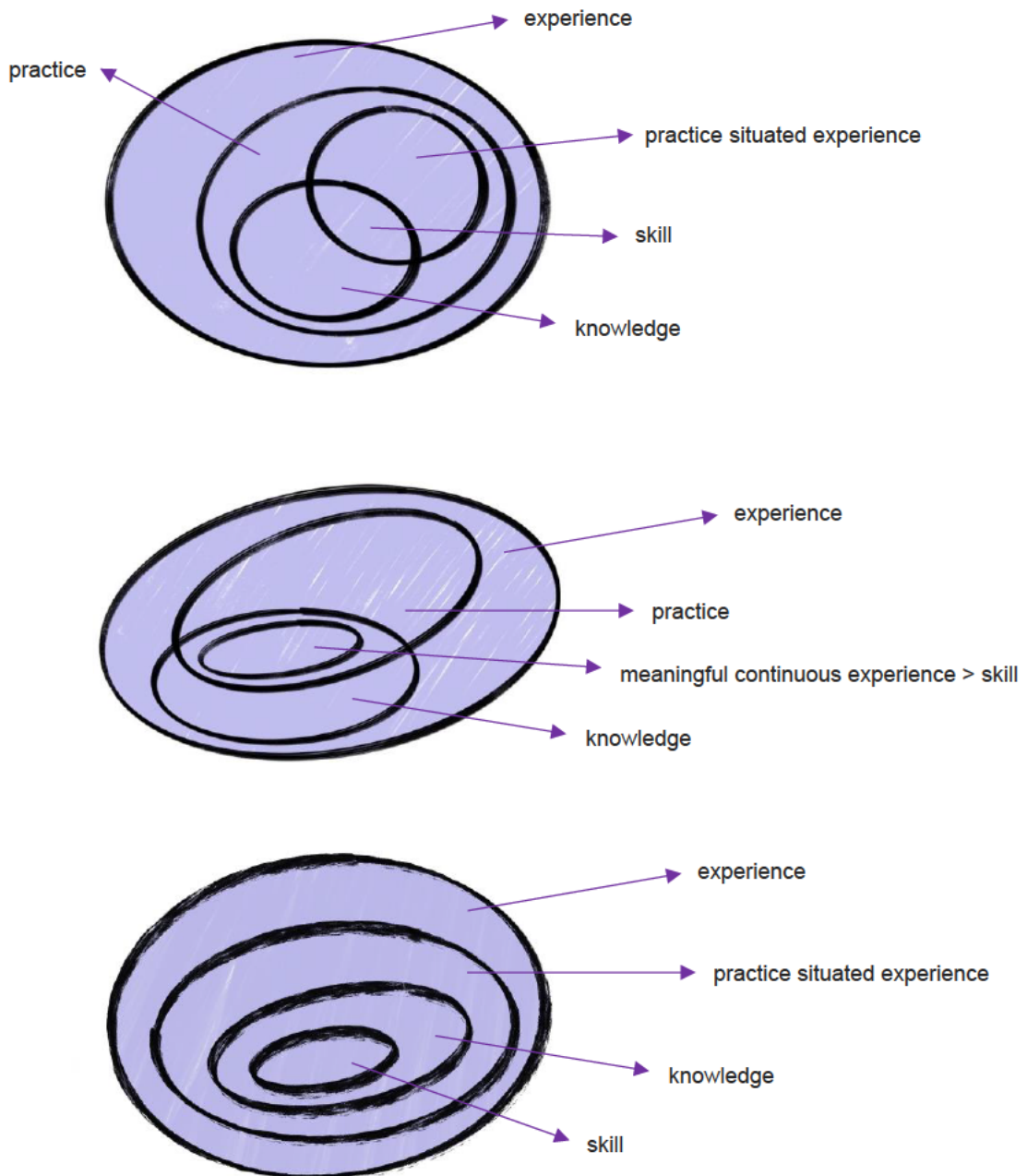
thinking and moving are constituent elements of ZOO's work, and the same applies to *Flot*. Analysing and discussing the multi-layered and highly complex context of creative collaboration through this case is not a simple task, since attempts to isolate each dimension and the various layers for the sake of analysis may betray the intricate character of the mutually defining nature of these elements, and the often shifting relationships between them. In order to enter these tightly connected layers and dimensions, I will attempt not to isolate them but rather to adopt different standpoints. The notion of dimensions and layers can help in understanding that there are fields or areas as well as levels of engagement involved in making and performing that dancers enter, exit and dwell in, continuously, according to what the work requires.

Noticeably, *Flot* has been worked through meticulously. Briefly looking back at Victoria Marks' way of seeing improvisation and choreography mentioned in Chapter 2, one could in fact take the words she uses to describe choreography and apply them to *Flot* and to ZOO's oeuvre. She has said that before a work is presented 'it has been transformed into carefully worked and reworked choreography, down to the smallest details' (2003: 135). However, in Thomas and ZOO's creations, the improvisatory, painstakingly worked and reworked *is* the choreography. Also, similar to in several other companies with similar working modes, some structures were tried out in the studio that do not feature in the final version. Regarding this process, Vass-Rhee observes that these trials still play an important role, as many of them enable the use and probing of new skills fostered in the process, 'including complicit engagement and attention to intention' (2018: 228).

While writing the sections on experience, practice, knowing and skill in Chapter 2, I sketched the relationship between these elements as I experience them, based on continuous self-observation using the lens of this study, in an attempt to grasp their interaction. This led me to consider that dancers' knowing is not equal to skill. Rather, I argue that dancers' knowledges manifest through the skills they develop or, in other words, what they know – which encompasses various ways of knowing *that* and *how* (Ryle 1945: 4), or various types of knowledge – is evident in their skilled actions. In this sense, knowledge is greater than what can manifest in skilled operation. At an early stage, the drawings I made displayed skill and knowledge as two elements of experience with intersecting aspects or areas. Later, further self-observation led to my perceiving knowledge rather as a space within which myriad skills could be developed, as if 'experience' and 'practice situated experience' would embrace 'knowledge', and the three

of them would embrace 'skill', and the earlier intersection image was replaced by a drawing of the first containing the latter (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: RELATING PRACTICE, EXPERIENCE, KNOWING AND SKILL



Different stages of sketching a graphic representation of the relationships between practice, experience, knowing and skill. Illustrations by Ilia Rüegg (used with the author's permission).

Further along the research process, I came across Ingold's contention that 'skill is at once a form of knowledge and a form of practice' (Ingold 2000: 316); another formulation of this idea could regard skill as being contained in the larger scope of knowing, and as being a manifestation or an articulation of knowledge. By this I mean that aspects of dancers' knowledge are made evident or observable, by them and by others, through their skilled action, but skilled action will not encompass the full spectrum of the knowing *what* and *how* of dance artists. Perhaps this is because not all types of knowledge available to us are transportable or transferable into action. Zarrilli's notion that the skilled practitioner is 'a sentient being able to *be*, *do*, respond, and *imagine* in (theatrical) environments' (2007: 638, added emphasis) hints at the dimensions involved in skill with regard to the human factor: the being, the thinking, the doing channelled into what is perceived as skilled performance.

5.1.1 Choreographing self – Modes of being and operating as choreography

I start with the dimension hinted at in ZOO's aim 'to make order emerge from disorder [...] leveraging exceptional qualities of perception, attention and concentration made possible and required by improvisation' (ZOO/Thomas Hauer 2021). In these words, there is reference to extraordinary ways of being that involve ways of thinking and acting – attentive, perceptive, alert and concentrated while improvising – which are the basis and a key characteristic of ZOO and Thomas' work. I refer to these ways as modes of being and operating and will look into what typifies Thomas' approach, to then discuss the implications of this approach and reflect on how such exceptional qualities are developed through his dance practice and how they may be sustained over time.

On his first working day with Ballet de Lorraine, Thomas introduced exercises that explored a rather internal dimension, asking dancers to work on their own and articulate their joints, while reminding them of the possible movements within each joint. Attentively, carefully, those articulations were fed with awareness through an investigative inner perspective that was the preparation for the 'careful scientist'. Movement is improvised. This implies a certain freedom to perform movements within the constraints of the tasks. Yet, modes of being and operating are given, are set parameters that, as becomes evident, typify Thomas' signature work. The importance of these particular modes of working is made clear in a statement made by Thomas in an interview the day after the *Flot* premiere in November 2018. In our conversation about the set and open-ended

components of *Flot*, which Thomas referred to as parameters 'in the toolbox that they can play with' (interview 4), he said:

I guess what's also given, what's part of the mechanics, is that hyperalert state they have, like, if they cannot be in that – or that's what I ask them – if they're not in there, then I would mention it the day after [laughs] (Thomas, interview 4).

I then asked him, what would happen if dancers were not 'there': 'Then they're not dancing the piece' (interview 4), he replied. This suggests that, if dancers cannot be 'in there', in the hyperalert mode, then the performance is not *Flot* anymore, it stops becoming what was intended. Evidently, there is a clearly defined structural dimension that Thomas also mentioned in the interview; operating according to the repertoire of the 'toolbox' that he created with the group is also set (see Table 3 for set and open-ended components). In that sense, modes of being are as much part of the choreographic as the creation of movement material that is performed and composed according to spatiotemporal parameters. I contend this makes a case for choreography being inscribed also in the innermost dimensions of self. In this microcosm, should a dancer fail to enter that mode – in which she dwells and from which she thinks and moves – what she performs is something other, not *Flot*. I propose Thomas and the dancers are not only choreographing movement but are also 'choreographing self'. There is a layer of exceptionality here that requires what I regard as a transformational process (see also Section 5.1.3) in the innermost spheres of each individual.

This idea of 'being in that' and 'being in there' imparts a locality to hyperalertness, a state-place where one should be that conveys situatedness to this state. Where is this place? If it were a localised place or space, one could perhaps learn the pathway to 'there', and 'be there' at will. I experience this state-place as having a shifting nature, manifesting differently every single time, which is one reason why it is so difficult to retrieve, as a state, or to visit, as a place. In this light, the term 'mode of being' conveys the notion of an approach to the intention of being 'there', which, in this context, needs to be a deliberate act that calibrates the dancers' operation with the parameters agreed upon for the piece. From the perspective of an inner dimension, dancers may experience bodily sensations – lived in such moments when one is 'there' – and use these embodied experiences as anchors, in an analogic way, that may help them recall what it is to be there, and how they got there.

state, space, mode

be there

be in it

is a state a space?

is it a question of having time – sufficient time –

to be there so often that one becomes that space?

that our space and that space becomes the same thing?

*that there is, at some point or moment, nothing between me and
that space of constant presence?*

is this 'there' not here?!

and why are we here, and not there,

so often that we keep seeking to be there?

(writing practice, 10.11.20, 10:10)

To further develop this idea of a transformational process and of choreographing self, I must turn to the intersection of self and other. Speaking about her experience in the 'improvised unison' and the challenges posed by the practice, Pauline says that she has to force herself to the extreme to engage hyperattentively, because if she is 'normal', with her regular level of focus, 'it doesn't work at all. If I am myself, it's dead' (interview 1). This conversation took place during the second period of rehearsals in June 2018, at a stage when Thomas was still focusing on the practices described in Chapter 4. Answering the question as to how she coped with this mode of working, Pauline said that, at that moment, she had 'to be super concentrated, super attentive, and if I am not thousand percent of the time, I get quickly discouraged because I feel that I can't do it' (interview 1). Depending on a dancer's capacity to respond to this exigence, which clearly appears here as a choreographic parameter, the requirement may ask for a sort of exceptional version of oneself wherein usual modes of being, which impact thinking and moving, need to be transformed and brought to an extraordinary – as in non-ordinary – level of operation.

It could be argued that every creation process involves some degree of transformation in the artist. My concern here is with the extent to which this transformative process must occur, and the dimensions involved. One thing is to train in physical principles based on unusual coordination in the joints through a counterintuitive approach to articulation, as in when Sarah speaks in her interview about the 'careful scientist'; this arguably belongs to the kind of skilled performance dancers are accustomed to. Another – pretty different in nature as a choreographic parameter – is to seek to achieve qualities described as 'one hundred percent present' (Vivien, interview 1), 'hyperalertness', 'constant presence' (Hauert 2019), 'total alertness' and 'total presence' (Mirijam Gurtner in the video about *Notturnino* (2014), Candoco Dance Company 2014), which should transpire as the

dancers create and compose, navigating interfaces of internal and external dimensions [DAY 2_180508 – 00:05:52 > PRESENCE AT ALL TIMES].

One way to pursue enskillment in this manner involves the development of multi-attentional perception and action. As will become ever more evident, multi-attentional perception and action are also fundamental to Thomas' improvisation choreography, in order to perform 'without the intervention of a central authority' and compose a 'highly polyphonic "writing"' (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). Being highly concentrated is concomitant with decentralised operation, thus besides being hyperalert dancers also 'have to react quickly and alert and react to everybody else' (Thomas, interview 4). Reacting or responding to others – very often immediately – does not mean picking up on just any emerging reaction but, rather, implies a dual act that is inventive and compositional, in line with the set framework of the piece [DAY 16_181106 – 00:16:27].

In my fieldnotes I named this process 'being all over the place', based on the idea of the decentralised perception and action that operate in multi-attentional modes. 'Being all over the place' refers to the experience of spreading conscious thought and action to as many points of one's being as possible [DAY 2_180508 – 00:05:27]. Since this happens while performing collaboratively, the action expands to embrace the group and the space, evidencing the need for a 'dramaturgical consciousness' (Middelow 2015: 106, 111), on which basis dancers also decide how to compose with space, as well as an expansion of one's peripersonal space.

In my view, this action asks first of all for a widening of the dancer's range of visual perception, translating that perception into unison action. In the two first days of creation, Thomas and the dancers worked on range of movement, exploring counter-intuitive coordinations and mapping, working meticulously with the 'careful scientist' and expanding knowledge of their joints' range of motion. Now there is the broadening of the visual capacity, but also the expansion of peripersonal space. It is almost as if they would incorporate the other dancer's intentions, cancelling out the moments when they do not manage and jumping into the next possible unifying or synching point.

According to science writers Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee, in our engagement in cooperative tasks in a shared space, as is the case here, our mirror neurons and body maps help us forecast actions of others (Blakeslee and Blakelsee 2008: 175). They go on

to say that in such circumstances there is a tendency to 'begin to mimic the other, synchronising your movements, postures and manerisms' (2008: 175). In our case, this shared space is not only defined by dancers being in the same room. It involves the expanding one's peripersonal space within which other dancers will partake and, in sharing that, 'mirror neurons interested in not only the motion but also in the motivation behind it [...] predict the intentions as well as define actions', 'mapping the interaction' (2008: 174, 175).

Following this ability to anticipate or forecast, dancers must also take decisions on how to respond, a complication that creates equations not solvable through the usual interpretation we make of people's actions in everyday life. Some outcomes are predictable, however, how initiations and responses evolve is to a great extent open. The context asks for creativity, innovation, surprise, and it is not unproblematic in what concerns risk of accidents and injury. In that sense, the term 'constant presence' Thomas uses to describe one of the skills his practices develop and which is indispensable for the creation and performance of his work seems very fitting to the amalgamation of very specific modes of being and operating dancers must know how to access at once. As anthropologist Konstantinos Retsikas has put it 'the bodies to which practices give rise are recognized as being both a product and a condition for the reproduction of distinct modes of being-in-the-world' (Retsikas 2010: 143).

Dancers must also become more inventive, acquiring qualities and skills, retaining them over time and transforming them accordingly, responding to shifts in the constellation of people, time and place. Parameters that may seem simple to follow take on a different scope or scale when looked at closely. One example is the instruction to avoid habit in creating and performing. Thomas asks dancers 'to somehow keep going against their habits' (interview 4). In avoiding habit, and in order to become familiar with strategies that facilitate the discovery of deviations from the usual and known movement pathways, the 'careful scientist' and the 'assisted solo' play a central role. Habits here denotes movement material habitually produced that is not varied enough (in Thomas' view) to qualify as inventive and, therefore, interesting. Thomas makes this explicit when he says:

when I started making work, I was very aware of those patterns that we have ingrained in our bodies, and four of the five dancers of my first dancers were ex-Rosas dancers and it's a kind of style that, yeah... you do it every day and for years without end, and it just sticks, and it's hard to get over it. The same with dance training, or whatever training, also ballet training – every training you repeat

over and over again – it sticks. With my first project we were very aware of that and we kind of wanted to make an effort to get over those patterns and do other things, but at the same time we wanted to work with improvisation, where those patterns... Then it's a question of practising and inventing other things. I find, once you know this, then it produces much more interesting movement, or you have a freedom of, at least as little as possible, people relying on those forms that, quite often, don't come from an interesting place, or a kind of tradition that I'm critical of, or a style they are there because of repetition, kind of... for me they are not creative (Thomas, interview 1).

Habits ingrained in the body are a complex interwoven web of internalised patterns, including dancers' dance training, many of which are difficult to address by means of dance practice alone in a limited, short period of time. Thomas himself affirmed there was little time for the production of *Flot*. The body is an integral part of the person as a whole, and elements of self-image, as well as of identifying oneself with what these patterns stand for, come into play. Questions arise as to whether and to what extent dancers are interested in questioning and modifying habits, while such transformation is, it can be said, not easily undergone through dance practice in a short period of time. From the 'choreographing self' perspective, avoiding habits involves an initial process of becoming aware of one's own habits and conditionings. In the present context, this will have to go beyond the individual domain, and performers will have to become aware of fellow dancers' habits and conditionings as well.

