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Writing *with* practice: Body Weather performance training becomes a medium of artistic research

Joa Hug

This article discusses an artistic research project that investigates the impact of Body Weather performance training on the perceptual process and modes of knowing of the performer. It revisits an early stage of my doctoral research, in which my main concern was to develop an embodied approach to the articulation of the knowledge created by the training practice. It begins with a brief introduction of the Body Weather training programme and the practice that is the focus of my investigation: the Manipulations. Drawing on the concept of bodily knowledge, it indicates the difficulty in providing a linguistic articulation of the tacit knowledge that is embodied in artistic practice. The article discusses how I address this issue by developing a 'research score' and creating a 'Glossary', and how these two are combined in order to think through the Manipulations. It provides a close reading of the process of alteration that is enabled by the Manipulations and a thick description of the research score, arguing that the latter allows for an equal relationship between practice and writing. It concludes by sharing observations regarding the expansion of training practice into a medium of research and the potential of my approach to research into training to become a mode of training research.

Keywords: Body Weather, artistic research, bodily knowledge, embodied reflection

Introduction

Since 2011 I have been working on a doctoral research project that investigates the impact of Body Weather performance training on the performer. One of the main objectives of my investigation is to articulate, from the perspective of the dancer as artistic researcher, how the training practice brings about a change, or alteration, in the performer's process of perception. Moreover, the research develops the epistemological potential that is embedded in the process of alteration with regard to the notion of bodily

knowledge. In this paper, I revisit and discuss how my artistic research took shape in the early stage of my doctoral studies. At the time, one of my main concerns was to clarify the epistemological grounds of my investigation, and to develop the methodological approach to my research. How to write about a performance training practice, *Body Weather*, that is relatively unknown and that has been largely disregarded by scholarly research?¹ How to approach an articulation of the knowledge that is created and embedded in this practice? How to write about the practice without reducing it to an object of reflection and without imposing an interpretive conceptual framework that is extrinsic to the practice?

These questions touch on one of the key issues hotly debated in the field of artistic research – the relationship between practice, research and writing.² One of the main problems has been the schism between artistic practice and academic research, and the ‘uneasy relationship’ (Borgdorff 2012, p. 56 ff.) between the two disciplines. Artists conducting research in the context of academia are often being confronted with the requirement to provide elaborate written accounts of their research; they find that the emphasis on a linguistic articulation of their research subordinates the practical forms of knowledge embodied in artistic processes and products to the kinds of propositional knowing and conceptual thinking that are privileged in academic research. The question is: how to develop modes of writing that take into account the specific properties of artistic modes of practical inquiry, and that do not subordinate artistic experience to narrow and restrictive academic conventions of writing? How to expand the register of articulating research?

In the following, I will discuss how I took on the (self-chosen) task to write about a performance training practice by developing an approach that involves writing from within the practice itself. I first introduce *Body Weather* and the training practice that I have been focusing on in my research: the *Manipulations*. I then draw on the concept of bodily knowledge to begin with an articulation of the knowledge that is created and embodied through the *Manipulations*. I elaborate in more detail on the development of a research practice based on the *Manipulations*, the ‘research score’, as well as on the creation of the ‘Glossary’, and I outline how, from the combination of these two, an embodied approach to thinking through the *Manipulations* emerged. This approach provides the ground for a close reading of the process of alteration in the *Manipulations* and to a thick description of the research score. I round up my account by stating that the research score enables an equal relationship between practice and writing, and I conclude the article with observations about the relationship between research and training practice.

Body Weather

I have been closely involved in the *Body Weather* approach to training and performance practice since 2002, first as a practitioner and performer, later as an artistic researcher. Throughout these years, my practice of *Body Weather*, as well as my relationship to it, have changed. In the early years, I was deeply immersed in the actual training and performance practice.

1 Notable exceptions are the unpublished PhD thesis by Snow (2002), as well as, more recently, articles by Taylor (2010) and Fuller (2014) in this journal, as well as by Marler (2015).

2 See Pakes (2003, 2004) for a detailed analysis of the issue in the context of dance-based practice-as-research in the UK, as well as Borgdorff (2012) and Nelson (2013) for transdisciplinary perspectives on the subject.

3 On the issue of expanding artistic practice into artistic research see for example Borgdorff (2012), Kirkkopelto (2015), and Nelson (2013).

Gradually, however, my main activity has shifted towards reflecting in, on and with the practice. This shift of focus is related to the task, and my desire, to expand the training practice into a medium of artistic research.³

Body Weather is a comprehensive training and performance practice that investigates the intersections between body and environment. It evolved in the early 1980s in Japan from a longstanding and intensive collaboration between dancer/choreographer Min Tanaka and an international group of dancers, actors and performers. The group lived and worked on the Body Weather farm, based in the small town of Hakushu on the Japanese countryside, and toured worldwide under the name of *Maijuku Dance Company*, directed by Tanaka.

Katerina Bakatsaki and Frank van de Ven, two former members of 'Maijuku', lived and worked in Japan from 1983 to 1991. After their return to the Netherlands in 1993, they founded Body Weather Laboratory Amsterdam as a platform for training and performance research. From 2002 to 2009, I regularly joined the weekly six-hour training session with Body Weather Amsterdam. In 2005, I co-founded together with several other Amsterdam-based Body Weather practitioners the performance project 'Something Here That Is Not There', directed by Katerina Bakatsaki.

The standard structure of a Body Weather training session, as we practised it back then, typically consisted of three sections, with each section taking about one-and-a-half to two hours. The first part is called the 'M/B', which is short for mind/body, or muscles/bones. The 'M/B' is a vigorous and highly energetic workout that develops strength, endurance and coordination while calling attention to the close observation of bodily changes, particularly in terms of the kinaesthetic awareness of the body, its alignment, placement and muscular tension. The second part, on which I will elaborate below in more detail, are the 'Manipulations'. The third part of the training is called 'Laboratory' and consists of a wide range of practices that explore the perception of the body and of movement in relation to other bodies, to time/speed, space, images, touch and so on.

In my research, I have been focusing mostly on the second part of the training – the 'Manipulations'. The following description of the Manipulations and of their transmission comes forth from several sources: my own extensive practice (countless times since 2002), the numerous feedback talks that I have had with practitioners, and my experience of assisting and facilitating the transmission in workshops as well as in an ongoing practice group. In his unpublished PhD thesis, Peter Snow (2002) provides a detailed account of the Manipulations, which has strongly informed my conception of this practice. I am deeply indebted to all those who I have worked with and who have enhanced my experience and knowledge throughout years of intensive practice, especially with *Body Weather Amsterdam*. Despite the abundance of evidence gathered throughout this period, though, I want to point out that my account is necessarily partial, subjective, and incomplete in that no single perspective could ever fully live up to the complexity of the phenomenon at hand. In relation to the state of progression of my doctoral research, I wish to emphasise that the findings provided in this text are provisional results of research-in-progress.

The practice of the Manipulations

⁴ See Hug (2016) for a video recording of Manipulations number One and Two.

The Manipulations⁴ are a hands-on practice consisting of a series of touch-manipulations exchanged between two partners, with one person giving and the other person receiving touch while lying on the ground. The receiving partner does not move independently; instead, they continuously work on muscular relaxation and on making the body available to be moved by the giver. Typically, in most of the touch-manipulations the giving person places body weight with their hands on the body of the receiving partner, while at the same time directing the pressure into and through the receiver's