Thomas' work, in its completeness, draws on his worldview and the shared space of ZOO members' principles; the pieces have an integrity closely linked with their principles of existence and co-existence. Dancers do not reproduce movement steps or phrases learned but create new pathways of being in relation to themselves as generators, and others as co-generators. However, being critical of usual ways and seeking to avoid the habitual is not always unproblematic. Performers may become excessively judgemental about what they produce, which in turn may result in their becoming less inventive. This is a possible implication of treating habits as something to be avoided, which was mentioned by Tristan and Vivien in our last conversation following performances of *Flot* six months after its premiere, and to which I will return in Section 5.1.3.

Regarding modes of operating, bypassing the 'conscious mind' is something Thomas often points to, and this was also commented on by Mat (ZOO), Pauline and Vivien (Ballet de Lorraine). Thomas called the dancers' attention to this aspect during the making of *Flot* [DAY 3_180509 – 00:02:29 > MODES OF BEING AND OPERATING]. There seems to be

an element of reducing the amount of cognitive activity, and the level of mental concentration on the guidelines of the task, to allow for immediate responses, for example, so that a touch, a look or the music can go directly into the dancing. Sarah described this in terms of getting to the point where there is 'a kind of *sauce* that links already the different points [ingredients] on the list' (Sarah).

Dancers are selective about what can be part of the experience and what cannot, inhibiting some tendencies and freeing up specific facilitative approaches in a selection process unique to each individual. Pauline points out the directness of information from other dancers passing from the viewing into movement: 'It needs to go from the sight to the body' (interview 2), she says. In describing this immediacy, she gives examples of the practices that substantiate the need for a specific mode of thinking, which I relate to Thomas' own description of a mode of creating that bypasses conscious thought (interview 1). Giving the 'improvised unison' as an example, Pauline speaks about letting go 'of your thought process because, even though there are very, very specific tasks at hand that are asked from us, you still need to dance, you need to dance through it all, and sometimes, when you overthink...' (interview 2) – she left this sentence unfinished. In her words, the tasks 'work a lot better when they are spontaneous, and you're having fun with it than when you're getting in your head about not making it work' (interview 2).

Furthermore, negotiating with ever-changing degrees of control is a constant and can pose challenges. Shifts between taking and giving the lead that occur repeatedly in the 'improvised unison' require the dancer to go 'from thinking to not thinking too much, very quickly' (Pauline, interview 2). To Pauline, the 'metal wire' can be pretty disturbing:

you have to think [that] you receive a contact – so it's processed – but at the same time you can't overthink. When you feel, you react, and you have to pick what you do towards that contact. You're always making a choice, you have to choose, to choose, to choose and at the same time you wanna let go of the brain (interview 2).

Another element of the idea of 'choreographing self' is intuition. In her article on intuition, Susan Melrose, in a graphic gesture, strikes through, twice, the title of her article, '~~Intuition~~' (2006a). Her gesture denotes, on the one hand, the term's 'effective negation or relegation to second place in university-dominant models of intelligibility, where "analysis" and the "critical-theoretical" are the preferred focus' (2006a: 75). On the other, it indicates the rare appearance of the word 'intuition' in the index of dominant Cultural and

Performance Studies publications of the past thirty years (2006a: 75), which, in Melrose's view, makes it possible to affirm that 'intuition is either irrelevant to, or marginalised in those contexts' (2006a: 75). That is to be expected, she adds, since much of the omission of 'intuition' from indexes indicates that thesis texts are not concerned with 'art-making processes' (2006a: 75, original emphasis), whereas interpretations of existing performance material are widespread. Cultural reception and not cultural production by expert practitioners has been the focus and tends not to look into the singularity of such practitioners, meaning that 'the tying of the outcomes of expert intuition to a single, "signature" practitioner tends toward the academically unthinkable/unwritable, except in anecdotal terms' (2006a: 75).

Intuition is central to ZOO's work, even if some of their practices involve counterintuitive approaches. Sarah's notion of intuition involves an analogy with the consistency and texture achieved when ingredients are mixed in the right proportion and become more than the sum of their parts. In her account, intuition

might be linked to the notion of choice and of trusting yourself, being in a listening mode with yourself, allowing things to happen, recognising the joy of it, I would say, or the moment it takes you, the moment *la mayonnaise prend*, in French – coming back to the culinary, or the soup or whatever it is – recognising the moment when it makes sense, the moment it becomes more than the addition of the parts. This magical moment when oil and egg become mayonnaise (Sarah).

She says this is perhaps what intuition is to her: 'to recognise something and to allow it to happen without too much self-judgement, something that's been created by the encounter of different factors' (Sarah).

Referring back to Mat's example of intuition as it operates in life, when he says that if a call or a sensation comes he follows it even if his reason asks 'why?' (Mat), there is one factor to bear in mind: the operation of these expert improvisers' intuition at work often leaves no time for the formulation of such thoughts, or for questioning why a certain course of action should be taken. In creation, as in performance, dancers initiate, and respond to existing, choreographic developments in milliseconds. Here is where performers may feel that their actions bypass conscious processes. They are however highly aware of their actions, they are hyperalert, continually present, not only for choreographic purposes and because they are indispensable modes of being in Thomas and ZOO's improvisation choreography but because they must also safeguard their own

and others' physical integrity. This may seem paradoxical, yet it evidences the complex workings of the innermost spheres of a dancer's skilled perception and action and also how, in order to perform in this manner, intensive and durational engagement with detailed conscious processes is fundamental. Perhaps this is one instance of De Spain's idea of 'survival strategies' (2011: 26) developed in the improvisatory [DAY 16_181106 – 00:16:49 > NUNACED DECISION-MAKING].

The question posed earlier as to who in this context is entitled to assess whether required states or intuition are operative comes again to the fore. Who knows whether the dancer is 'there' where she should be? From what I have gathered in this study, and through self-observation, I argue that this is a self-perceived instance. Besides all that has been explored this far, dancers' skill lies also in knowing for themselves whether they are in the desired mode of being and operating to perform *Flot* (or any of ZOO's pieces), which is also due to the uniqueness of how these modes will be derived. Dancers develop improvisation-specific 'organs' of perception, so to speak, that can act upon the appropriate, and corresponding, coming together of the spatiotemporal and human factors (time, place, people) and can recognise when '*la mayonnaise prend*' (Sarah).

Whereas in educational contexts learning processes will often be assessed by the teacher, who needs to structure training and practices that can offer demonstrable learning outcomes, as Roche points out in her article 'Shifting Embodied Perspectives in Dance Teaching' (2016: 145), in this professional context a highly skilled performer will have developed 'internal devices' of self-assessment, and integrated them into action. In a cosmology where performance is characterised by the lack of a central authority, assessment of the required modes of being and operating becomes – and this is part of enskillment here – the responsibility of each individual. At the same time, as Thomas told me in our first interview and Mat likewise mentioned, there is a shared accountability, in the sense that dancers are there for one another, as 'external devices' so to speak, assessing and assisting one another in sustaining states, dimensions and all sorts of constituents of the performed microcosm.

Thomas' and the dancers' experience of expert intuition as a basic tool for performance-making (Melrose 2006a) also grants them the ability, at least to a certain extent, to perceive other performers' states and recognise the source from which others are dancing. This made it possible for Tristan, for instance, to observe that the performance of

Flot in Paris had a quality that differed from what was present six months earlier at the Opéra de Lorraine (something also observed by Thomas, interview 5). To my question about how the performance had gone, he replied:

Um, it was good, but I was a bit frustrated. In general it was good and I think the audience liked it, and it was nice to perform in a different venue. But I don't know, I felt that people were on a very different mode while performing. I felt like some were more focused on showing off, and being a great dancer than really being focused on the tasks and on the relations. So I felt a bit alone, I felt like there was sometimes this kind of wall between dancers and me, because they were not really there – not all the time, but in some moments and it's hard because you... I mean, you don't really have to have a connection with someone [and do the same thing] but you need the others to have reasons to move. Most of the time you can also move with the music and stuff, but at some point you really need to be in relation. And, so, there were some moments where I felt like 'Come on! Let's connect!' but there was just a few moments that felt [like] forever. But besides that it was good (Tristan, interview 4).

Melrose writes that expert-performer intuitions can be regarded as 'multi-dimensional in potential, practice and practitioner-specific, relational in their tight linking to the setups and contexts to which they apply', and will 'tend to be partial and to lack rigid boundaries, because they need to "fit" with other choices from among the heterogeneous systems at play' (2006a: 76). Partly indistinguishable, they are 'potentially multi-stranded in implication', and also 'multi-schematic, multi-participative, and performative, in their overall concern with how to *work* the performance event, in all its complexity; how to *work* spectators, in turn' (2006a: 76, original emphasis).

Melrose goes on to say that these characteristics seem to the practitioner to be 'sensed' and are quickly regarded as different from 'thought', even if the 'collaborative nature of performance-making will tend to mean that what is initially sensed by one practitioner is likely, if it seems to work, very swiftly to be discussed and thought by others' (2006a: 77). There is no central authority in the person of the choreographer defining this stance (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021), rather, as Melrose highlights, expert practitioners manipulate specific elements, play with patterns, juggle virtual tools and grab models and potential combinations, 'some of which will have an elaborative task with regard to the discipline (and to the prevailing interpractice), rather than one more conventionally linked, indexically, to thematics, to narrative development, or to explanatory description' (2006a: 76).

Pauline, Tristan and Vivien (Ballet de Lorraine), and Mat, Sam, Sarah and Thomas (ZOO) did not seem uninterested in verbalising what intuition was to them and how it was experienced in operation. They appeared to be genuinely searching for the most appropriate expressions, while also acknowledging the difficulty in doing so. This contrasts with Melrose's observation, citing Gregory Ulmer (1994: 143) that, despite evidence of their capacity to bring the 'intuitive product' (Melrose 2006a: 77) into operation in performance, the expert practitioner may have little interest in articulating evidence of how it is produced. Most pertinent to my discussion, however, is Melrose's claim that, in contrast to everyday intuition, the expert insightful grasp is far from pre- or anti-analytic (2006a: 77). Citing Elkhonen Goldberg (2005), she adds that

expert intuition, or intuitive operations of an expert kind, are, on the contrary, 'post-analytic': they are the product of analytic processes ... condensed to such degree that [their] internal structure [will tend to] elude ... the person involved in making the intuitive operation' (Melrose 2006a: 77, original brackets).

Writing from the viewpoint of a non-practitioner closely looking into practice, Melrose's reflection on intuition is of great relevance here. She explains further that the performer may intentionally tend to bypass 'orderly, logical steps' (Goldberg 2005: 77 cited in Melrose 2006a: 78) because she is a skilled improviser – which has become possible for her precisely through the process of skill acquisition and retention she has undergone by means of those 'orderly, logical steps' (2006a: 78). This aligns with what I presented above regarding intensive and durational engagement with the detailed conscious processes dancers go through, and touches also upon Thomas' notion of intuition as expressed in our first interview:

The thing is a bit what I told them today with that exercise, like the scales on the piano... Yeah, it's like practising something and learning, consciously doing it, and you have to give the command, go through that whole process until you could... With the pianist, you can kind of read [the notes] straight away... Is that not intuition? Or what is that? It's skipping the process of kind of remembering consciously and then giving a command to do it. Yeah, because you've experienced it and you know (Thomas, interview 1).

Thomas acknowledges the role of intentional conscious processes as basic meticulous work (evident for example in the 'careful scientist'); however the example he gives of the pianist, who after enskillment can read music, which is set through notation, does not fully correspond with his improvisation choreography. Still, there is a parallel that seems to become established in his musings, in that intuition could be regarded as a language to

be learned – just that dancers would not be learning words or terms but rather ways to go about improvising, the specific modalities of being, thinking and moving. In articulating their experience of intuition in the present context, dancers used terms such as ‘trust’, ‘open’, ‘able to shut out judgement and planning’, ‘sense’, ‘feel’, ‘absence of over-thinking’, ‘be in the moment’, ‘flow’, ‘let it happen’, ‘encounter of factors’, ‘confidence in the body’ and ‘feel something coming’ (in a group situation), which indicate some of the modalities of expert intuition, and which may vary from person to person, and depending on the constellation of human and spatiotemporal factors at play. Melrose’s final observations in her article seem to align with this idea, and they also touch upon the interplay of what I previously referred to as internal and external cues. Further quoting Ulmer, she writes that

a creative practitioner, in these sorts of terms, will have learnt to make herself open to ‘sudden, unexpected relationship[s] with other areas of [her own and other participants’] experience’ (Ulmer 1994: 140-2). Her perception, in such instances, will tend to ‘involve . . . an active coordination of internal and external stimuli, whose coordination is the key to intuition’ (Melrose 2006a: 78, original brackets).

My intention with the term ‘innermost spheres’ in the title of Section 4.2.2, where I reported ZOO dancers’ perceptions of intuition in operation, lies precisely in the need to highlight the key role of heightened perceptions of self, while interacting with other and environment, that is required in but also developed through improvisation choreography. In Thomas and ZOO’s case, however, the ‘perception work’ (Melrose 2006a: 78) is not in the hands of the director but must be comprehended, absorbed and integrated into action by each dancer taking part in collaborative performance-making.

5.1.2 Relationality as choreography – Composing on the interface of self/other/environment

[T]he focus is not only in the inside. You have to really read the others, read the group, and so, it’s also a lot of concentration. And then you have to read the others, but with yourself, and how you, as a group, shape your making, durations... Then you go back and forth with you, the others, the group (Tristan, interview 1).

Thomas and ZOO see their choreography as a microcosm and explain that constant negotiation is needed between each dancer’s freedom and creativity and their desire to connect with others (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). Tapping into notions of free will and responsibility, and the continuously shifting constellations in the choreographic, are

elements of ZOO's work that echo the types of negotiation at work in social interactions (2021). They write that 'conflicts, tensions and resolutions' mirror 'the forces by which we are confronted with our human condition' (2021). Performances unfold without the intervention of a central authority, forming an integrated dynamic system of unpredictable behaviour, in which dancers both initiate and respond to movement; responses trigger other moves within the same structure, or initiate a new development (2021). Drawing freely on a shared directory of physical principles incorporated during a long process of creation, the dancers are responsible for the invention and implementation of movements on stage, and also for the creation and development of group structures. They must adapt their individual role within dynamic constellations whose progress is constantly changing (2021). Within this relationality, the required skills include those of 'complicit thought and action within shared practice', as mentioned by Freya Vass-Rhee (2018: 226).

Relationality is the term I use to refer to the choreographic interplay of the triad of self, other and environment that was explored in Chapter 2. Being together, which I also refer to as co-presence, implies intersubjective communication that is not always explicit, not always noticeable, even though it may be operating. We are and remain porous to others and the surroundings, and in such spaces of relationality something comes into being that is the result of the very event of co-habiting a space-time. Relationality is the creation process as well as the choreography; a loosening of these elements could represent a collapse of the choreography's integrity, and consequently its identity as a work created collaboratively.

convívio

*to live together, conviviality
breaks with compartmentalised ideas of what happens in the midst
of human beings being together
qualities and ways of knowing that result from conviviality
are neither mine nor yours
are not transmitted from those who know to those who don't
who knows who is giving or taking...
qualities and ways of knowing that result from conviviality
but float amongst self and other
and penetrate the partakers
who can claim for its ownership?
(ongoing movement practice, warm-up shared online with a group
of amateurs during covid-19 lockdown restrictions, 06.03.21)*

The Portuguese term *convívio* corresponds to the English 'conviviality'. Translation, however, can be mean; certain words seem to exist only in one language and resist being

translated. What I reflect upon in the journal entry above is that time spent together in practice provides, to those involved, not just hours of conviviality but the ‘rubbing off’ of qualities on one another, a sort of interpenetration of human qualities and abilities, the kind of knowledge communication or exchange wherein the direction of flow is not defined (in contrast to the idea of ‘knowledge transmission’, as referred to in Chapter 2), and which can be analogous to the process of osmosis in plants. Knowledge exchange happens in conviviality. The autoethnographic entry above (*convívio*) relates to reflections arising through shared movement practice; it re-enters a point I have considered for a long while in regard to the notion of communication of knowledge. As for diverse ways of communicating knowledge, Thomas also facilitates the ‘communication link’ Bloch (2005) speaks about by experimenting in partnership with the dancers, immersing himself in the experience when improvising with them; hence dancers are exposed to his highly developed improvisational dynamic, as they are required to engage directly with his immersion and absorption in the task.

For Thomas, working with Ballet de Lorraine afforded opportunities to make new discoveries, and articulate and share his knowledges anew as he demonstrated/experienced his and ZOO’s practices. Vass-Rhee calls attention to a similar process when describing the complicity that arises among dancers in such contexts. In her article on Forsythe’s *Whole in the Head* mentioned in Chapter 2, she writes:

The ensemble veterans cast in the new work also benefitted from the experience of new partnerships, as well as opportunities to reflect on the knowledge they had accrued. As Forsythe would observe, San Martin – a choreographer in her own right – deeply enjoyed working with Johnson as a new partner in duets, while Johnson, the new dancer with the least experience of Forsythe’s repertory, could draw on San Martin’s knowledge and experience for support (2018: 227).

In particular, in the context of collaborative dance-making, the discoveries, ways of knowing and artefacts emerge out of co-presence and co-action. There are initiators and leaders, yet they are at the same time in relation to the others, in an interdependent relationality, mutually defining roles and productions. And there is the time factor, necessary not only in terms of number of hours or months but as process – time allows maturation.

In consideration of self/other/environment experienced as one system, the dancers had to learn to cope with the challenges of multi-attentional skilled action while focusing on

artistic intent that required a high level of accountability and responsiveness. Pauline described the challenges she faced in coping: she would tell herself 'to be super concentrated, super attentive because as soon as it kind of stops working, uff... I always have to keep that level of focus up, 1,000%' (interview 1). Structural choreographic indications, such as keeping a specific distance between each other in the 'walked unison', is a spatial relationship parameter of a different nature to that of being in 'constant presence'. The presence of clear spatial parameters side-by-side with specific modes of being suggests that relationality in improvisation choreography has various dimensions and implications. The transformational process needed to operate within the required modes, as discussed in the previous section, is not equivalent to keeping one's distance from other performers, as is required in some of *Flot's* scenes. I aim to call attention to the different types of relationality involved. Expert dancers develop a sense of space and distance throughout their training that allows them to perform spatial parameters without further implications for their innermost spheres. Relationalities, when it comes to multi-attentional focus and distributed thinking for collective decision-making (as in the 'improvised unison' and the 'complementary'), however, demand the skilled operation of inner qualities of each dancer in uninterrupted conversation with the group and the surroundings.

Nuanced relationality is continuously presenting itself. Ballet de Lorraine is a large company and at any one time there were twenty-four to twenty-six dancers involved in the creation process. Relationality here also means that every move is a way of positioning oneself relative to shifting features of time, space and people. In the event of improvisation choreography, this relationality never ceases; there is an elasticity to the strings forming the fabric of myriad connections – sometimes more, sometimes less stretched – but the tension or tonus of this linkage remains throughout. Samantha shared her interest in these continual shifts in relationality, saying that the nature of knowing in improvisational dance is an ongoing process: 'Yeah, and they always change, you can never lean back and know it. Yeah. That's nice, I like that. It's always working and practising' (Samantha).

This is in line with points explored in Chapter 2 regarding the notion that performers do not arrive at knowing through learning some skills facilitated by exercises or strategies and that is it. In this context, knowledge is never completed or fully accomplished, knowing is transient and renewable, and improvisation is to a certain extent uncertain, certain only

until it is called into question. In his interview, Mat referred to the need for an iterative calling into question. When he joined the company, he noticed there was a common dance background shared by Samantha, Sarah and Thomas that was biasing their search for new modes of creating. He also commented that, after working together for a while, the company became used to certain approaches that, in turn, biased their view of new inquiries and hindered novel approaches. This relates back to Mark Harris' proposition of the pursuit of 'knowing as an ongoing process' rather than 'knowing as certainty' (2007: 4), which aligns also with Samantha's stating that there is no leaning back and you know it. Harris' urging of us to change our understanding of methods as just tools and formalistic procedures (2007: 12), in our case artistic methods, resonates with what in fact happens in improvisation choreography.

Furthermore, the musicality of the other is here a key ingredient in co-creating. Samantha spoke about physically sensing the other dancers' musicality, through touch, and also about continually giving up and giving in to what is happening around her, which testifies to what is in fact extraordinary in these improvisers' perception of self/other/environment: through their intentional relationality they carve heightened perceptions that craft their action. This encompasses physicality in terms of sensing the other's physical structure, muscular tonus, skin texture and various other subtler bodily features, but it also provides cues as to this dancer's unique compositional qualities and particular rhythm. In short, co-presence and co-action afford coming to know something about what the other *is*, which may make it possible to forecast *what* and *how* the other may *do* in the following moment. With this material composition is made.

The importance of the other

It's not just, I think, a mind thing – your whole being needs to be brought back to [that]. And that's a certain challenge, you know, for sure. And then, because we know each other – I think a lot of it happens not so much through the consciousness 'thing', but because we know each other, and how we can help each other, support and challenge each other – there's something also a bit life related, because we're friends [...] so that speaks also in there.

And so I think it's also kind of love, you know, that you want to help that the other gets there, lovely helping, but also exactly challenging. There's a wanting that the work has a quality, so that we also demand from each other. We challenge each other so you can't just lay back; then the others will also challenge you, like, 'hey come on!'. But if someone needs, in that moment, to be calmer, then we take care of that (Mat).

In the process of researching their own questions, investigating ways to work from intuition and less from the idea that one has to bring consciousness to every move (Thomas interview 5; Mat), ZOO dancers have been interested in ways of improvising that bypass the operations of the conscious mind, as Thomas refers to it (interviews 1 and 5). However, their search for unexplored terrain on an individual level, and the need to go beyond relying on what they already know, asks first for a process of becoming conscious of their own tendencies and movement preferences. Enhancing awareness of both one's own and the others' present state, hence carrying out meticulous, conscious work, is needed to then take the next step in researching, as Sarah explains about the 'careful scientists' genesis:

So then Thomas had the idea to give each other words that would be the name of a movement quality that we would have to find. And those names that we were giving each other, those labels, those titles of movement qualities – of course we were trying to give names that would trigger something that we thought would be different (Sarah).

In answer to my question about for whom it would be different, Sarah said 'for each of us'. I asked whether they had been observing what the others were doing, and she said: 'We were observing and we were thinking "ah, I would like that person to go more into a direction that she never goes to, so I'll give [her] that name", for example' (Sarah). On that occasion, Sarah says, Chrysa Parkinson, who was also part of this particular creation process⁵⁹, gave Thomas the name 'careful scientist'.

I reflected extensively on the importance of the other during this study, sometimes having flashbacks to fieldwork while carrying out my ongoing movement practices. This journal entry is one of the notes I made in this regard:

⁵⁹ The piece Sarah refers to is called *Modify* (200), with concept and direction by Thomas Hauert, created and performed by Thomas Hauert, Lisa Gunstone, Martin Kilvady, Sarah Ludi, Chrysa Parkinson and Mat Voorter. Originally created by Thomas Hauert, Martin Kilvady, Mark Lorimer, Sarah Ludi, Chrysa Parkinson and Ursula Robb (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). For details of this production see <https://zoo-thomashauert.be/en/projects/14/modify>

the other

remembering – continually – is the re-incident that carves my knowing

not like a hammer. no. that would hurt

but like a stroke, so insistent, it leaves long-lasting traces

i often forget to remember

but the other is here to remind me

remind, reaffirm, incorporate

(writing practice, 16.04.21)

Sharing aspects of ZOO in an interview, Thomas highlighted the history they have together, the trust, and also simply the time they spend together. He stressed that the dancers' interest remains lively, something he associates with the fact that the creation processes always do something to them. He also said:

These processes were always kind of strong learning processes, learning periods that leave traces. And that feels somehow substantial, or that feels useful also [in] many different ways. [...] We can be pushed or we will push ourselves to discover things. Yeah, I think everybody also has a kind of an exigence (Thomas, interview 3).

Materials

Thomas continually stressed the role of the source from where dancers generated movement. The source has a central role in his and ZOO's choreographic work because it can indicate whether the dancers are reproducing habitual movements, as Thomas puts it, or actually inventing while being truthful to the task, and co-creating by accessing intuitive modes. What I refer to is not only movement material as it is visible in the dance, but materials that are in fact 'invisible' (specific modes of being and operating) that, though not palpable, manifest in the performance through the dancers' movement, acquiring materiality and visibility. Referring back to Stephanie Bunn, when we recognise the central role of materials in making it is not that 'something is done *to* something' (2011: 21), which would characterise a goal-oriented process. Rather, it is about working *with* materials (2011: 21). In the open-ended process of improvisation, dancers are the ones making, yet, together with their movements and their immediate surroundings, they can also be regarded as materials *with* which the choreography is made.

It is important to note that, even if the operation of specific modes of being is noticeable during a performance, the spectator does not necessarily need to be aware of this process. The appropriate use of the various materials involved in *Flot* is of importance to its identity and integrity, from the point of view of its author and collaborators.

5.1.3 Collaboration as multidimensional transformation process

As mentioned in Chapter 2 in the words of Greg Downey, enskillment involves the 'patient transformation of the novice' (2010: 35) in a process that can promote change on a muscular level and with regard to patterns of attention, motor control, neurological systems, emotional reactions, interaction patterns and self-management strategies. 'Patient transformation' – though expressed in terms not directly related to collaborative creation but nonetheless of relevance here – was also addressed by Gill Clarke in an interview with Professor in Dance Sara Reed, when she explained her experience as a teacher in higher education. She observed that 'the important thing in gaining this embodied understanding is time and you can't short-change that' (Clarke (2002) in conversation with Reed 2018: 10); the value lies not in 'concepts or terminology, it's something that has to be experienced to be of subsequent use and you can't do that without time' (2018: 10, citing Clarke). In what seems to refer to processes of skill retention, Clarke stresses the importance of students' experience, as necessary for them to later retrieve and tap into a skill: 'so until something has actually got beyond the head and actually sunk into the body it only remains abstract and an attempt to imitate the look of a sensation' (2018: 10).

It can be said that the time necessary for a novice to incorporate, absorb and internalise, to then be able to operate new skills, differs from that needed by an expert; yet time remains a factor to be considered. All ZOO members mentioned the long stretches of time they spent in the space of practice. How gradually transformation occurs in gaining knowledge and acquiring new skills is also addressed by Jaana Parviainen, who notes that this process happens through constant practice (2003: 21). She equates dancers' bodily knowledge to a path, and observes that a 'new skill learned yesterday is sedimented in the dancer's body, becoming his or her indwelling tomorrow' (2002: 21). Gaining awareness of the perceptual, physiological and behavioural modifications as an outcome of practice, and of the diversity that emerges through this change, is important insofar as these facets may provide insights into the process of knowing how (Harris 2007: 13). Multi-attentional focus, hyperalert states, expansion of one's peripersonal space, and immediate response in moving in synchronicity, are modes of being and operating that suggest that ZOO and Thomas' choreographic practices offer the observation of another point made previously: the indissoluble relationality of individual(s) and environment as the locus where unmediated perceptual engagement (Ingold 2000: 21; Marchand 2010b: 2) may occur.

In his first interview, Thomas shared with me his satisfaction on learning from a ballet teacher working at P.A.R.T.S. – who had taught students who had participated in Thomas' classes and workshops – that students reported a kind of 'before' and 'after' effect regarding their experience of Thomas' practices. Alluding to the change they underwent, students commented that 'once you've gone through these things, you cannot go back to the dancer you were before. [...] Once you've discovered these things, then it's like... it breaks your naivety or something' (Thomas, interview 1).

Transformation, however, as hinted at earlier, is not 'a thing accomplished'. Mat, Samantha and Sarah called my attention to the challenges of not working together on a daily basis and having to reconstruct a piece to perform after long breaks. In the time between periods of working together, they engage in other projects and, in Mat's words, their 'attention and physicality has gone in other things' (Mat). He spoke about the challenges posed by discontinuity:

if we would work with each other on a daily basis, we would have, of course, the body memory and the being together. Having shared the days before [performing] makes it in a certain way fresh. It goes quicker, I don't know. What is a challenge for sure is if there's a time in between (Mat).

Mat explained further that, most of the time, they immediately do a run-through, going full on and testing where they stand. This is a way to know what needs to be worked on before the show, and they then just refresh those things and get ready for the performance. Mat adds that through going full on as a re-entrance to the piece, they also discover the things that are safely in place. Still, due to the time gap, to working with other people and doing other things, their attention has gone elsewhere: 'the focus, the remembering where to focus on in this specific piece – that needs to come back. It's not just, I think, a mind thing, *your whole being* needs to be brought back to that' (Mat, added emphasis). Interestingly, this last statement connects in some ways to the first section of my discussion – 'choreographing self' – and to both the notion of multidimensionality involved in this practice that is process and performance, and the articulateness involved (Foster 2003: 7) in the whole being.

As Thomas mentioned in our talk in October 2019, after the performance of *Flot* in Paris in June, the intensive rehearsal period just before the premiere in Nancy had brought the dancers to a point where the qualities needed to perform the piece were at hand. Mat and

Sarah, who have been collaborating in ZOO for more than twenty years, experience gathering to perform repertoire after long periods of not working together as challenging. Given this, after six months of no rehearsals of *Flot* and no practice of any kind of Thomas and ZOO's strategies, having three half days to reconstruct *Flot* – rehearsed in parallel to other repertoire pieces – was not a simple task.

Thomas was not present during the reconstruction of the piece but he had the opportunity to attend the performance in Paris. Reflecting on this situation, he told me:

if I had been there, I could have put my finger on [things]. Yeah, that's a bit the dilemma, I think. We talked about that already – that they need to be in it and all those things but, yeah... I said the things over and over again because you keep forgetting and juggling all those 'you should do this, and you should do that' – that is an impossible task. You have to have it all present, with all, and it just takes a little bit more practice. Yeah, especially if people haven't done much of that before, and then we're doing so many different things in between. I wonder now, if there wouldn't be a way also to have that thought [through] already in the conception of the project for such a company, [so] that they can actually take it back [reconstruct the piece]. Yeah, it's their reality, that they might not do it for six months, and then they have two days to take it back. Yeah, it's somehow not in the nature of the work to... (Thomas, interview 5).

From Thomas' perspective, the performance was not as good as those that immediately followed the making process. He added that the rehearsal director did great considering the conditions. Still, he observed, even if she might have verbally reminded the dancers of the ingredients in the 'toolbox', they might, after six months, have been overwhelmed. The stage was very different, the audience was very close to the stage (reported also by Tristan and Vivien, interview 4), and, as Thomas described:

It was a bit sticky in space. They forgot to still make the special connections while doing the 'unison' or whatever. Or, even if the leader is standing still, you can still keep orbiting, the space keeps moving. So they tended to get stuck. Whenever the leader was not moving in space, the whole group was not even moving in space, then it gets a bit heavy (Thomas, interview 5).

Vivien did not perform *Flot* in Nancy due to her injury, but she could perform in Paris. In her experience, it was quite special, 'the space was nice. It's a small theatre so it was much less people, much closer. You know, there was not a stage, it was like on the ground level, like a black box sort of thing' (Interview 4). She then added:

everything had changed because he [Thomas] designed it for the opera house, so it was such a different space that it literally transformed everything. [...] I kind of

think, like, my idea was that the space is better suited to *Flot*, being closer. [...] I think it's probably more powerful when you're close to the dance, yeah (Vivien, interview 4).

On the other hand, distancing oneself from the material and the requirements of a given piece may well bring in new insights and ways of performing. Vivien and Tristan mentioned the process of becoming relaxed about specific challenging aspects of *Flot*, and they attributed this change to not having to pursue certain aspects intensively on a daily basis. Time and distance from the experience of the creation process made space for a lighter relationship with the challenging features they were pursuing all too fiercely during creation. Tristan said to me:

It is important to spot the habits and go against that, but when you practice so much you are so aware of your habits, and it can also block a bit, and now [in the performance in Paris] I felt more relaxed because maybe I was less aware of my schemes, and ways of doing things so I could just dance, be a bit less in my head and be like 'It's wrong'. So that felt good (Tristan, interview 4).

Bringing together various of the points discussed thus far, Mat's ways of responding to my questions were noteworthy in that they gestured towards the shared space of common views and disagreements. His accounts evidence how being together in working together also involves sharing one's view of the world. Being together, sharing one's thoughts, visions and principles, may create common ground that supports the work, as well as revealing conflicts of opinion that, in turn, feed the work with inquiries. These questions might break the patterns dancers get too used to and which become impediments to creativity or further artistic development, or just to their development as human beings. This shared terrain of principles, which may be of a rather philosophical nature, is not explored when there is a limited spatiotemporal framework in which to create a piece.

Another topic emerging from the data, though not directly linked to the dancers' accounts, is memory. As I observed and reflected on how memory operates in the process and in performance, I came to regard it as a space in which dancers move and compose, weaving traces of lived experience with the unfurling present moment. I see this place, where purposeful acts of inventing and composing progress, as a choreographic space. I treat memory here as traces of past experiences that have remained or have been retained by the soloist while practising the 'improvised unison', for example, and which will intentionally be retrieved or recalled or recuperated as a choreographic act. There is in this process a dual-mode kind of operation, or two stages of working memory.

The first moment is the 'making of the memory', by which the experience during the co-presence part of the 'assisted solo', for instance – when soloist and assistant(s) work together – is co-created [DAY 2_180508 – 00:22:02 > MAKING OF THE MEMORY 2], and also [DAY 5_180511 – 00:01:10 > MAKING OF THE MEMORY and 00:17:30 > AWARENESS EVERYWHERE]. While receiving inputs from the assistant, the soloist is constructing a constellation or assemblage of elements that will be referred to later. The soloist is aware of the value of the experience and deliberately garners or stores as much of its totality as she can. In this stage or mode, she is feeding on energy, forces, directions, new sensations and incomprehension. This practice affords individual and unique approaches to the same practice that will define likewise idiosyncratic choreographic developments in the second part, when the soloist is left alone to improvise [DAY 5_180511 – 00:54:13 > EXPLANATION LEAVE THEM ALONE and 00:54:42 > ASSISTED SOLO (TRIO)].

Once the assistant leaves, the soloist starts the retrieval process. Memory becomes the space where she begins to utilise traces of the experience – not recreating or reproducing what happened before, but rather retrieving elements that populate that space of memory in order to dance. Even if this practice is not used in its entirety in *Flot*, the co-presence phase of the 'assisted solo' is fundamental to the choreographic, since dancers will have to refer continuously to those energies, directions and 'incomprehensions', as Pauline called them (Pauline, interview 2), engendered by the assistants.