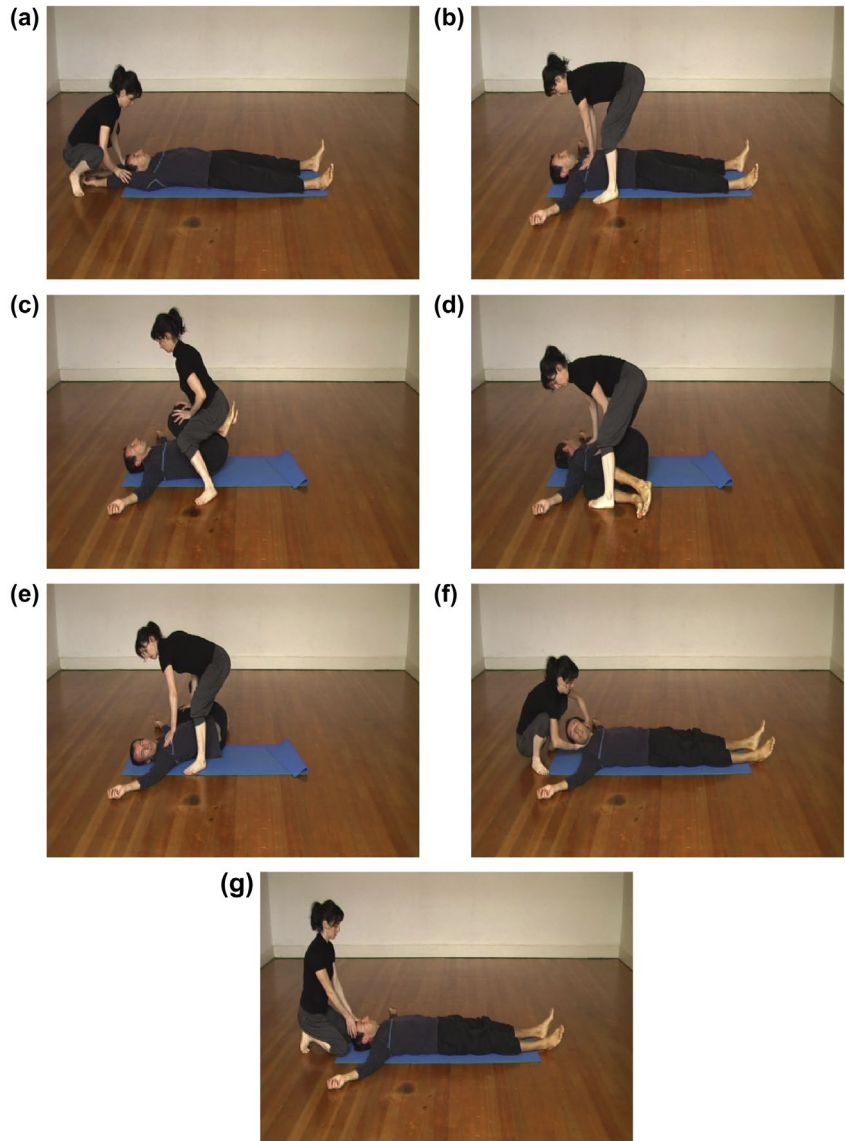


Figure 1(a-g) The Manipulations. Video stills, Joa Hug and Ema Nik Thomas. Courtesy of the author.

body (or a part of it) so that it is becoming lengthened, stretched, expanded and permeated.

Another possible way of giving a Manipulation is by exploring the condition and material properties of the receiver's body (or, again, a part of it), for example by moving an arm, sensing its weight, size, tonus, texture, or by testing the mobility of a joint such as the elbow or the shoulder. The complete practice of the Manipulations consists of a series of approximately 90 touch-based hands-on operations that are structured into a fixed sequence from One to Seven, during which the roles of giver and receiver alternate. Typically, it would take one-and-a-half to two hours for the complete practice to be accomplished.

One of the main aims of the Manipulations is to decrease the receiving body's muscular tension in order to foster its sensitivity, permeability and availability to be moved – its capacity to affect and be affected.⁵ Sending and directing weight through the hands of the giver into and through the body of the receiver is one way to facilitate this process. Conversely, the receiver actively supports the process of relaxation by consciously minimising muscle tension, for example by sending the breath through areas of tension in the body and/or the part of the body that is being manipulated.

From a practice-as-research perspective, the Manipulations provide a highly specific framework for the two practitioners to study how their bodies mutually negotiate their mental and physical limits. The giver and the receiver engage in a close reading of the changing condition of their bodies, both in relation to their own body as well as in relation to the body of the other. This specific if artificial setting thus allows for a tremendously rich and complex field of inter-corporeal experience, in which the close observation of sensory perception, in particular touch and proprioception, is intensely important.

In my conception of Body Weather, the Manipulations figure as that part of the training that is the most fundamental, powerful, complex, sophisticated and fascinating. Rather than being a straightforward movement technique, the Manipulations are a preparatory practice with the capacity to alter the conditions for the possibility of movement by changing the relationship between sensing, perceiving and reflecting. This process of alteration, however, depends much on the engagement of, and the relationship between, the two partners. The Manipulations reconfigure the bodily conditions for movement only insofar as the receiver, deliberately and wilfully, allows for the undoing of habitual patterns of holding and fixation that govern the body's perception in relation to itself and to the other body.⁶ Over the years, the Manipulations proved to harbour a seemingly endless potential to study the body and to examine how its mode of existence can be shifted from a mode of being into one of becoming. It is this enthusiasm about the Manipulations and the intuition that new discoveries are always possible that guided my decision to further explore and to articulate the knowledge that is enabled by this practice.

5 An exploration of 'affect' in relation to 'touch' in the practice of the Manipulations is beyond the scope of this paper.