I see Thomas' processes much more as a twofold occurrence entailing transformative and expansive aspects. It is transformative in that it proposes a becoming aware of one's own and others' conditionings – what Thomas refers to as habits – that do not fit with his artistic intent, to then change those patterns by avoiding their operation while improvising. It is expansive because it intends to explore new pathways and add to what is already there, what each individual artist brings into the encounter of co-creation.

With regard to memory, what is being transformed is the lived experience of each dancer. They learn to refer to memory during performance through the lens of Thomas' improvisation choreography, thus creating the new from what they received from fellow dancers, for example through the 'assisted solo'. Expansion, in turn, manifests in the range of types of experience and the span or array of possible movement materials to be

invented and composed with. Remembering. This skill is an essential element of Thomas' unique principles for inventiveness.

5.1.4 'Becoming one'

Susan Leigh Foster (2002) and Melinda Buckwalter (2010) have noted that contemporary dancers started experimenting as early as the late 1960s with tasks of moving in unison with one or more dancers while improvising. The 'improvised unison' is one such attempt, in which what Thomas suggests with the expression 'become one' is based on an idea of trust among the dancers that safeguards the choreographic order they want to establish. Exempt from an individual authority, variations of this practice are used in *Flot* to deploy 'puzzled choreographic sequences in which movement realised in unison is born spontaneously from the listening that is being done "between" the dancers, rather than by the pre-determined decision of one individual' (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). As evidenced in the annotated videos, besides 'listening' to one another, the multiplicity of improvisation-specific actions involves all the senses. The 'improvised unison' requires, for example, mutual gaze, something commonly referred to as 'reading' each other, and, very importantly – and what greatly interests me – the ability to read each other's *intentions*.

If the other dancer's intention is concealed from Pauline, Tristan or Vivien because they cannot know what the other is thinking or planning on doing, how can dancers perform the 'improvised unison'? One event particularly caught my attention while I was observing rehearsals, and kept on coming to the fore as I repeatedly watched the documentation of Thomas' second day with the dancers, which can be viewed in the video indicated below. Thomas asks the dancers to do the 'improvised unison' in its first version and, while watching what they do, he engages in the practice from a distance. His ability to, in his terms, 'become one' with a dancer in the room playing the leader's role, even while standing several meters away, is noteworthy [DAY 3_180509 – 00:13:58 > THOMAS].

Flot is made up of co-existing systems happening simultaneously, which is identifiable in the video documentation. Each system corresponds to the practices explored in the studio, with their specific parameters, centre of gravity and orbits, performed in shifting constellations, forming the piece. Dancers need to notice changes far outside their immediate sphere of interaction – a multifocal mode of operation. That aligns with Downey's observation of the dispersed visual behaviour in capoeira (2011). Going into the details of what happens physiologically when dancers do this falls beyond the scope of

this study. Briefly, however, what they do is to suppress the reflex that enables them to focus on the movement of objects within their field of vision – something we do with the fovea – just as the capoeiristas Downey studied do. The fovea is a tiny depression in the functional centre of the retina that provides the clearest vision of all [DAY 16_181106 – 00:26:48 > PARALLEL SYSTEMS AND ORBITS].

When attempting to be in unison with others in the group scenes, combining different systems operating as parallel orbits, the dancers make choices on a milli- if not nanosecond basis. This extremely tight timeframe characterises their decision-making in terms of movement material and compositional structure. But how are decisions being made? As is evident in the annotated video, it is not possible to reproduce every single movement in sync with the leader. Joining in with the leader's arm movement is a relatively simple response, even if the initiation is quick, but a shifting of the weight to one leg in order to lift the other or a change of level is more challenging to respond to in unison. This requires an extraordinary proprioception, a direct and very precise knowledge of one's own situation in each moment.

At the same time, the group that is not participating in this specific system is also travelling in space, and this shifting constellation has also to be kept within the spectrum of attention, of an all-encompassing seeing, and responded to accordingly. The systems remain porous to one another, and dancers enter and exit them as they see fit, as these choreographic elements are mutually constitutive. Juxtaposed in space, they intersect. Why is this important? For this intersection, the performers are aware of their own position and their spatial relation to others in the system they are in, and also of how the other constellations are evolving choreographically. What the dancers at the back produce happens through an immediate assessment of their condition and position and their availability – physical and otherwise – regarding what *can* be responded to in unison, which requires an enhanced perception of self. It also requires knowledge of some predictable outcomes of such contexts, with which dancers will combine some unknown, unforeseeable potential outcomes, through intuiting what better applies next. Thomas insists that the 'improvised unison' is not similar to copying someone's movement; it is based on the intention to 'become one' [DAY 3_110509 – 00:17:12 > BECOMING ONE IN ACTION], in a kind of 'lock-on' process. Perhaps the amalgamation of skills needed to perform these mutually constitutive choreographic elements forms what Thomas calls 'constant presence'.

ZOO members share the notion that ‘every dancer is free, but at the same time responsible. However, the structure is not horizontal: on top of the dancers’ individual reality stands a shared reality’ proposed by the choreographer (ZOO/Thomas Hauert 2021). In order to exercise this responsibility, dancers need a very precise assessment of internal cues, and a very broad overview of what is happening on stage – the external cues. Greg Downey, who investigated capoeira by learning it, raises the question of ‘how to keep sight of an adversary while twisting, turning and cartwheeling; [...] how to read other players’ bodies to anticipate their movements’ (2011: 223). Perception of self, other and environment must operate in hyperalertness, which contributes to the possibility of ‘constant presence’. In trying to understand what this all-encompassing term entails, I looked at how it can be broken down.

Thomas speaks about the importance of dancers ‘being there’, and Vivien too reflected on this. At the beginning of the making process, Vivien thought a lot about focus and concentration, observing how ‘attention ebbs and flows’, ‘comes and goes’ (interview 1). She had been noticing this and described it as ungraspable, saying ‘I don’t know if I can say I’ve learned how it works, but I just learned that I’m not clear how it works’ (interview 1). The essential aspect of the ‘improvised unison’, of moving at the same time as the leader, is to her:

like a state of being completely there and completely in your body, maybe not even in your brain, just being present in your body because you don’t have to analyse it. And what makes... I mainly got questions, really. What makes us able to do that, able to be in that? And, yeah, I really need to know how to use it. It changes it a *lot* (Vivien, interview 1).

So in this sense, ‘constant presence’ can also be a place from which the performer acts. From that place, specific modes operate that correspond to Thomas’ choreographic concept and form the work’s aesthetics. Thus, to unpack ‘constant presence’, I consider one way of operating separately: the senses we rely upon to perceive are key and the sense in focus now is sight. In looking at the leader and attempting to ‘become one’ in movement, how do dancers manage to bend their knees in sync with this person if they are not looking at her legs? They change their way of seeing. What they do does not involve focusing attention, but rather a ‘diffuse’ mode of seeing wherein dancers capture the overall event the leader creates – a kind of ‘multifocality’. These dancers need exceptional vision, in terms not of detail but of spectrum, and also the development of

peripheral vision – a term widely used in improvisation practice because of its importance to the improvisatory. Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee say that athletes have superb peripheral vision and are able to see everything while focusing on nothing (2008: 129). Downey investigated ‘visuomotor’ learning and the plasticity of perception, and reports that players can track an adversary ‘better without looking directly at the target’ (2011: 227) [DAY 6_180618 – 00:07:51 > SILENT AGREEMENTS].

Catherine Stevens and James Leach investigated creative cognition in dance contexts. They regard creative cognition as ‘social, relational and distributed’ (2015: 404). The dancers they interviewed highlighted the importance of ‘the presence of another body. The form of movement made is conditioned by that presence’ (2015: 405). These dancers were concerned not just with filling space when dancing, or worried about getting in each other’s way; they spoke about being ‘focused on *responsiveness* to the other’s intentions and *understanding* those intentions *through* their movement’ (2015: 405, added emphasis).

In pulling things together, I bridge positions from both the dance world and anthropology to synthesise where improvisers’ knowledges and how they operate skilfully seem to reside. Vida Midgelow writes about ‘improvised ways of going about things’ wherein the improviser ‘operates in a purposefully developed state of curious unknowing’ (2017: 130) and Ingold highlights the importance of *how* we operate, be it in improvisation or the world in general. Ingold posits that other animals do not seem to bother with anything, absorbed as they are in their ‘own way of doing things’ (2018: 1), and that pondering is possibly what makes us humans. He goes on to say that our ‘ways of doing and saying, thinking and knowing’ (2018: 1) are not served on a plate, nor do they ever settle: ‘[I]iving is a matter of deciding how to live, and harbours at every moment the potential to branch in different directions’ (2018: 1). Skill sits among the abilities of individuals and their environments in a context-specific relationality, wherein the forces that maintain that relationality must operate according to the work’s very purposes.

To bring the above discussion to a close, and suggest how this study joins with current efforts to further and deepen our understanding of the nature of improvisation-based work, I refer back to observations regarding the growing corpus of writing on improvisation within Dance Studies and beyond – also concerning cross-disciplinary areas – that stimulates the development of discourses and theoretical frameworks for this practice

(Midgelow 2019; Whatley 2019). Notwithstanding this growing body of writing, Whatley observes that not everyone seems to welcome the discourse of improvisation that is currently emerging (2019: 415). Dance theorist Bojana Cvejić, offers a less optimistic perspective than Midgelow's and Whatley's. Developing an 'immanent critique' of the ideas promoted by practitioners and theorists of improvisation, Cvejić affirms that many imprecisely differentiated or theorised terms have circulated in improvisation discourse because it has been manifesting itself on the basis of artists' understanding of it (2015: 130). She claims there is a 'monopoly' of practitioners' knowledge in the field, the consequence of which is 'a lack of proper theoretical study, of a comprehensive systematization and historicization of diverse improvisational dance practices of the twentieth century, and of, quite simply, consistent academic work dealing with the subject' (2015: 130).

To achieve what Cvejić refers to as a lack would seem to require a significant degree of agreement on the definition of terms related to improvisation practice. This would, in turn, require someone to write a case study for each artist working with improvisation choreography, not only because the use of improvisation differs from practice to practice but because nowadays it is also combined with other approaches and borders are fluid. As Laermans points out, choreography goes through an ongoing redefinition (2008: 9), or, as I suggested earlier, improvisation is being 'reimprovised'. Purposes and usage define what improvisation and choreography are (continuously becoming), and that feeds theorisation. I explicitly asked Thomas whether he had a specific term for his choreographic practice based on improvisation, one that would embrace its scope. His answer was 'no' (interview 4). Should a lack of precision in theorisation be the case, this could be rapidly changing, as recently there has been a growing number of publications devoted exclusively to dance matters, for example on improvisation in dance (Midgelow 2019) and creation and performance processes (Blades and Meehan 2018), along with 'polyphonic' publications that involve a variety of distinguished voices in dance practice and scholarship (e.g. Ellis, Blades and Waelde 2018).

This thesis contributes to the increasing body of reflection, bringing practitioners' and practitioner-researchers' knowledge into connection with that of other dance scholars and anthropologists of practice. Its adopted methods and modes of writing qualify this case study as non-monopolistic – contrasting with Cvejić's view – and as a contribution to the growing corpus Whatley (2019) refers to.

5.2 An autoethnographic gaze on being/thinking/moving

And sometimes also you feel that your body is very awake and very sharp and almost responding without even [thinking] of what's happening (Samantha).

As I type Samantha's (ZOO) words on the keyboard, I am reminded of what I refer to in my prologue, that my search for an adult version of the experience of being fully absorbed in the dance is the driving force behind both my artistic research and this project. Looking at my journal entries, and remembering what I observed in myself in the four years of this study, as I engaged in all the different research practices (some of it never written down, since it remained unformulated as clear thoughts or words), I understand better why I propose being, thinking and moving as one.

As Samantha describes, sometimes moving is the way one is thinking, and all distinction vanishes. Moving is, at once, reflection and action, the doing or the making finds its own solutions with little, if not no, interference from what we tend to conceive as thinking. It is not a lack of cognitive activity but another way of thinking altogether that is not offered to us, in a general sense, in the compartmentalised and analytical approaches we are brought up in. However, being in this experience of full absorption in adult life needs some internal work, as Samantha describes by saying that she always tries 'to get to a certain kind of focus where I can exclude completely the judgement so I have no distance [to] what is happening and I have to be really, like, in the moment' (Samantha). In Samantha's terms, immediacy seems to relate both to the immediate moment and to the non-existence of something in between. Through this intentionally non-judgemental mode of being, this lack of distance from the event, one can create a synthesis in which the distinction between being, thinking and moving vanishes. These dimensions of experience serve the purpose of the task at hand, operating to find the most appropriate development; at times when there is no task to be pursued the experience is the purpose itself.

walk down the road

recalling what i told a friend about my research.

this friend is also busy with the issue of sustaining – just in her own practice.

recalling and walking down the road to buy bread.

this memory of talking to her brought back the question:

is it time, in terms of the length or duration or periodicity of practice that helps sustain presence?

*it can't be only the 'ten thousand hours'.
there is an aspect of recurrent experience – the intentional ones –
that connects to...
just forgot what it was i was thinking.
typing now the thoughts i had as i walked down the road took so
long that the word left me... it will come back.
(short break for a piece of fruit in the kitchen)
it did. it was the element of intention.
intention is the insisting element of specific practices – like the
practice of conscious presence – whose recurrence carves the
places – ever changing as they are – from where we impregnate
our inner and outer actions with presence.
and time helps.
(ongoing movement practice journal, 24.02.21)*

I kept journaling up until the end of the project, and saw myself asking – during a movement session in the period when I was writing my final thesis draft – what this movement-as-method approach and journaling had offered or brought to the study. Had there been any benefit at all to the study or to me as a researcher and, if so, what was it? The answer was recorded on a small piece of paper (my notebooks had no more empty pages):

detached journal page
*ongoingmovementpracticehasofferedcomingbacktomycentre
againandagainandagain,
insistentlyremindingmeofwhat,where,andhowiam
andbeinghelpingmebeingfullerinwhateverido,
make,write,think,includingthiswork,
towhichmanyvoiceshavecontributed,
whichicanhonourbybeingfuller,andtruthfulltothetask
ofamplifyingandvaluingtheircontribution
towhatthesewritingshavebecome.
(ongoing movement practice journal, 10.03.2021)*

On one day I was making the above note, and on the next, on rereading the transcript of Sarah's (ZOO) interview, I came across the following:

There's a lot of parasite movement, that I create for no reason, just because... So I wish I could not even pass through that parasite movement, and just stop and think and produce only things that are true to the task or to the moment. But it's not always possible, so it's about negotiating with that, with myself, allowing a bit of parasite, 'it's ok, it's ok, it's ok. It'll be better tomorrow'. And then, I guess, allowing myself to do less and, in doing less, to be more receptive, and more aware, and more in the present moment and to not try and produce something when... Yeah, difficult [to explain]. So for me this means concretely good preparation for myself, on my own, like lying down, good warming up, good coming into contact with my own fluidity first of all, both mentally and physically, and yes also some calming

down about expectations – ‘ok, now we meet again, we’ll do that, it’s not frightening, it’s just joy to be together’ (Sarah).

There is some similarity between what Sarah describes and what I wrote on 10 March 2021. The last part feels particularly familiar to me. It connects to how beneficial movement practice that brings the person into contact with her ‘own fluidity’, as Sarah says, can be, to how it affects the quality of one’s approach to creation. In Sarah’s context, it refers to creating improvisation choreography and in my case, within this ethnographic and autoethnographic journey, to creating reflections and understandings. Also, the type of internal negotiation Sarah describes touches aspects of my experience that were crucial to the development of this research. Certain kinds of self-talk can be detrimental to one’s integrity when carrying out a generative activity – be it creating thoughts, writing, or movement – affecting one’s very performance, however skilfully it is realised. Sarah’s words evidence this process, as do Samantha’s and Pauline’s. The question arises of how to inhibit *undesired* states, so as to operate in the *desired* states. Returning to my autoethnographic gaze, ongoing movement practice and journalling provided precisely that possibility, to come continually back to my centre, to the experience (and the joy therein) of perception in action, of the absence of any space or time between being, thinking and moving – and ‘moving’ here encompasses any movement, not only movements for the purpose of dance-making.

For some people, stationary thinking and writing is not problematic. However, since I am not that sort of person, but had to get used to long stretches of time reading, writing and pondering in front of a computer, the re-establishment of an ongoing practice during this study was extremely challenging, precisely because of the undermining self-talk that devalued the importance of continuous practice to someone like me. My own thoughts undermined my intention and initiative to resume movement practice on a regular basis. In a non-rejecting or, rather, integrative attitude towards herself, Sarah says, ‘it’s ok, it’s ok, it’s ok. It’ll be better tomorrow’. Taking a similar approach, I had to say to myself, ‘that is how you operate at your best, this is part of your work, this *is* your work’. In this way I convinced myself to fit in some hours of movement practice a week, in between my other research practices, and attempted not to feel guilty. It was a hard job. I eventually succeeded, and the consistent movement practice and journalling have unleashed a surprising, and very welcome, writing flow accompanied by self-confidence, calm and joy; and an empowering sense of self-respect.