6 I will elaborate below in more detail on the process of alteration.

Bodily knowledge

The issue of knowledge production has been one of the core topics in the debate about research in and through the arts (Borgdorff 2007, 2011, 2012). In dance research, the exploration of the epistemological and methodological grounds has placed special emphasis on the concept of 'bodily knowledge' (Parviainen 2002; Rouhiainen 2007). Finnish dance scholar Jaana Parviainen (2002) argues that the dancer's bodily knowledge is a mode of knowing *in and through* the body, and not merely knowing *about* the body. She also points out that the conceptual articulation of bodily knowledge deserves more attention:

The often stated but rarely analyzed issue of dance studies is the question of knowing in and through the body. Although the concept of 'bodily knowledge' has been around for a long time in dance practice and dance research, the intuition of bodily knowledge is not yet articulated adequately. (Parviainen 2002, pp. 13–14)

According to Parviainen, one of the reasons that make it difficult to articulate the intuition of bodily knowledge linguistically is that this knowledge relies on tacit and nonverbal forms of knowing. However, the gap between thought/language and the dancer's bodily mode of knowing is not unbridgeable, she writes. For Parviainen, the issue of knowing in dancing is mainly related to the distribution of the sensible: there is an unequal distribution between the explicit knowledge expressed through verbal language, on the one hand, and the implicit knowledge gained through the awareness of the body and of movement, on the other. She writes:

Dancing is hardly less rational than conceptual thinking, although the medium is different. Some dancers are more talented than others; however, all of them have knowledge of movement. Knowing in dancing always has something to do with verbal language; nevertheless, it essentially concerns the body's awareness and motility. If we acknowledge that dancers know something and that for the most part their knowing is nonverbal, it leads us to ask, *What* do they know, and even more importantly, *How* do they know? (Parviainen 2002, p. 13)

Thus, for Parviainen, the way dancers know in and through the body is not disconnected from language, yet their bodily knowledge is grounded on a tacit and nonverbal dimension of knowing.

If tacit knowledge is indeed such an important part of the structure of bodily knowledge, then the problem is evident: how to properly articulate bodily knowledge given that the nature of its basic component, tacit knowledge, implies the very impossibility of its articulation? The solution to this problem, according to Parviainen, has to do with a shift of focus and with reflectivity. By shifting the focus of attention to our lived bodily experience and by reflecting on our tactile-kinaesthetic sensations, we may come to gain the bodily awareness and the epistemic openness that permits the tacit dimension of our experience to surface and to become explicit. It is, thus, by shifting our focus to the tacit dimension, and by reflecting on it, that the

implicit dimension of experience turns into an explicit awareness, for example of an object or a phenomenon, and that tacit knowing translates into focal knowledge (Parviainen 2002, pp. 17–18).

But what does this mean precisely? If Michael Polanyi's (1967, p. 4) famous dictum that 'we can know more than we can tell' is correct, and if there is a dimension of knowledge beyond words, then is it not a paradox to make the attempt to put this 'more' into words? How to give voice to the tacit? How can the tacit ground for the dancer's bodily knowing be properly articulated? How can tacit knowledge be made explicit?

These were the questions that I addressed in the first phase of my doctoral research. At that time, one of my main objectives was to investigate the practice of the Manipulations in the light of the concept of 'bodily knowledge', in order to see what the concept would do to the practice and vice versa. By drawing on my own practitioner's experience as a source of knowledge, I wanted to reveal and articulate the knowledge that is created, embedded and enacted through this practice, and to further develop the artistic research I had already undertaken during my Master's studies.

The research score as an embodied approach to think through the Manipulations

What is the knowledge that is created through the practice of the Manipulations, and how is it embodied? How can the epistemological potential of the Manipulations as a method of research be further developed? From the outset, the intention behind the doctoral project was not to provide a detailed analysis of each and every element of the BodyWeather training programme, but to specifically delve into the Manipulations and to further explore their potential as a medium for artistic research.

In 2012, I gave a public lecture-demonstration at the Theatre Academy Helsinki: 'Imaginary Properties: Thinking Through (The) Manipulation(s)'. In this lecture-demonstration, which was my first externally examined, and approved, practical part of my doctorate, I presented my artistic approach and the results of an artistic exploration conducted during an intensive three-month working phase. During this time, I had experimented with a modified version of the Manipulations, the so-called 'research score'.

In the research score, the original set-up of the Manipulations is changed from a duo into a solo practice: without an actual giver, the receiver enacts being given/receiving purely by memory and imagination. Thus, instead of investigating the Manipulations in their original form, based on years of practical experience, I experimented with a modified solo version.⁷ To this solo version, I added yet another task: to observe the process of thinking and to make written notes of the ideas that would come to my mind. Thus, the problem posed, and to be explored, by the research score is to enact a solo version of the Manipulations by memory and imagination, and, at the same time, to recreate as precisely as possible the sensation of being given/receiving while observing the process of thinking and taking written notes of the ideas that appear.

The concept of the research score is adapted from dance improvisation, where a 'score' is a set of instructions that structure and inform, yet do not

⁷ I have regularly practised the Manipulations since 2002 and began to work with a less elaborate solo version already during my final project for the Master of Artistic Research at the University of Amsterdam 2008/2009.

exactly define, how the improvisational event takes shape and what its contents will be. While the Manipulations are probably most accurately defined as a choreographed, fixed sequence of specific touch-based movements, by using the term 'score' I wish to highlight the aspect of contingency that is inherent to the form of structured improvisation and that underlies the modified solo version of the Manipulations: while the 'what' of the score is quite fixed (following the form of the Manipulations), the 'how' remains always a matter of negotiating, and improvising with, the various tasks at hand.

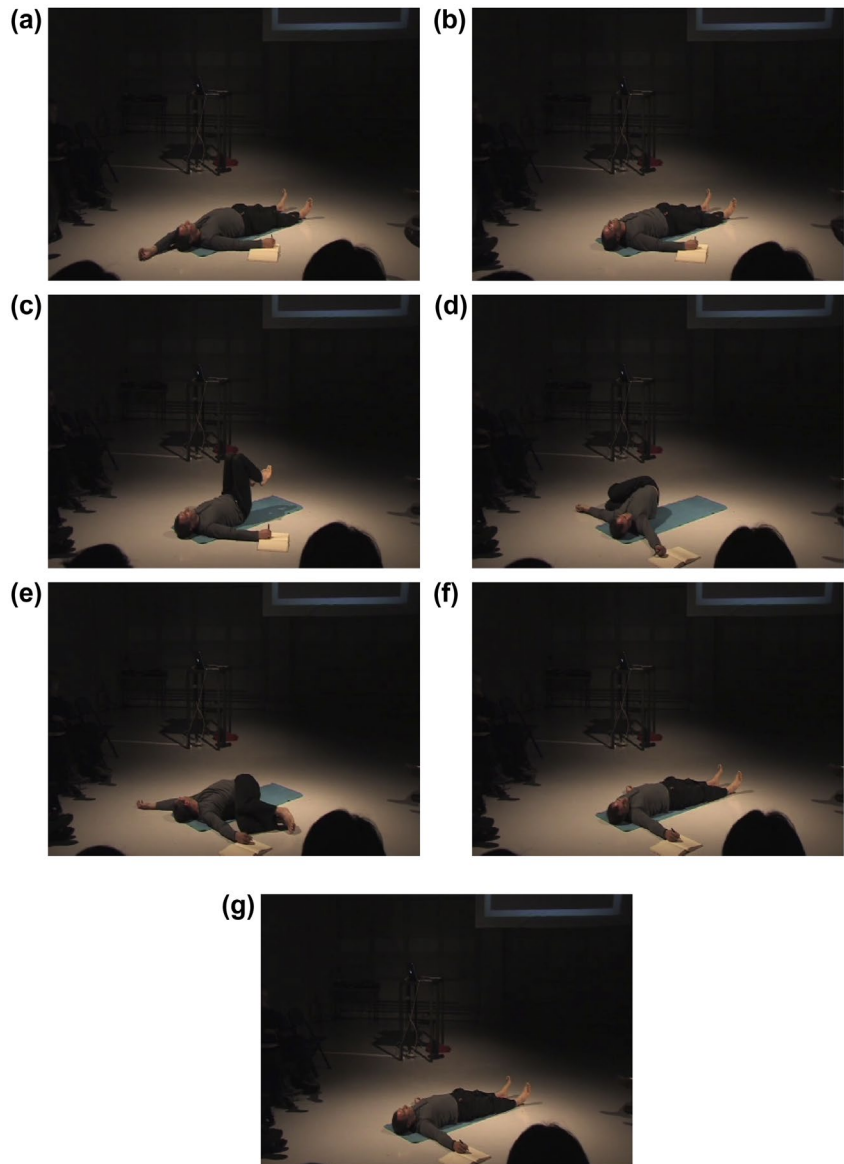


Figure 2(a-g) Performance of the research score in 'Thinking through (the) Manipulation(s)'. Video stills. Video: Jyrki Oksaharju, Theatre Academy Helsinki. Courtesy of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

Moreover, by specifying 'score' in terms of 'research', I want to emphasise the investigative nature of the research score and its function as an epistemic medium of perceptual-linguistic inquiry with an undetermined outcome.

Methodically, it may seem an odd choice to approach the investigation of the Manipulations through the research score: why inquire into a duo practice that so fundamentally relies on the corporeal encounter between two bodies through a *solo* practice in which the body of the *other*, the giver, is merely imagined – based on memory? Why not take the first step first: to study, observe, and articulate the impact of the original duo practice of the Manipulations? Why complicate things more by subtracting a quintessential element of the practice (the body of the giver), and by adding further tasks (imagining, writing)?