In hindsight, the journaling was a free space of writing down or speaking out as thoughts manifested, with their own order and logic, playing with words, meaning and understanding. It disrupted the so-called scholarly writing, and thus worked also as a way to loosen the intricacies of academic reflection, writing structure and terminology. Persistence was key and patterns started to surface. One example is the category explored in 'the importance of the other' (Section 5.1.4). Taking yoga classes every now and then put me in the position of receiving instructions and noticing how important it was on those occasions to be continually reminded by the instructor of what we were practising. I use this account to highlight the power of consistency, of the discipline to consistently engage with practice, voluntarily and with a clear intention. Acknowledging the necessity of sticking to my artistic modes of working opened up new avenues, and the more truthful I was to that need throughout the project, the more empowered I felt, the better and fuller I thought, wrote, read, annotated videos and lived. This process was fundamental to the quality of my engagement with the research project, benefiting me as well as the overall inquiry.

Finally, an autoethnographic gaze has allowed me to maintain a way of working that is in line with my artistic practice and approach. In hindsight, adopting this self-reflective perspective led occasionally to self-centredness, which I identified in my writing. This was part of developing an ethnographic gaze, in which I had not been formally trained, and of the scholarly approach required in doctoral research. Concomitantly, there was a purpose in allowing self-centredness to take place without excessive self-critique. I was probing the validity of the autobiographical in the context of this study. Drawing on my longstanding creative practice, I knew that cutting this impetus short too early would not give me the answer – it needed space, and the irrelevant bits would eventually prove irrelevant.

6 Epilogue

This study has investigated modes of being and operating that are fostered in the making and performance of what I have termed improvisation choreography, with the aim of learning how these modes are developed, and how acquired skills may be sustained over time. Ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches guided my case study on Thomas Hauert and ZOO's choreographic practice, realised through fieldwork on Thomas' collaboration with CCN Ballet de Lorraine in the making of *Flot*. I entered a conversation with the collaborating artists and with the writings of a selection of practitioners and researchers who have themselves explored the space of practice in their investigations. By means of intensive interaction with the gathered data, woven with rigorous self-observation, I identified four main categories in order to build a conceptual framework that would elucidate my questions: 'choreographing self', 'relationality as choreography', 'collaboration as multidimensional transformation process' and 'becoming one'. These categories resulted from the analysis of gathered data in line with the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach adopted for this investigation.

I assumed a perspective that regards ways of knowing as a dialogical and co-constructive engagement of people, and of people, things and environment (Marchand 2010a: xii), in my case, the engagement of artists being, making and performing together and the situation in which this occurs. I have referred to this as an interplay of self/other/environment. In fieldwork observations, video documentation and conversations with the collaborating artists, a better understanding of the scope of this perspective has ensued. Research and artistic practices – those of other artists' and my own – provided the terrain for explorations of hybrid modes of analysing and writing that involved engagement in video annotation practice using the prototype Research Video tool.

I regarded the context in focus as a cosmology, and approached contemporary dance ensembles and their oeuvre as macro- and microcosms respectively. Prompted by the perception that requirements in terms of professional dancers' competences are increasing, I asked whether there are indispensable aptitudes in improvisational modes of working. This question, however, concealed my assumption that what are deemed indispensable modes, which manifest in the form of expert skilled performance, reside in the practitioner. Also, as evidenced in the data, there seems to be a correlation between dancers performing in hyperalert states and the integrity of the dance work, suggesting that the latter relies to a great extent on the performers' abilities.

As discussed, performers are required to be, think and move in accordance with specific parameters. However, the development of abilities in single individuals is closely connected to their interactions with the other and the environment, in synch with spatiotemporal features. We have seen that improvisation is open-ended and skill transformation is part of performing the skills involved therein – what Freya Vass-Rhee termed a ‘progressive morphing of skills’ (2018: 226); that dancers’ skills are sensitive to context, characterising the situatedness of skilled performance, and are developed in the interface of self/other/environment. Also, as explored above, instances of this are typified in required modes of being such as ‘constant presence’ – in *Flot*, I would argue, inevitably a ‘constant co-presence’ – together with intuitive and counterintuitive modes of operating, distributed thinking and co-action.

Yet, although the voices represented in my writing, including mine, conceive of ways of knowing as instances in the intersection of self/other/environment, the focus of studies on skilled performance and of the discourse on expert skill is often placed on the human factor – the practitioner. What if the practitioners we consider go as far as the scope of their field of operation permits, and yet the desired outcome does not ensue? Or what if they have no role in defining the time and place of practice that serves their purposes within the artistic work? There is a dimension here that goes beyond the capacities of the dancer, as acknowledged and explicitly formulated in the thesis, in line, for example, with Tim Ingold’s notion that ‘skill is not an attribute of the individual body in isolation but of the whole system of relations constituted by the presence of the artisan in his or her environment’ (2000: 291). Still, the latter is only occasionally scrutinised as a constituent of skilled improvisation. My inquiry has led to considerations of the ‘ability’ of the time and space of practice that is created for dancers to be able to ‘operate’ as required by the artistic project – musings I expressed in the following journal entry:

skilled place skilled time

are places or spaces

or is time, or a duration of time, capable of something?

skilled at something?

persons are

but are ten minutes capable of giving me the peace of mind i need?

or are sixty minutes more able to do that?

are this room and this keyboard on this desk

able to help me write the thoughts i seek to articulate?

or is my balcony, where the sun is shining

where the ceiling is today's super blue sky

more skilled at that?

(writing practice, home office, 23.04.21, 16:10)

Evidently, there are components of the intricate cosmology of improvisation choreography that go beyond the individual, and which are accountable for a given work becoming what it was conceived to be. Dancers' inner abilities (modes of being) and skilled performance (modes of thinking and moving) can be considered accountable for *Flot* becoming *Flot* or, in other words, for the actualisation of its potentiality, to a certain extent. I would argue that the exceptional skills required are a collective occurrence, distributed across a group that, at the same time, creates this microcosm's cohesiveness. Moreover, the human element is but one component of this intricacy, wherein the dimension of the role of practice and experience (which I regard as attributes of 'place'), as well as time, may be overlooked. Great attention is paid to the importance of dancers' skills, of the human material. Yet, conditions and circumstances facilitate, or complicate, the operation of certain types of skill. Hence, spatiotemporal factors need to be able, as it were, to perform their role as appropriate environment, so that an optimal relationality between them and the human factor can ensue. This relationality may well be indispensable.

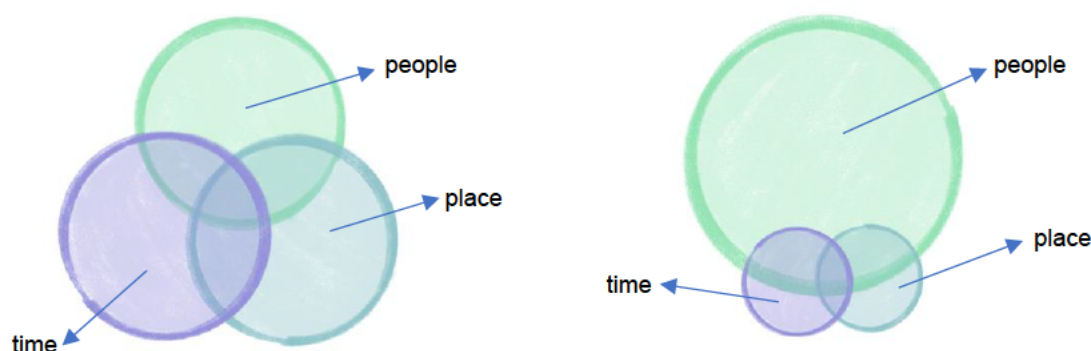
The macrocosm that is ZOO has worked out this intricacy, operating in a dynamic balance achieved by negotiating with different forces and shifting roles, with the resulting shifts of centre of gravity and orbits responding to its members' trajectories in and outside the company. This dynamically balanced macrocosm, with its nuances and its sustained, longstanding existence, is the environment wherein the expert skills studied here were engendered, and flourished. Outside this and other similar environments, can it be assumed for certain that these expert skills can be tapped into at will?

Anthropologists investigating practice and dance practitioners advocate the situatedness and context-sensitivity of skill. In the present study, this notion is evidenced in the dancers' accounts. Both Ballet de Lorraine and ZOO members reported that the quality

and amount of time dedicated to the space of practice had implications for their own performance, and that of the ensemble. Tristan's and Vivien's (Ballet de Lorraine) observations about the reconstruction and performance of *Flot* six months after the premiere, and Mat's, Samantha's and Sarah's (ZOO) descriptions of what it takes to rework a piece after a long period of not working together, attest to this idea. This arguably discloses a dimension of the ability, or inability, of an environment to be the appropriate space-time for the performance of certain skills by the dancers. Changes in the constituent aspects of a context where a specific practical skill came to exist, and in which it is operable, may render some modes of being challenging to tap into, some capacities challenging to operate.

Taking up the culinary analogies often used by ZOO dancers, I refer back to the image Sarah conveyed when speaking about intuition in operation. She linked it to the ideal consistency and texture of homemade mayonnaise. Intuition in operation is like 'when *la mayonnaise prend*' – a French expression meaning that things evolve in a favourable manner. If the ratio between the ingredients in a recipe is disturbed, the characteristic texture and consistency of the desired product may not be achieved. Too much of a certain ingredient, or not enough, and things will not evolve in a favourable manner. Transposed to the interplay of individuals, time and place in the case in focus, the same applies to the dynamic relationship between the number of people involved, the amount and quality of time, and the space that is given, or not given, to the practice of being together and making together. Graphically, the way in which these factors intersect when the relationship ratio shifts could be represented as in Figure 7 below.

FIGURE 7: RELATIONSHIP: PEOPLE, TIME AND PLACE



Variations in relationality between people, time and place. Illustration by Ilia Rüegg (used with the author's permission).

In addition, dancers may leave a production process and others may join, causing changes in the human constellation (hence in the quality of relationships) and/or in the number of dancers involved. Ballet de Lorraine is a stable state-funded company, but it is nonetheless in constant flux due to dancers' injuries and/or contract termination. Those who joined the making of *Flot* later in the process had less experience of the practices that form the work, less knowledge of the modes of being and operating involved. In the light of 'relationality as choreographic practice' and 'the importance of the other', as proposed in Chapter 5, such fluctuations have implications for and repercussions on the process and the performance, and on how skills can be retrieved and sustained by the group.

Earlier in the thesis, I took up Ingold's view that artefacts may be 'grown' rather than made, and that, seen in this light, they are akin to living organisms. His suggestion places 'the emphasis on the *skilled character of the form-generating process*' and less on the final form of the artefact (2000: 290, added emphasis). In connection to dance creation, regarding processes that generate form as capable of having a skilled character can help in not focusing too fiercely on the individuals who produce the dance. Ingold's parallel between making and organic growth allows the form of the artefact – in our case the dance performance – to be seen as 'arising through the unfolding of a field of forces that cut across its developing interface with the environment' (2000: 290).

In analysing the data I gathered, and thinking of Pauline, Tristan and Vivien (Ballet de Lorraine), and Mat, Samantha, Sarah and Thomas (ZOO), it becomes clear that the relationship between practice, experience and knowing in the context of improvisation choreography is such that dancers may perform less skilfully without the situated experience provided by recurrent practice. Their knowledge *that* a given dance work they co-created and performed has such-and-such parameters does not suffice to perform the piece once again as it was conceived – or even develop it further, as Tristan wished could have been possible when reconstructing *Flot*. The knowing *how* and the sustained modes of being and operating are interwoven with the spatiotemporal elements that characterise a specific microcosm, and also render it retrievable when in a favourable relation.

Hence, if skill is context-sensitive, as has been discussed, if improvisation as studied here requires collaborative skills that are distributed across the ensemble and are situated, and if, as substantiated in the annotated video material and artists' accounts, a dancer's heightened perception of self, other and environment develops and is retrievable

collectively, then attributing to the dancer the sustaining of expert skill would mean underestimating the importance of factors beyond the individual's operative range. Taking these notions and implementing them in my inquiry, I ask the question: are the indispensables of improvisation choreography, then, in the appropriateness of the interplay of time, individuals and place, in both quality and quantity? My research materials suggest that, for improvisation choreography to be performed as it was conceived, there are not only indispensable dancer skills but also indispensable appropriate articulation and relationality of factors, so that dancers may be, think and move as the piece requires. In other words, *Flot* can be *Flot* once the constellation of its composing elements, layers and dimensions are operating in sync. Differently from what I expected, and in turn corresponding to the perspective I assumed, the indispensable in improvisation choreography is thus not only the dancers' exceptional operation in particular modes of being.

Indeed, performers are accountable for what the performance becomes; they are intentionally present, and think and act inventively, compositionally, responsively and adaptively. Nonetheless, how their innermost spheres manifest – which I have argued is by way of 'choreographing self' in Thomas and ZOO's modes of performance – is in interdependence with spatiotemporal dimensions. I propose that developing and sustaining skills in improvisation choreography in group settings is a collective undertaking, with accountability distributed across the performers, the materiality and actuality of the place of practice, and the time 'substance' manifesting as duration and periodicity. Sustaining skilled performance in this cosmology, which involves expert intuitive operation (Melrose 2006a), is an attribute of practitioners' co-presence and co-action in favourable conditions of space-time, where the volatility or impermanence of these factors is a determining factor to be taken into account.

Whether this framework lends itself to application in other improvisational choreographic process and oeuvre is not the matter of my inquiry. Yet, considering that *Flot* in terms of its methods of creation and performance is not a one-of-a-kind dance piece – numerous contemporary dance works are created and performed by means of similar approaches, with dance professionals in equivalent contexts – some extrapolation to other micro- and macrocosms may be possible. As a closing reflection, a greater awareness of the implications explored here may be key in informing the way in which professionals who create, perform, teach and study dance both design and implement models of practice,

production and performance, allowing these to be in consonance with what the dance profession is becoming. For that, the focus would lie on knowing not only what the required and indispensable skills may be, but in inquiring into how the dimensions of skilful improvisation in dance-making may be more widely considered. Such inquiry would also consider how the environment can be crafted for practice and performance by dancers, choreographers and their collaborators, taking into account the suitability and sustainability of dimensions of people, time and place, hopefully sensitising our approaches to what is yet to come for the flourishing of dance artists in and through the dance works they co-create, and bring to life.

My closing reflections in this chapter involve looking at the RV project with hindsight. Having joined the project as a dance practitioner whose task was to use the annotation prototype under development and feed my experience, insights and findings back to the RV team – and to do that precisely from the perspective of a performing artist – what I encountered was not only a digital tool. My exploration of the affordances of the RV platform has revealed its use as a tool, as a space for insights, and as a mode of writing. I dealt with annotation from two perspectives: the practice of annotation, and the creation of a hybrid research output. Engaging in annotation practice expanded and amplified my perceptions of the original video material and, since I myself recorded the annotated videos during fieldwork, this practice also influenced processes of recalling field observations, impacting how I perceived both the video recording and my memories of the live event. Practising annotation also deepened my understanding of the overall data and, as it allowed for iterative actions of data comparison, categorisation, analysis and synthesis, it contributed to my arriving at new insights in relation to my topic, and to video annotation itself. Feeding back my findings to the RV team helped develop the prototype, identify its shortcomings so that technical issues could be tackled, and implement and refine its features from a performing arts-specific viewpoint.

Like a number of other time-based annotators, the RV platform is a space where viewing, thinking and writing coalesce, in an embodied manner, in one environment. Annotating video merges processes that may be considered intrinsic to research and to data analysis. However, the specificity of the processes that characterise video annotation deserve attention. Annotation involves parallel and interdependent actions that are key to an in-depth comprehension of one's research materials in a particular way: these actions have a perceptive/reflective and creative nature. Besides the analytical character of video

annotation (Stancliffe 2018, 2019), I noticed that annotation also affords shifts in perception processes and instigates creative ways of seeing, thinking and writing. These processes characterise a rich environment for synthesis and understanding. Viewing and re-viewing sharpens the way the eyes see, which feeds reflection and consequently textual articulation. Yet, besides synthesis-like embodied processes, the various components of the platform allow for organisation, comparison and categorisation within one space.

As to my using video annotation to share research outcomes, considering the specificity and uniqueness of this hybrid output, this study's contribution to the field of annotation lies in the way in which it expands the space of the manuscript, and the in-depth view that concomitant viewing/reading of the annotated videos offers – facilitated by the option to pause and play the recording – as well as the possibility to explore different layers and types of data.

Rebecca Stancliffe points to the incompleteness of representational systems such as annotated videos – regarding their nature and how they evolve – and proposes that 'video annotation is the most recent stage of an ongoing trajectory in dance analysis and documentation that has roots in the notational endeavours of Renaissance ballet masters and which accelerated in the early twentieth century' (2018: 359). She argues that, despite the time gap, the notation systems created in that period match the inquiries and motivations of current contemporary dance artists experimenting with digital technology to develop, archive and share their choreographic practices and oeuvres (2018). Stancliffe's argument is relevant here because it draws attention to considerable changes in *what* in the dance is to be represented.

Contemporary dance-makers do not engage in specifying the correlation of steps with the music. In the cosmology investigated here, the actual movements dancers inscribe (what was earlier a *step*) are predominantly not fixed and neither do units of movement necessarily have a name. Choreography here is an onsite multifarious composition of states, improvised material and relationalities (albeit often neatly constructed, and at times combined with set movement phrases), and hence the object or material of documentation is of a totally different nature to what traditional notation systems were aimed at. It is a matter not only of the methods and instruments, but also of the material in question. Current contemporary dance materials cry out for specific ways of engaging with for

documentation and/or analysis purposes (regarding the particularities of the work, and/or to the questions being researched) if these are to be recorded and published, even if only partially⁶⁰ – and hence new tools and methods. The specificity of the latter is key when we look closer at current dance materials and at what dancers are asked to perform. The following words by Bebe Miller typify what I mean:

We are generating movement strategies that unfold in ways that are not as feasible in step-by-step choreography, for us. We specify the intentional body-mind-set and allow the movement articulation – the dancing – to respond to the frame or strategy (Bebe Miller in Motion Bank 2013).

Annotations may be of different natures – descriptive, illustrative, analytical, discussion-like – and besides being a space for understanding the author's propositions, the annotated video offers an autonomous exploration of the audio-visual and the textual material, and, potentially, alternative comprehensions. In this way, the videos in this manuscript make possible the scrutiny of an under-researched method of analysis and mode of writing in dance, while offering video annotation-specific analysis and discussion, and making available to the reader/viewer a synthesis process that differs in nature from text-only presentations. In what concerns modes of writing and presenting data, this hybrid output contributes to furthering knowledge on the utility and suitability of video annotation in articulating dance knowledges and sharing research materials.

⁶⁰ I draw a parallel here between what Bleeker says about writing – 'a means of noting down speech, yet it captures not all aspects of speech but only some' (2010: 4) – and video annotation – which is able to register and convey what would otherwise remain hidden (deLahunta 2013) but which can render accessible partial aspects of dance practice. In her writing on *Synchronous Objects*, Norah Zuniga Shaw explicitly acknowledges this partialness, saying that the studies undertaken for this project 'do not attempt to preserve the live moment nor do they attempt to represent all of dance and choreography' (Zuniga Shaw 2011: 208).

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8 Appendices

8.1 Participant Information Sheet

Faculty of Arts and Humanities | Coventry University
PhD Research Project

Participant Information Sheet

Researcher

Marisa Godoy – PhD Candidate, Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE)

Project working title

Generating co-presence in/through dance making: *Intuitions, practices, and discoveries in collaborative creative processes in contemporary dance*

You are being invited to take part in research on collaborative creative processes in dance. Before you decide to take part, it is important you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

This study aims to increase understanding of how practices that seek to foster dancers' embodied knowledges are built, how skills developed through this process are maintained during creation and performance. It examines different aspects of collaborative processes and seeks to shed light on the transformational implications of collective work.

Additionally, it aims to help develop the software 'Research Video', a digital tool developed as an alternative to existing text-based publications of research into the performing arts. This software has 'video annotation' as one of its key features, which is an underexplored area in dance research. By using the 'Research Video' software, this study aims to further develop alternative methods of dance analysis and publication of research outcome.

2. Why have I been approached?

For the purposes of this study contemporary dance artists taking part in the creation of new work are needed. The criteria for recruiting dancers and choreographers are: a) that the work they develop is based on collaborative creative practices; b) that the choreographer places special focus on practices that hone dancers' embodied knowledge. You have been approached because the project "[Name of Dance Project]" is an information-rich context for this study. As I would like to draw out different viewpoints and overlay them, the participation of both dancers and choreographers is of great interest to the research.

3. Do I have to take part?

You don't have to take part; participation is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the project without giving a reason at any point during data collection, and at any time within two weeks following end of data collection. You can withdraw by contacting me on email. In case you decide to withdraw, all your data will be destroyed and will not be used in the study. There are no consequences to deciding that you no longer wish to participate in the study.

4. What will be asked from me if I take part?

You will be asked to:

- . Agree being video recorded during the creation process and during one performance;
- . Agree to be named in the project (non-anonymous participation – a common practice in dance research);
- . Watch selected video footage of rehearsals with me (not more than twice during the process) and comment on your experience (your comments will be audio recorded);
- . Give no more than four interviews during the whole period.

Your participation will start at the beginning of the creation of “Creation 2018/Thomas Hauert”. It will end with your last interview, which will take place after one of the performances has been video documented. The questions in the interviews relate to the aims outlined in paragraph 1. Note that you can choose not to answer questions in the interview if you do not wish to. You will receive an email with the transcripts of your interviews for reviewing.

5. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The interviews will take place outside of rehearsal hours so you will have to meet me for the interviews after work, but no more than three times. We will also watch together selected footage of the rehearsal once or twice during the study. This can be a disadvantage if you are tired after work or if you have to make special childcare or travelling arrangements.

I will document a real-life setting in which you are involved as a professional dance artist. My method of documentation (video recording) is usual practice in dance rehearsal contexts and poses no additional risks to you. Though video recording of rehearsals is a common practice in contemporary dance, you may feel that the presence of an observer who is not a collaborating artist in the creative process, who is video-documenting and making notes, has an influence on you.

Another aspect you may consider to be a risk or a disadvantage is that anonymity cannot be offered: you may be identified in the video and your statements will be linked to your person.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Volunteering for this research may open up possibilities for self-reflection and reflection on the work you are co-creating. Taking part can provide you with valuable information about your role in and relationship with collaborative creative processes, as you will be asked to observe your responses to the practices. One of the strengths of this study is that it gives voice to choreographers as well as to dancers and so your perspective and your personal contribution is very valuable. Also, your participation helps future advances in artistic research through allowing in-depth investigation to take place, and for findings to be shared with a wider community not involved in the creative process itself.

7. What if something goes wrong?

If we have to cancel an interview, I will attempt to contact you as soon as possible using the address indicated by you on the informed consent form. As already mentioned, participation in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw without stating a reason at any point during data collection, and at any time within two weeks following end of data collection by contacting me on email. If you have any queries or complaints related to the study, you can contact my Director of Study using the address stated below.

8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

This project involves video documentation of rehearsals and performance, and anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, information you give in the interviews may be kept confidential if you explicitly wish so. The digital data collected during this study will be kept in a password-protected hard disk; hard files containing information about you will be kept in a locked safe place. Note that no personal information such as your contact address and phone number will ever be made public.

I will retain the raw data until the final mark for my thesis has been given. Raw data will be destroyed no later than 5 years after end of data collection.

9. What will happen with the results of the research study?

The results of the study will be part of my PhD thesis, which will combine text and video using 'Research Video'. The thesis will be available for consultation at the libraries of Coventry University and Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), including online open access. It may also be presented at academic conferences and/or written up for publication in academic journals.

Participating artists will be named as 'collaborating artists' in the project. The authorship of the artistic work documented in this study is attributed to the choreographer(s)/author(s) of the work (and co-author(s) when applicable), exactly as officially announced by the company, and will be acknowledged in both written and video outputs.

The authorship of the video documentation is the researcher's (myself). The copyright of the Research Video output belongs to the ZHdK.

Coventry University is a Data Controller for the information you provide. You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. For more details, including the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can also be sent to the University Data Protection Officer - enquiry.ipu@coventry.ac.uk

10. Who is organizing and funding the research?

I am a PhD candidate at the Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE), Coventry University, and the organizer of this study. The study is embedded in the research project 'Research Video' at the ZHdK and is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

11. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been submitted for ethical review by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Coventry University and has been approved. If you are unhappy with any aspect of this research, please first contact the lead researcher. If you still have concerns and wish to make a formal complaint, please write to my Director of Study (email address below):

12. Contact for further information

Should you want to contact me or my Director of Study please write to:

Researcher: Marisa Godoy
Email address: godoydom@uni.coventry.ac.uk

Supervisor: Director of Study: Dr Scott deLahunta
Email address: aa9576@coventry.ac.uk

Your participation is very much appreciated!

Marisa Godoy

8.2 Informed Consent Form – participant

Faculty of Arts and Humanities | Coventry University
PhD Research Project | Ethics Application

Informed Consent Form – Participant

Researcher

Marisa Godoy | PhD Candidate, Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE)

Project working title

Generating co-presence in/through dance making: *Intuitions, practices, and discoveries in collaborative creative processes in contemporary dance*

Please read carefully the statements below. If you are willing to participate in this study, please tick the boxes, sign and date the declaration at the end.

- 1 I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions
- 2 I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has been concluded (Deadline: two weeks after the last interview)
- 3 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at anytime without stating a reason
- 4 I understand that the research will involve data collection including:
Audio recorded interviews;
Video documentation of rehearsals I am part of
- 5 I agree to be video and audio recorded, and for quotes to be used as part of the research project
- 6 I understand that anonymity cannot be safeguarded due to the nature of the project
- 7 I understand that the researcher will discuss the progress of the research with her Supervisory Team at C-DaRE, Coventry University

I consent voluntarily to take part in this research project as ‘collaborating artist’ and have been given a copy of this form.

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Email address of participant: _____

Name of witness: _____

Signature of witness: _____ Date: _____

Name of researcher: Marisa Godoy

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

Contact of researcher: godoydom@uni-coventry.ac.uk

Mobile phone: XXXXXXXXXX

8.3 Informed Consent Form – non-participant

Faculty of Arts and Humanities | Coventry University
PhD Research Project | Ethics Application

Informed Consent Form – Participant

Researcher

Marisa Godoy | PhD Candidate, Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE)

Project working title

Generating co-presence in/through dance making: *Intuitions, practices, and discoveries in collaborative creative processes in contemporary dance*

Please read carefully the statements below. If you are willing to participate in this study, please tick the boxes, sign and date the declaration at the end.

1 I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2 I understand that I also have the right to change my mind about participating in the study for a short period after the study has been concluded (Deadline: two weeks after the last interview)

3 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at anytime without stating a reason

4 I understand that the research will involve data collection including:
Audio recorded interviews;
Video documentation of rehearsals I am part of

5 I agree to be video and audio recorded, and for quotes to be used as part of the research project

6 I understand that anonymity cannot be safeguarded due to the nature of the project

7 I understand that the researcher will discuss the progress of the research with her Supervisory Team at C-DaRE, Coventry University

I consent voluntarily to take part in this research project as ‘collaborating artist’ and have been given a copy of this form

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Email address of participant: _____

Name of witness: _____

Signature of witness: _____ Date: _____

Name of researcher: Marisa Godoy

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

Contact of researcher: godoydom@uni.coventry.ac.uk
Mobile phone: [REDACTED]

8.4 Interview abstracts

Ballet de Lorraine

Pauline Colemard

Interview 2 | Day 15 (2 November 2018)

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Marisa: Did you notice distractions? Things that disturb you from doing the tasks, in the sense that usually we think of things that help, but sometimes we notice things that almost prevent us from realising it the way we would like to?

Pauline: The neck. Holding the neck prevents from seeing. When we're like this it doesn't work at all something that uh... allowing the eyes to move.

Marisa: Any other disturbance or impediment?

Pauline: To be... to not think too much. When I think precisely, and I think that's actually very important because um... when you get more specific, you sort of get stuck in your head cause, yes, there's a lot to think about, but it's sure that when you think too much you prevent yourself from... So, yeah, there's overthinking, and even thinking too precisely about sort of everything blocks the connection and the energy, so you have to let go of your thought process, because even though you... even though there are very, very specific tasks at hand that are asked from us, you still need to dance, you need to dance through it all, and sometimes when you overthink – just the unison part, for example, they work a lot better when they are spontaneous and you're having fun with it than when you're getting in your head about not making it. It needs to go from the sight to the body without going through the brain.

Marisa: Do you perceive yourself acting intuitively while practicing within the process, and if yes, how would you describe that in operation? You just gave an example, maybe another example besides the 'complementary'.

Pauline: The unison; it changes all the time, sometimes you take the lead, you give the lead, you take the lead, you give the lead, so you're acting intuitively but it comes and goes, that's the reason why, exactly, you have to go from thinking to not thinking too much, very quickly [laughs].

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Marisa: If you had to describe what you do after the person left [referring to the 'assisted solo'], would you relate the experience more imagining that the person is there, or recalling, remembering a bodily sensation or something else?

Pauline: I think I don't imagine concretely that someone is touching cause that would be too unreal and... but I try to go for parts that are apart, and that would kind of render the exercise... that would make the exercise difficult in order to get the same feeling of incomprehension that I had when the person was there.

Tristan Ihne

Interview 4 (20 June 2019)

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Marisa: How was it in Paris? How was it for you, how was the performance?

Tristan: Um, it was good, but I was a bit frustrated. Er... in general it was good, I think, and also I think the audience liked it, and it was nice to perform in a different venue, er, different relation to the audience, being quite closer to them and at their level. Um, but I don't know, it felt like, erm... I don't remember if it was the same, but I guess it was the same in Nancy, but I think I forgot. What I felt was that people were on a very different mode while performing, it was really on a performing mode. I felt, maybe I'm wrong, but I felt like some were more focused on showing off, and being a great dancer than really being focused on the tasks and on the relations. So I felt a bit alone, I felt like there was kind of sometimes, erm, this kind of wall between the dancers and me, because they were not really there – not all the time, but in some moments and it's hard because you... I mean, you don't really have to have a connection with someone doing the same thing [and do the same thing], but you need the others to have reasons to move. Most of the time you can also move with the music and stuff, but at some point you really need to be in relation. And so there were some

moments where I felt like 'come on, let's connect!', but there was just a few moments that felt like forever. But besides that it was good.

Page 155 and RV project [DAY 16_181106 – LEVELS OF COMPLEXITY]

(...) now I jump to other practice, but with the group or with others. So now the focus is not only in the inside, that you have to really read the others, read the group. And so, it's also a lot of concentration, and then you have to read the others but with yourself. And how you... as a group, how to shape your making, durations, then you go back and forth with you, the others, the group, or also... I don't know, we have this practice where we have to... we have a number of four rules, and you can choose one, or pick one or a few of those. And so, it's like a rule to connect with someone, always the other [unclear], more than one person. And then you have again, yeah, to be really focused with sticking to that rule, and be precise and be... So, yeah, so it's a lot of concentration. And then as well, sometimes you can be aware... develop an awareness that's not so... that can be, in a way, without taking too much exactly what you do. For example, I have to try to keep the same facing with the others, at some point it's like automatic pilot, it's there. Of course you have always to be sure that you don't lose it, but you don't have to focus there all the time after some practice. Same if you try to follow someone or stay in the same duration or same distance with someone. That's something that can be almost automatic at some point so you can focus on something else. And that's nice, when you feel that: with the practice, a certain... I don't know, [an] intelligence takes over that gets more and more intelligent with the practice, the repetition. And it's also nice because it's something that you cannot just get it like une pointe: 'ok, I get it!' It's really with repetition. When we started with the isolation, for example, I really felt like I was handicapped, I was, like, not able to do it. And then, after a week, after doing a bit of it every day, it's like 'ah, it's getting there!' So it's really... it's not just understanding it, it's your body understanding it, go through it and, I don't know, make the connections, I don't know exactly what [unclear] but... through going through it again and again, and then somehow you get better at it.

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Marisa: I was there for 3 days [referring to the reconstruction of the piece in June 2019]. Can you share with me the process of putting up the piece?

Tristan: Um... it was maybe... we would have needed more time, but we had time to go through some practices, not focusing on what we do on stage, but practising the tasks and that felt really good, and also nourishing, then the work on stage. In my opinion, maybe there was too little of that. But maybe I also felt that because, er, we have so much going on, and we are tired and it's the end of the season. I also could feel that some dancers, they were, like, less focused on the essential, or what seems to be the essential, so it could have been a bit too much [for these dancers], to do too much, to do workshops and practice – and I can understand that. Personally, I felt like I would have needed more, but it was really good to go back to it, um... I felt that it was different, being after we've been through other things and go back to that um... I don't know, I think because it was so intense for the premiere. I also back then worried about maybe not being creative enough with my movements, or doing the same thing all the time. And there [referring to the performance in Paris] I was really not worried about that. I don't know, er... It is important to spot the habits and go against that but when you practice so much you are so aware of your habits and it can also block a bit and now I felt more relaxed because maybe I was less aware of my schemes and ways of doing things so I could just dance, be a bit less in my head and be like 'It's wrong'. So that felt good.

Vivien Ingrams

Interview | Day 8 (20 June 2018)

Pages 144 and 167

Marisa: Have you made new discoveries so far about your dance, about your creativity or even inventiveness, the way you improvise, but also what you mentioned now, on a personal level, and on a relationship level?

Vivien: Yeah, I've thinking a lot about focus and concentration and it's interesting, I've really been observing how attention ebbs and flows. Ebbs and flows, it comes and goes. But this is the thing, I've been noticing this but it's ungraspable. I can't quite explain it so I don't know if I can say I've learned how it works, but I just learned that I'm not clear how it works. Yeah, with regards to, like,

what stimulates me, what means that, when the choreographer is explaining something, I'm completely focused and I take it all in, and I'm on the ball? And what means sometimes he's talking and I'm thinking about what I'm doing, or I don't quite grasp it, or it sounds like he's repeating something he said already, or I'm anticipating what I think he's gonna say? I'm not really perceiving how that can change what I'm actually doing. It completely passes me how that works. I don't know, you know, it is the time of the day or how tired you are, or how interesting you find and exercise, or the atmosphere in the group? I... uff! I don't know.

But, yeah, it's something I definitely want to work on and this is really good exercise, for sure, to work on how... or being really ... and also this is really essential, and he mentions it a lot with this... the copying, this imitation or not imitation, it's moving at the same time as the person you're seeing, and it's like a state of being completely there and completely in your body, maybe not even in your brain, just being present in your body because you don't have to analyse it. And what... what makes... I mainly got questions, really. What makes us able to do that, able to be in that? And, yeah, I really need to know how to use it. It changes it a *lot*. So when is there this element of pleasure and excitement that comes with music, or... also we anticipate cause we know the music, and we can guess the music from the start cause a song we've had before, you know, it's a particular rhythm or whatever, and then it makes it somewhat easier to be in the flow of the person that you're following, or maybe it's just an illusion because I think... cause you're enjoying, and you're into it and you're anticipating what you think they're doing.