I admit that these objections are not completely off the point. Indeed, it would have been a more obvious and linear approach to first add the task of writing to the original duo practice, and to expand it afterwards into a solo research score. However, when I started my doctoral research, I had practised the Manipulations for many years, and I already knew them very well. I felt confident enough to jump one step ahead and to make my own embodied experience the departure point to explore and investigate this practice. What I did not yet know was how to articulate my own embodied, implicit knowledge of it, and how to connect the research into movement and perception with conceptual reflection. The research score was an attempt to inhabit, and to explore, the ground between thought, language and experience, and to literally think through the Manipulations from within the practice.

In *Body Weather*, imagination typically plays a crucial role in the process of creatively transforming a preparatory and pre-performative training practice into performance material. For example, in the training we would frequently practice an exercise called 'wind'. In this exercise, different from the Manipulations, the receiver is upright and in a standing position when he or she receives a specific touch-manipulation by the giver. After having practised 'wind' for some time, in a more advanced stage, the giver withdraws and the receiver works alone, imagining the experience of being moved and recreating the concurrent sensations based on the memory from the previous work.

The basic principle, here as well as in many other *Body Weather* exercises, is to replace the concrete and real action of being moved – by *imagining* to be moved. From this perspective, the research score is a manner of reframing the Manipulations by applying a core principle that is also frequently used elsewhere in *Body Weather* performance training: to recreate, and ultimately to perform, the sensory perception of past experience by using memory and imagination.

Thus I propose the idea that practising the research score is a way of translating the original of the Manipulations through the wilful acts of memory and imagination. This translation, I suggest, is both faithful and a betrayal: the research score betrays the original of the Manipulations by turning a duo into a solo practice; yet from another perspective, the research score is faithful, because it reiterates one of the core principles in the creative process of *Body Weather*: the (re-)creation of past experience by memory and imagination.

The glossary

I started to work on the 'Glossary' by brainstorming and fixing a list of words that I would focus on. In the training, these words had frequently been used to verbally instruct, direct and give feedback on the process. Each time that I practised the research score I selected *one* of the 31 words from the list and reflected on it. I named the written notes that I took while practising the research score the 'Scribblings'. The list consisted of the following words:

Allowing	
Autopilot	Monitoring
Availability	Negotiating
Camera	Observing
Cutting	Peeling Off
Dissecting	Reading
Effort	Receiving
Fixing	Resisting
Flow	Scanning
Giving	Standby
Handling	Surrendering
Holding	Switching Off
Installing	Towards
Listening	Transposing
Maintaining	Tunnel-Perception
Manipulating	Undoing

In addition to the written material collected in the form of the Scribblings, I conducted four sessions with different variations of speedwriting: In the first session, I spent five minutes writing about each word from the list, deciding on the order by chance. In the second session, I took one minute of writing for each word, again deciding on the order by chance. The third writing session was preceded by a one-hour M/B.⁸ In a state of physical exhaustion following the M/B, I wrote for one minute on each word in random order. In the fourth session, I first took five minutes for each word during which I looked at the written material from all previous speedwriting sessions, as well as at the Scribblings. Then I took five minutes for writing about each word in alphabetical order. Finally, I looked at all the material from the writing sessions and edited that into the final version of the Glossary.

⁸ See above for an explanation of the part of Body Weather training called 'M/B'.

The Manipulations: A Glossary

Allowing

Allowing oneself to be moved by the giver requires from the receiver to constantly work on *minimising muscle tension* while avoiding *resistance* and simultaneously *observing* the impact of the *manipulation*.

Autopilot

One is said to be running on *autopilot* when the process of actively *observing* the experience has stopped, when one's attention has become *fixed* and when one's actions have become automatic.

Availability

Making oneself *available* means *allowing* oneself to be moved by the *giver*; *availability* enables creating a body that is not only moving from the awareness of the body itself, but also from the awareness of the body's environment.

Camera

Camera is a metaphor for bringing bodily sensations into focal consciousness; the idea is that there is always a multiplicity of *cameras* operating simultaneously.

Cutting

Cutting refers to the action of interrupting the impulse to move by yourself and, instead, to become *available*; it also refers to constantly shifting, redirecting and redistributing one's attention.

Dissecting

Dissecting the body denotes the process of carefully examining the *receiver's* body, creating understanding, both for the *giver* and the *receiver*, about its current condition and anatomical constitution.

Effort

The *receiver's* task is to constantly *minimise effort* in terms of *muscle tension* while maximising *effort* in terms of attending, sensing, perceiving *and observing* the experience.

Fixing

One speaks of *fixing* when the process of *observing* is frozen in one mode of attention or in one area of the body, and when the condition and the organisation of the body are no longer actively observed and *negotiated*.