Yeah, this is... It's much easier when we're doing the impro. I find it, yeah, a lot easier when we're doing... we're improvising either being manipulated, or imagining we're being manipulated – having external stimulus – and really also trying to play with the music as much as possible, and even if it's real concentration on trying to find new pathways and new ways of moving, and avoid just going with the flow and doing whatever feels comfortable. I probably find that easier to get kind of get in the groove, I guess, and be one hundred percent present, I guess, and discover new ways of moving. Cause we often do this, either in duos or trios, when you're being manipulated, you're getting a lot of external stimuli and then they leave you on your own and I think 'oh, yeah, I've learnt new movements through this', so now that I'm moving on my own I've got other ideas, my body's learned other ways of moving. And then, when I'm... when we're working in groups we're trying to follow – or even in duos or trios – we're trying to follow the person in the front, sometimes I'm there and sometimes I'm not [laughs]. So, yeah, I think sometimes I really want to be quick, I wanna be fast, I wanna be there and move at the same time as the person I'm watching but sometimes it works, sometimes... it also depends on the person you're with.

Page 162

Marisa: How was Paris?

Vivien: Really good, it was really nice. We had a tour actually, we were in Lylle before then, and then Paris with.... really nice atmosphere, the theatre there in the middle of the woods, yeah, it was quite special actually, and erm, the space was nice. It's a small theatre so um... it was much less people, much closer. You know, there was not a stage, it was like on the ground level, uh, like a black box sort of thing. So the audience was very close. In fact when Thomas – I didn't know they expected Thomas seeing the performance – but um... he said like the light and everything had changed because he designed it for the opera house, so it just... it was so... such a different space that it um... it literally transformed everything. And I think... well, it's different as well because I'm now rather performing than watching it, so my experience is obviously very different but um... yeah, it felt, like, quite different. I kind of think, my idea was that the space is better suited to *Flot*, being closer and... I remember this feeling, watching it in the opera house, like, it was um... there were some moments – specially the group moments – it was like this kind of lost kids running around, like playing a game on stage, but you're kind of far away, with a distance to that. I think it's probably more powerful and [unclear] when you're close to the dance, yeah.

Company ZOO

Thomas Hauert

Interview 1 | Day 3 (9 May 2018)

Pages 38 and 130

Thomas: I've just read a book about... Do you know this symbol, the 'A'? Um, what is it? It's a social organization that is non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian. It's very obvious, it's really not... It's like communism, capitalism... It's anarchism! But not anarchism as it got twisted now, that scary thing that is just chaos, but the ideas of having organisation that is local also, and it's that thing that you're actually in charge of the things you're doing. It's not [that] you're doing it because someone else tells you, but you are in charge and you are responsible – that kind of thing. Yes, somehow, that's somehow in there also to... that I... Of course I direct, and I make the thing happen. I kind of... and I have more say, it's not like in the company we're... it's completely [non-] hierarchical, but I think I'm striving for that, and I'm enjoying it when it's working, that I'm just one of everybody and with my company it usually works really well. I told you, no, about the last creation where, yeah, where it's, yeah... I was certainly not the one in charge [laughs] for a big part of it so it's... For me that's also really exciting, to see that working and people then... yeah, also it gives such another energy and other motivation for things and for everybody, and also everybody finding their places. It's not that everybody is the same. Everybody kind of with their skills, their kind of mind and priorities, everybody finding their spot and... So that's one thing also, and then another thing is that with every project that we did there was a challenge of something to learn, a new skill to learn, a new way of moving together or a kind of new logic of moving in space or on the bodily... Afterwards, now they are connected also with the duets we did on the first day maybe or the second day, it's all... it's a kind of extension or logic of everything. It's a kind of a whole system that grew, with every new project was kind of a new side to something...

Pages 146 and 147

Marisa: What do you intend to facilitate with the practices you proposed? What should dancers achieve?

Thomas: So, uhm... Well in the first half before the break usually things... I... for me it's because eventually they will have to improvise, they will have to make up their own material and these exercises are developed in my company and then also in my teaching later on, but in the beginning, when I started making work, I was very aware of those patterns that we have ingrained in our bodies, and four of the five dancers of my first dancers were ex-Rosas dancers and it's a kind of style that, yeah... because you do it every day and for years without end and it just sticks and it's hard to get over it. The same with dance training, or whatever training, also ballet training, every training you repeat over and over again, it sticks and so... With my first project we were very aware of that and we kind of wanted to make an effort to get over those patterns and do other things but at the same time we wanted to work with improvisation where those patterns... I said that at the beginning of the workshop also... So really looking at trying to find out what are the possibilities of the body and so we came to that thing of the joints, and then the coordination of different movements so that you can... So that's kind of the idea that is... for me, in a way, once you've realised that you can... then it's a question of practice. But you can kind of know what else is there, and what else you could do even though you're not able to, because those exercises are so difficult... They're so difficult because obviously we never do those things together, um, then it's a question of practicing and inventing other things. I find just... once you've... once you know this then it produces much more interesting movement than... or you have a freedom of invention, yeah, that for me it's... I want to start there, I don't want to, yeah, somehow... or at least as little as possible people relying on those forms that quite often don't come from an interesting place or a kind of tradition that I'm critical of or a style they are there because of repetition, kind of... for me they are not creative.

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Marisa: Can you speak a little a bit about the role of intuition.

Thomas: The thing is a bit what I'm saying when I told them today with that exercise, like the scales on the piano... Yeah, it's like practicing something and first I think that's one way of learning: first consciously doing it, and you kind of have to give the command, go through that whole process of until you... until it's... I guess you could... with the pianist you can kind of read straight away... Is

that not intuition or what is that? Is that... because it's faster than... It's skipping the process of kind of remembering consciously and then giving a command to do it. It's something that I... yeah because you've experienced it and you know. Or it's what you said: coming into a room and kind of having a feeling of who is... who feel connected to and who not... it's because of previous experiences, no, from that kind of how ... I don't know what all plays in that. But... it's kind of prejudice, I guess, but they are based on experience in your life and they might be right or wrong but... no?! You can have wrong intuitions also because of false experiences or experiences that...

Page 161

Marisa: Today it occurred to me that this process leads to these qualities becoming second nature.
Thomas: One thing I'm kind of proud of – do you know Janet Panetta? She told me once that... she didn't tell me in those words, but she told me once that people have told her – and she actually invited me also to teach in New York – that at P.A.R.T.S., or also from different people she worked with before, that people have the impression... some people have the impression that for their... what you say, their 'nature', that there's a kind of a 'before' and [an] 'after'. Once you've gone through these things, you cannot... it's like you cannot go back to the dancer you were before. Once you're discovered those things, then it's like, yeah, it breaks something that is er... your kind of naivety or something, I don't know what it is, but er... Well, but then in a... kind of in an appreciative way, they were very thankful for that. It kind of opened the door that... And that's something I'm very flattered [about].

Interview 3 | Day 17 (7 November 2018)

Page 159

Marisa: Can you speak a little about how this came together or still comes together with the dancers that you have worked with in this period of 20 years, your work in relation to that sharing of views or positions. Looking a bit more at their participation in that process, if you can tell me a bit about that.

Thomas: Um. Yeah, I think, well, the company provides kind of a home maybe, or kind of a platform for, for those meetings and those processes, and in some ways, I think it has suited kind of the, even though the roles - it's not completely horizontal the structure and the roles are... we all have even if we are kind of in a process and we are in one of those stages where we kind of, where it is horizontal, the roles are still different – I think that's always like that, it's not that we all, yeah, again we all have different personalities and also the different skills that people have, interests; there are kind of different roles – but er, and as part of that also is that I kind of took the role of, yeah, of it was always me kind of staying in the boat, and taking it from project to project and kind of most suggesting to the outside world to maintain kind of a continuity...

And I think the dancers would also clearly say that the work, while it's... For them it's very clear that the kind of work we do with ZOO is very much, has very much to do with me, and the kind of choices I make to start with maybe, or that line, that of course it has a very strong kind of, yeah, taste of me, I guess. But er, because they also all do things outside, or do their own work, or they do things with other people and they... so they are, yeah, they see very well that the work they make for themselves or the interest they have in... goes in a lot of different directions. But I think what they appreciate is, or what works also is that... and I think for a lot of them, it's really exceptional than in compared to the other things – even though they are not, it's not necessarily hierarchical but just the way of working and the kind of complicity they find and the history that we have together also, just also the time we spend and all, yeah, the things that happen come, and the trust that is there. Yeah, and somehow the interest of that the work itself keeps producing, because... I think because it was... it generally did something to everybody always, these processes always, they were always, yeah, kind of strong learning processes of learning periods that leave traces, and that feel somehow substantial, or that feel useful also for many different ways. So I think there is kind of a trust and a... and the curiosity also still that comes back, trust that also next time, somehow, as a group we find, yeah, we can be pushed or we will push ourselves to discover things or to... yeah, I think everybody also, there is kind of an 'exigence' is the word in French, yeah.

Interview 4 | Day 21 (15 November 2018)

Pages 143, 145

Thomas: I think, I guess what's also given, what's part of the mechanics is that hyperalert state they have, like if they cannot not be in that – or that's what I ask them – if they... if they're not in there, then I would mention it the day after [laughs]. Like, yeah, if they are too slow, they have to react quickly, so it's...

Marisa: Yeah, very responsive.

Thomas: And alert, and react to everybody else, so that is also something that, yes, that is given. Of course, it's open for interpretation afterwards, but within that frame of... yeah, going with the other one at the same time and catch up, and not let the space get elastic, things like that, there is something that is very clearly defined and if that's not there then the... it makes that the... it's not the choreography anymore, it's note what we're trying to do.

Interview 5 (3 October 2019)

Pages 149-150

Marisa: Is there any element in your repertoire of exercises that facilitates inventiveness and creativity you think you could have done with Ballet de Lorraine during that process that you didn't do?

Thomas: Yes. Um... Well, it was more when I went to see it again in June, in Paris, that I thought 'Ah, I should have done this and that'. More like if I would have been there, I could have put my finger on that and say... Yeah, that's a bit the dilemma I think – we talked about that already – that they need to be in it and all those things, but we also, yeah... it's... No, I said the things over and over again because you, yeah, you [the performer] keep forgetting and juggling all those 'you should do this, and you should do that' – that is an impossible task, er... You have to have it all present with all, and it just takes a little bit more practise. Yeah, especially if people are doing... yeah, haven't done much of that before and then we're doing so many different things in between [performances]. So that also, like, I wonder now, if there wouldn't be a way also to have that thought already in the conception of the project for such a company, that they can actually take it back [reconstruct the piece]. Yeah, it's their reality that they might not do it for six months and then they have two days to take it back. Yeah, it's somehow not in the nature of the work to... [laughs].

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Marisa: So you're planning to go and work with them [referring to upcoming performances of *Flot*, at the time of the interview planned for December 2019]?

Thomas: Yes.

Marisa: Just to go back to the to the question of whether you're going to introduce something [new] or just to stick to the...

Thomas: Yeah, just to kind of remind them of things and... They did a really great job [referring to the performances in Paris], yeah, considering, and I was really happy with what – what's her name – Valérie did, yes. But, it's, yeah, she had so much notes of course, there are things... And then even if she might have said everything, you know, and then on this stage, for the first time on stage after six months, they, yeah, they might have been a bit overwhelmed, and then they also... it was a bit sticky, you know, in space. They forgot to still make the spatial connections while doing the 'unison' or whatever, and not just do the [unclear] thing. Or even if the leader is standing still, you can still keep orbiting, things like that. Well, orbiting, whatever, that the space keeps moving even though the... so they tended to get stuck: whenever the leader was not moving in space, the whole group was not even moving in space, then if it gets a bit heavy.

Sarah Ludi

Pages 129, 130 and 148

Marisa: What kind of state do you have to be in or what kind of quality you have to engage in in order to work with these strategies? It can be more than one quality, more than one state. Is it more a quality, is it more a state? What is it, how would you describe that?

Sarah: Yeah. And still it [the question] is about those three tasks, somehow?

Marisa: In general: the improvised creation, this improvised performance mode.

Sarah: Yeah. Yes, it is indeed difficult to explain it in words. I would say, for myself, it is clearly a state, I would call it a state, which includes many things, but that the addition of all those ingredients gives something different than the addition. But it's also linked with time because when

we develop something we are... I am still very busy with the list in my head, like somehow, I guess, jumping from one thing to the other with my attention. But even with practicing, very soon comes the joy of not being alone doing this, and [the] input of what I see and, I guess, what I feel kinaesthetically. And then very soon that creates a kind of sauce that links already the list... the different points on the list. So this already blurs it [the list] a little bit, which is good. And then little by little, when it gets to the performing mood then, for me, clearly it becomes a soup in a good sense – a soup often means something a bit crappy but erm...

Marisa: A good soup?

Sarah: A good soup with all of that in it but then I don't verbalise anymore in my brain some directions or task, it becomes something else than the words, than the list. Now, when we work on things, we're clearly refining the list and re-insisting on the ingredients that tend to disappear, or we're discovering new vegetables in the soup, and we think 'oh, did you discover that one? Can you also enjoy that one or should we take it out? Does it give bad taste? Well, it's a bit like this.

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Marisa: What helps you and what are difficulties or challenges to arrive at the state required, especially when you're not working together for a long period of time and then you have to perform with ZOO?

Sarah: Yeah. For me, I think the challenge is to be true to the task and not um... not fake it. That sounds really bad, it is bad. But... Yeah, I can... the first day when we meet up, and we do, I can... I cannot feel like it. I... Yeah, it's difficult. And then, because mainly these are tasks that demand to move a lot, and then you just move, it's not that you can stop and wait and start again, and it's... So in the process there's a lot of... how would you call it, when there's a noise, like now, the noises outside like the erm...

Marisa: Disturbances?

Sarah: Yes, but this disturbance is part of getting to it, but little by little... it's a parasite, that's the word I was looking for. There's a lot of parasite movement, that I create for no reason, just because... And so I wish I could not even pass through that parasite movement, and just stop and think, and just produce only things that are true to the task or to the moment. But it's not always possible, so it's about negotiating with that, allowing a bit, with myself, allowing a bit of parasite, 'it's ok, it's ok, it's ok. It'll be better tomorrow'. And then finding... yeah, I guess allowing myself to do less and to... in doing less, to be more receptive, and more aware, and more in the present moment and to, yeah, to not try and produce something when... yeah, difficult to [explain]. So for me this means concretely good preparation for myself, on my own, like lying down, good warming up, good coming into contact with my own fluidity first of all, both mentally and physically, and yes also some calming down about expectations – 'ok, now we meet again, we'll do that, it's not frightening, it's just joy to be together', but expectations about 'I hope it' will be good' then you make it... So, yes, lots of... there's some inhibition going on, having to let it happen instead of trying to make it happen. And it is to tune with the others of course.

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Marisa: What is intuition for you?

Sarah: I guess it [the question] would be linked to dancing?

Marisa: Linked to this context but you can extrapolate if needed.

Sarah: What pops up in my head is that it might be linked to the notion of choice and of trusting yourself, listening... yeah, being in a listening mode with yourself, allowing things to happen, recognising the joy, I would say, the joy of it or the moment it takes you, the moment *la mayonnaise prend*, in French, like, coming back to the culinary, or the soup or whatever it is, recognising the moment when it makes sense, becomes more than the addition of the parts. [Sarah explains what the French expression means]. This magical moment when oil and egg become mayonnaise. Yeah, maybe that's intuition for me, yes, to recognise something and to allow it to happen without too much self-judgement, something that's been created by the encounter of different factors. And, yes, to not intellectualise, I guess, follow the... there is something flowing also clearly, we say 'follow your intuition', so I think there is movement in there.

Marisa: What's the role of that in creating and performing improvised material?

Sarah: Yes, it's a good question because. It's tricky because in a way Thomas is always looking for breaking the habits and that's very paradoxical, I think, in that sense. What is difficult to explain is that he's looking for those different tasks and strategies that allow you to break your habits and to

search for new combinations or foreign zones, in terms of architecture but also space – how you look for space, how you dance into space also, how you... all those spatial organisations that are part of his work. There too we try to break the... I say, for example we tend to go always counterclockwise in space. Why is that? And we always remind ourselves let's also sometimes change and go clockwise. So all those things are counterintuitive. But clearly intuition is part of it so, where is it? I'm trying to find something, it's a difficult question. Yes, is it to do also with what is not part of language, maybe? So in that way it is very important in dance, I guess, because it's this field that doesn't stay in the... *dans la passoire* [in the sieve] of language. I've heard that, I don't remember who said that, but I found it nice that language is the *passoire* – *les langues sont la passoire* [the languages are the sieve]. What's the name in English? When you have salad and then you put it in this thing that the water can go about. So I've read or I've heard that languages are that thing, some things get trapped in it but most of it...

Marisa: Cannot be captured?

Sarah: Yes, exactly. So then it's clearly for me something that goes through it and maybe intuition plays the role of how to navigate into that, without the words. I'm not sure. I might be just...

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Marisa: Thomas used three main practices with Ballet de Lorraine to create *Flot*. One was the 'careful scientist' then the 'assisted solo' and the 'improvised unison'. Mat told me those are the names you use in the studio. I wanted to ask how these practices were developed.

Sarah: Ok. For the careful scientists I have a clear memory because it was in the process of making a piece called *Modify*, about ten years ago, something like that, and we were exploring movement qualities um... individually. So we were improvising for ourselves, looking for material, textures of movement that we could give a name to and we came [up] with a few. Each of us had a list of things we could call by any name, it was just to give it a label. And it was very nice and interesting but then we also all... we realised we would all search into a direction that was still kind of familiar to us, so we were going where we know. So then Thomas had the idea to give each other words that would be the name of a movement quality that we would have to find. And those names that we were giving each other, those labels, those titles of movement qualities – of course we were trying to give names that would trigger something that we thought would be different...

Marisa: For [whom]?

Sarah: For each of us, yeah.

Marisa: So you were observing what the others were doing?

Sarah: We were observing and we were thinking 'ah, I would like that person to go more into a direction that she never goes to, so I'll give her that name', for example. And um... actually, this whole explanation makes sense for what we were doing, but for the 'careful scientist' it's not so obvious, because I wouldn't say 'careful scientist' is something so far away from Thomas. But anyways, Thomas was... got given that word by Chrysa Parkinson, she gave him 'careful scientist', and it became the 'careful scientist', which he performed as a movement quality somehow in the piece *Modify*, and which developed later into this kind of pedagogical tool practice to work on dissociation and... yeah. So that's for the 'careful scientist' – *genèse* of the 'careful scientist' [laughs].

Samantha van Wissen

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Sam: Yeah, I think the scientist – the 'careful scientist' – came before, and that one is a tricky one, for me personally is difficult.

Marisa: The 'careful scientist'?

Samantha: Yeah, the 'careful scientist', yes. But also, there it's really something... and then I found a way of... I do it and I really do as a practice, as I would do my yoga practice for example, you practice to practice, and you're not busy with the result, or you don't want. And then er... If I can do that, even though I see 'ah, I make mistakes' – I mean, I make a lot of mistakes – I would do that again. Just practising and if you... like in a creation, we would do it like every morning, then you also feel like after er... like a month and a half or two months you really feel there's something happening. And then... so that's really like an individual one, though all the others are very much... you have to do with other people.

Marisa: Working with somebody.

Samantha: Yeah. And then the improvising unisono or the complementary that's then also, like, totally different vocabulary or way of connecting with each other. Although, like, the assisted solos are also very much about connecting with the dancing person in the middle, you feel their musicality, really, like, physically through touch. Um... and then improvising, like unisono, you also have this somehow all the time, give up and give in into what's happening around you. Yeah, and they always change, you can never er... lean, like, back and know it. Yeah. That's nice, I like that. It's always... it's always working and practicing.

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Marisa: I have one last question related to if you see yourself as a dancer-choreographer in this context?

Samantha: I must say I see myself always as a dancer. I would... I mean, I know that for example in ZOO – and I really appreciate it because it shows respect towards the creative and artistic work and choices we make, in the creation also on stage – that we're mentioned as dancer-choreographer, but I would never use the word choreographer for myself. For me I'm a dancer and I'm really happy to be a dancer but I'm a dancer with um... I like to be a dancer like how I can be a dancer in ZOO. So I have all that freedom, I have also all that responsibility, but for me I stay a dancer, yeah. But I don't like to feel... I've done other work where I'm a dancer and I don't have that freedom, or I don't have the feeling of contributing and that's not a nice way of being a dancer. But for me, yes, somehow, maybe that's a bit old fashioned, but, like, the choreographer for me is the one like... Thomas, he makes the final decisions, he has all the weight and pressure on his shoulder of the end result, and all of that and er... I always wanted, you know, to become or maybe to be a choreographer, and I think, since a few years, I come to the conclusion it will not happen and I'm happy, I'm happy to be a dancer. Yeah. Although, I mean, when I'm teaching for example, now I don't do it anymore, but I was teaching like amateur group for 15 and I really like to make, like, a dance and to decide – 'people there, you go there' but I would not say, no, I'm a choreographer. No, I'm being creative with movement, yeah.

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Marisa: What happens then when they stop stimulating you [referring to the 'assisted solo']?

Samantha: I remember that in the beginning we were... we would first practice a lot, like, that they were there. It's not from the beginning that the outside people would step out. You do that after some time of practice, so you have so really, like, physical... physically that experience and for me that's... I think it's maybe also... or very personal, for me it's very important that I can somehow click off the brain. And I don't know how it works, but somehow have imaginary people go on giving me impulses, without really thinking 'he's moving my shoulder' or 'she's doing this to me' but somehow finding a way of planning a movement which is difficult of course, but I cannot really explain how. It would be interesting to know what makes that. I think it's the amount of... of undergoing that kind of moving, like, with the people being there, being there, being there. I think somehow the...

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Marisa: Can you describe qualities or states that you have to be in to work like this?

Samantha: For me it works... I have to find a... I don't have a recipe like 'if I follow this warming-up, that it always works'. No, but I'm always trying to get to a certain kind of focus where I can exclude completely the, like, judgement, so I have no distance of what is happening. Um, and I have to be like really in the moment, like ready to react on any second, on anything that could happen. I have to be very alert, very ready and often I really don't like when... cause that happens now and then, that you start to judge, like 'oh, no, that was not good' or 'I was too late' or ta, ta, ta. All those things, they blur it and make that you cannot do the task well. So the more I can forget about that and really just be in my body at that moment, the better it goes. And sometimes also you feel that your body is very awake and very sharp, and almost responding without even thoughts [thinking] of what's happening. And I don't know the...

Marisa: The recipe? [laughs]

Samantha: No, no [agreeing]. We were talking about it yesterday, like, for this kind of performance somehow you need to prepare and with me also, we're getting older also, and I have the feeling I'm busy always with it when I wake up. Like, everything in the day goes towards the performing at night. Um... Yeah, because it asks a special kind of state. And I cannot go, like in the other pieces,

in other companies, I go to the museum, ta, ta, ta, and here I cannot do that somehow. And it's also not that 'ah, if I do a good warming-up, then I'm ok. No, it's really something also in the relation between the brain and the body should be right there.

Mat Voorter

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Marisa: And the improvised unison? Do you remember when that came into play?

Mat: I think that was because we... That process was the wish to... Because all the pieces previous of Accords, if I don't say it wrong, we worked with that we created with the tasks we had done we created a structure. Out of that came the wish where the piece also... the composition, the structure, also there, would be more improvised, that it would be less and less set and defined, so one idea, what Thomas had was also [that] the space was also written out. In the beginning with Cows in Space there was loads of tapes on the floor to give ourselves support, later we made more like a grid with squares of one square meter on the floor and then we would know from where we had to be on a certain moment in relation to the other people, and we could read that from the floor. (...) As we marked we could relate to how we had put it on the floor. We put square on the floor and that could help us. For that piece we wanted to have that improvised, as well the spatial relationships, but that's not talking about the unisono but, like, by having how we could make the space to have a help on that we thought to work with... we set we wanted to have the same facing, because that would make it visually more clear. 'What kind of rapport can we have there with each other?' And then we said we keep the same shoulder relationship with each other. It could have been also different. It could have been exactly the same but the head goes... and no, we keep the same shoulder because that makes it very traceable for the people. I can imagine that then also it was 'How is it if we *move* also together?' So there has come, like, the unisono, but then, I think it came through the working, by watching it, that we said 'but, yeah, that doesn't er... it's not so interesting, if the person who is following is in a delay'. So then we were studying from 'ok, how does it work then to be really together, to have a unisono?'

So there came the task and the fun – we had really fun with it – in discovering 'ok, how does it work then to attack it together? What is the difference between the person who initiated and the person who needs to be 'mili-with-it' in unisono?' So that we discovered that person had to have another movement, another speed with, in fact, than the person initiating. You cannot think you do the *same movement* exactly. No, you need, in fact to... in *timing*, your movement needs to change because – I now exaggerate – like this arm goes up, and this one needs to catch [be in unison]: this is a very different movement than in fact this. But of course, so timing-wise there's something different but usually you go exactly in the same way through the space almost, to get the catching [the unison]. It's more in general speaking, it's like the way we work is er... one important part is we want to feel a certain excitement ourselves when we work in space. We need to be curious about, we need to be triggered by it and then we say also as a group 'let's go, let's figure this out, let's work on this till we get this'. And also taking in conscious [into consideration]... might this be interesting for audience or for dance in general? Like, I think we have a certain kind of... we don't worry also too much about it, it's more like we trust it a little bit because it fascinates us, that we think we might be enough on the border of where dance is going to understand from 'yeah, this is something that goes beyond just our personal interests', it might an interest to more people in the dance or to dance itself.

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Marisa: If we could stay with that practice for a bit. I have a question related to this um... What is the experience of performing the assisted solo when the assistant is not there anymore or these two people are not there anymore. Can you speak about this experience? What remains?

Mat: It might be that I approach it a bit different. It's maybe how everyone does it. I work a lot with imagination. As soon as people go, I still imagine them there I still have these beings with me so I still can perceive that input. That's something where I can lean on er... can happen, while I can imagine what people go from out of the body, what is this muscle tension. I still can imagine that they're still... I try timing-wise what was there, how does the musicality work? What happened there into the impulse? To have the different the forces, to keep that alive and varied and not to fall back. It was also to break with certain habits in movement er... to open up other possibilities, so I

try to challenge myself to not fall back into... or recognise when habit comes back, to learn from that and see if I can open up. It's a practice of practice. What did I want to say? I forgot.

Marisa: Physicality. I was asking the dancers and Thomas what kind of process he goes through.

Mat: But what I wanted to say is, like, from er... Because we have done this, we've practiced it, it's also possible that you don't need... after you have practiced it er... over time, than you don't need to have the real people anymore, you also really can go into having the imaginary ones with you. So you can er... your body memory is there, from there, that you can do it like that. But that happens over time.

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Marisa: There is one notion, or one specific term Thomas uses quite a lot. I wanna ask you about intuition. What is intuition for you?

Mat: For me it's also it's also like er... For me it's very key in life and in art making. Well, I feel very er... related to this, I think that's why I might also related very well with Thomas. It's not everything needs to go through a conscious mind, while, I think, we need to keep our conscious with us and work as a register, register what's happening, but it doesn't have to pass through there before going into an action. So that's another kind of... for movement, it's another kind of directness, and we don't need to *know*, we don't need to er... to know it yet. And for me it's... for a development in the world, for a development, a life, er... if you want to have progress, change, transformation, that er... like science, I think it's very important in life but it's not that there we should... that cannot be our guideline only. I think it's exactly what we don't know so, yeah, the mysteries which out there, that we also allow that to be present and to step into that with curiosity and to let that be present. With art making and with intuition, I think, there we can present maybe a bit of that, you know, we don't have to define it yet or... And of course, as soon as we, like, back to the first questions with those words, we get to the words because we need some still the er... by writing it down, by language, we try to share it through the word and the language. It's a great tool to share something with each other but its' not the only way. Like, dance is another option for sharing, it's another language. So... [Laughs] yeah, for me it's a great thing but it's difficult to put into words. But I, trust I... I let the intuition give me quite some guidance, also in life, I try also in life to have that, like, if my intuition says 'I think I need to go downstairs because...' you know, if you get a sensation that, you know, you get a kind of ring.

Marisa: What? A wind?

Mat: A ring. I follow that, even if the reasoning would say 'but why?'

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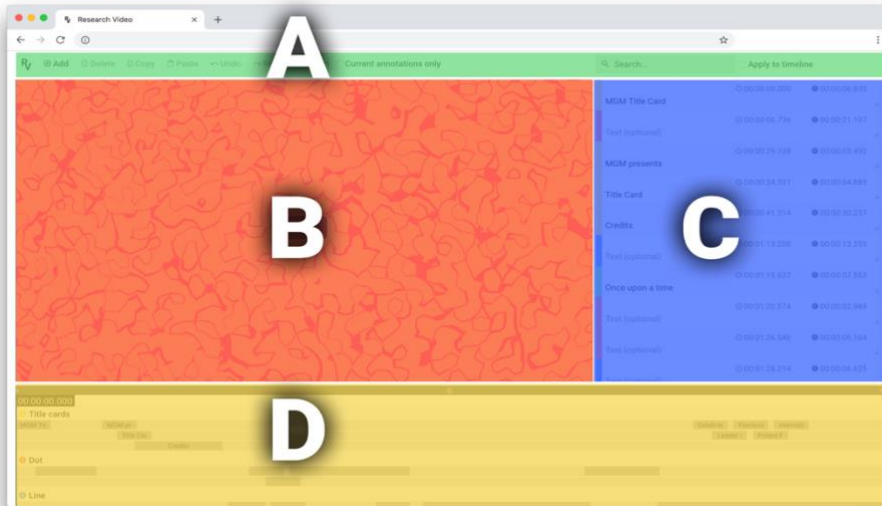
Marisa: In relation to this topic of the qualities or states, I'm curious to know how you maintain that over time. You're not working on a regular basis together over long periods. What are the strategies to maintain [hyperalert states] and what are the challenges?

Mat: For sure a challenge is like, if this... if we would work with each other on a daily basis, what we would have is, of course, the body memory, and the being together and have shared the days before – that makes it in a certain way fresh, you know. It goes... it might go quicker, I don't know. What is a challenge is for sure, like, if there's a time in between, then we need, when we meet up – mostly when we do a show over a period of time – then we do the general [rehearsal]. And mostly we don't use the video rehearsal before the general, maybe a few things, but a lot of times we do immediately a general, because there we have to go full in and we immediately test it from 'ok, from where are we? Where do we need to work on the day before the show?' We just refresh those things again, or work on it to be ready for the performance, instead of rehearsing bit by bit. And also, like, because we... through going full on, then a lot of times we discover the things that are well enough on their place; we just have to be sharp. But because there's time in between we, have met other people, we have done other things, so... our attention has gone somewhere else, and physicality has gone in other things. The focus, the remembering where to focus on in this specific piece – that needs to come back. It's not just, I think, a mind thing. Your whole being needs to be brought back to that. And that's a certain challenge, you know, for sure, and then we know, er... but because we know each other, how... I think a lot of it happens quite... happens not so much through the consciousness 'thing' but because we know each other, the adaptation to rehearse and how we can help each other, support and er... and challenge each other. There's something also about, er... it's a bit life related, also, because we're friends, we know each other, so that speaks also in there. And so, I think it's also kind of love, you know, that you want to help

that the other gets there, lovely helping, and but also exactly challenging, there's a wanting that the work is... has a quality, so er... so that we also demand from each other, we challenge each other, so you can't just lay back. Then the others will also challenge you like that 'hey come on!' But if someone needs it, in that moment, to be calmer, then we take care of that. I don't know if I answered that.

8.5 RV Tutorial 1 | Script

FIGURE 8 RESEARCH VIDEO INTERFACE COMPONENTS



Components of the Research Video platform: (A) Toolbar Component; (B) Video Component; (C) Inspector Component; (D) Timeline Component

This is a tutorial on how to navigate the Research Video online platform, where you will be able to explore the annotated videos integrated in my thesis.

As a first step, open the link to the switchdrive folder that you were given access to and download the video files. The files will go to the 'Downloads' folder of your computer. Please save them in the hard drive in a folder of your choice.

To watch the annotated videos, open the internet browser Google Chrome. I recommend you clear the browsing data before opening the files.

Copy-paste or type onto Chrome the Research Video web page address provided in the manuscript: <https://rv.zhdk.ch/>

Once the platform is open, go to the toolbar component at the top and click on 'Project', and then on 'Open Project' on the left side.

Open the folder 'MARISA GODOY_VIDEO FILES', select the file you wish to watch and click 'open'. An icon will appear indicating the file is being loaded.

I will now explain the main components of the Research Video platform. In the Toolbar Component (A) at the top, the most important editing features are located.

The Video Component (B) in the centre is the video player. To play and pause the video, press the play icon in the centre of the video component (B), or on the video itself. You can also use the play/pause icon at the bottom left.

To open a track, click on the arrow beside the track name. All annotations in that track are thus visible in the inspector component in chronological order. If you open all the tracks, all existing annotations will be displayed in the inspector component on the right side.

The Inspector Component (C) hosts all annotations and serves as a tool for editing the text-based data. Here, the content of the annotations can be read and explored.

The Timeline Component at the bottom hosts all tracks and annotations. Time is represented from left to right, and the playhead indicates the current time in the video.

The timeline component (D) hosts all tracks and annotations. By dragging the playhead, different parts of the video can be watched.

By double-clicking on an annotation in the timeline, the playhead jumps to that point in the video, and the corresponding annotation is displayed and highlighted in the inspector component.

To view only the annotations corresponding to the current playhead position in the timeline, check the box 'Current annotations only' in the toolbar component. This feature hides all annotations in the inspector that are not currently under the playhead.

The files that were submitted as part of my thesis can be edited. If you shift an annotation or delete content by accident, these changes will not be saved in the original files. To reopen the original file, go again to 'Project', 'Open Project', and click on the corresponding file.

Typing text into the search box starts a live search: annotations that do not match the search are then completely hidden from the inspector. Annotations that match the search will appear in the inspector in chronological order. The box 'Apply to timeline', when checked, will apply the search result to the timeline as well.

Key terms and categories developed in the thesis have been assigned tags in the video files. To locate the tags, type the hash tag symbol (#) in the search box. All existing tags will then be displayed. Click on the desired tag to view the annotation that contains that term.

This is the end of this tutorial. Thanks for your attention.