Flow

Being in the *flow* is a condition where one is no longer actively processing experience but where the perception of experience has taken over; as soon as one has become aware of *flow*, it should be broken through redirecting one's attention.

Giving

The task of the *receiver* is to be *available* to receive the *giver's manipulation* in the form of weight, touch, twisting, compression, stretch, relaxation, expansion and extension.

Handling

The issue of *handling* is learning and knowing how to *give a manipulation* in such a way and with such sensitivity that the *receiver* can feel reasonably safe and trust the *giver* when being taken to their physical limits.

Holding

Holding is a type of muscle tension and one of the three attention points that are constantly checked and *observed* in the action of *minimising muscle tension*.

Installing

One of the main requirements for the *receiver* is to constantly recapture and put into action tasks and points of attention such as *minimising muscle tension* and *observing* sensations.

Listening

Paying close attention to sense perceptions in *all* possible modalities: including intero- and proprioceptive as well as exteroceptive experience, i.e. stimuli perceived both from inside and outside the body. The *receiver* should treat all modalities as equal.

Maintaining

In order to *maintain* the process of *receiving* alive, the receiver is asked to constantly redistribute attention and to avoid *fixing*, *flow*, *tunnel-perception* and running on *autopilot*.

Manipulating

The main objectives of *manipulating* the body are altering perception, crafting a body that is *available* and receptive to external influences, and creating experiential insight into the anatomical structures of the body as well as into the operating mode of consciousness.

Minimising Muscle Tension

One of the main tasks of the *receiver* is to constantly work on *minimising muscle tension* on the basis of asking three questions: (1) Is the tension of your muscles on *zero*? (2) Where are places of *holding*? (3) Where are you in a mode of *standby*?

Monitoring

Monitoring is the action of *maintaining* the aliveness of the process of *observing*, of checking the points of attention, of tracking changes and making sure that one does not fall into any automatism (*flow*, *fixing*, *autopilot*, *tunnel-perception*).

Negotiating

Negotiating, in the action of *receiving*, refers to the constant and deliberate effort to stay in physical dialogue with the *giver*, and to be ready to go beyond one's own limits even under the perception of pain, for example through *allowing*.

Observing

Observing sensations and *maintaining* an overall picture of the process is one of the main points of attention in receiving; observing creates a distance between the observer and the observed, and thus objectifies experience.

Peeling Off

Peeling off refers to the action of *minimising muscle tension*, and to the *undoing* of habitual patterns of movement and perception in order to attain a more objectified experience of the body's sensations.

Reading

Checking the condition of the body and attending to its sensations is understood by the word *reading*; a *close reading* of the body entails attending in great detail to micro-perceptions of the body.

Receiving

Receiving is a highly active process of sensing, perceiving and reflecting on the effects of a manipulation. *Receiving* is accomplished by a wide range of tasks that are *maintained* simultaneously, such as *installing*, *reading*, *scanning*, *allowing*, *observing*, *cutting*, *peeling off*, *listening*, *surrendering*, *switching off* and *undoing*.

Resisting

Resistance against a *manipulation* physically manifests itself in the form of muscle tension; the receiver is asked to *undo resistance* by constantly working on *minimising muscle tension*.

Scanning

Constantly checking the condition of the body, in great detail and part by part, *minimising muscle tension* and *observing* sensations.

Standby

Standby is a quality of muscle tension that arises from a mode of anticipation in which one is ready to move by oneself; *standby* is one of the three attention points in the action of *minimising muscle tension*.

Surrendering

Surrendering denotes giving oneself completely over to be moved by the *giver*, while actively processing the sensory experience; the process of *minimising muscle tension* enables *surrendering*, its opposite is *resisting*.

Switching Off

Switching off muscle tension is accomplished by consciously sending the command to the body to release tension; *switching off* plays an essential part in *minimising muscle tension* and is similar to actions like *cutting* and *peeling off*.

Towards

The strategy of working *towards* implies that one is always engaged in approximating a goal that actually cannot be reached, that one is working on a task that can never be fully accomplished, and that the process of *negotiating* never stops.

Transposing

Transposing denotes the sending, directing and emplacing of the *giver's* touch and attention in the body of the *receiver*; the *receiver's* responsibility is to allow the *transposition* to take place, making herself *available* to being *manipulated*.

Tunnel-Perception

Tunnel-Perception is a type of concentration in which the focus of attention unconsciously gets *fixed* in one modality of sensing and perceiving, or in one location in the body, for example in a place of tension or pain.

Undoing

Undoing refers to the action of constantly *switching off* and *minimising muscle tension*, thereby increasing the *receiver's* *availability* and capacity for being *manipulated*.

Why a glossary?

With the creation of the Glossary, I pursued several aims. First, I intended to make explicit the language of instruction that was used in the BodyWeather training process and in the giving of feedback. The function of a glossary, usually, is to facilitate the understanding of a highly specialised expert discourse entrenched with a particular, almost exotic, terminology. In the early phase of my doctoral research, I was dealing with the question of how to communicate, and contextualise, my research approach. In comparison to other methods and approaches to performance training, BodyWeather is relatively unknown. How could I make my research more accessible through the use of descriptive language? I was hoping that the Glossary could be instrumental in communicating my research approach to those who were not familiar with BodyWeather.

Second, I hoped that working on the Glossary would contribute to a process of clarifying for myself the implication of the language used in the transmission and the embodiment of the Manipulations. Although learning-by-doing is key to Body Weather training practice, clearly any learning process will never happen in a linguistic or conceptual vacuum. The language that is being used in the pedagogical process is crucial; it generates and shapes the practitioner's experience.

Therefore, the knowledge that is transmitted and that becomes embodied in and through the training process hinges on the words that are given in order to direct the process of perception in the training. One of my objectives is to reveal this connection, and to explicitly articulate the language that is used in order to redirect, and thereby alter, the process of perception in and through the Manipulations. Furthermore, in my view the re-articulation of the language of instruction is of key importance when it comes to the question of expanding a practice, in this case the Manipulations, into a medium of research. Language enables us to critically analyse and discuss the Manipulations as a material-discursive practice that is historically constituted by just that: material-discursive practice.

The task of writing about a training practice in a manner that reveals its true complexity is extremely challenging. It is, in fact, overwhelming. Where to begin? How to approach the writing? How to create a linear narrative out of a non-linear and complex web of information, out of a mess of processes that are running through, across, in between? How to structure this mess so that someone else who does not have the first-hand, in-depth expert knowledge can relate, connect and make sense of it? The Glossary was meant to be a vehicle, maybe even in the first place for myself, to get started and make the first steps on what I felt was going to be a long way towards the linguistic articulation of the Manipulations. The alphabetical order of words in a glossary makes for a non-hierarchical system, in the sense that each word is of equal significance within the system. This equalisation made it easier to get started with the writing; it didn't matter which word I chose to begin with, I could start anywhere.

Apart from that, I didn't want to approach the creation of the Glossary only from an abstract conceptual perspective, but I also wanted to include my own bodily experience in the process of writing. I didn't want to merely

write about the Manipulations, but I felt that it was necessary to articulate the practice with explicit reference to the tacit dimension of my own embodied practitioner's experience. It was important for me to find a balance between writing from within the practice and a more distant mode of writing about the practice, combining both modes into an embodied approach to think through the Manipulations.

A close reading of the process of alteration in the Manipulations

Having outlined the evolution of the research score as an embodied approach to think through the Manipulations and to write the Glossary, I now want to return to the subject of alteration. I mentioned above that, in my experience, the Manipulations have the capacity to alter the practitioner's process of perception by changing the habitual relationship between sensing, perceiving and reflecting. As my research progressed, it became important to further explore and articulate the experience of alteration as a means for indicating the epistemological potential that is embodied in the Manipulations and explored through the research score: how is the relationship between sensing, perceiving and reflecting altered? How does the alteration of the body and its perception actually happen? What, concretely, is the corporeal materiality of this change? The vocabulary of the Glossary is a basic resource to draw on in order to advance, and to articulate, a close reading of the process of alteration in the practice of the Manipulations.⁹

⁹ I further developed my conceptual reflection on the Manipulations and on the research score in the process of preparing for numerous research presentations at conferences and university seminars, when facilitating workshops and practice sessions, and by practising the research score.

To begin with, it is somewhat arbitrary to say where the process of alteration actually starts. The Manipulations are a highly complex and multi-layered practice, and although there is a clear linear progression in terms of the form (as mentioned above: the series of touch-manipulations is choreographed into a repeatable sequence of movements), I take the processes of sensing, perceiving and reflecting as interweaving in a non-linear and rhizomatic network of relations. However, having to begin with an account somewhere, one possible way to approach mapping the process of alteration is from the perspective of observation and attention.

Attention and observation

The constant redistribution and re-placement of attention across multiple and continuously changing parts of the body prevents observation from falling into a flow, and from getting fixed or stuck in a tunnel-perception. Like a camera, attention zooms in and out, scanning the body in a more and more detailed way, moving back and forth between macro- and micro-perceptions, the molar and the molecular, constantly shifting and expanding the frame of perception, dissecting the body, fragmenting, isolating, disconnecting and differentiating it part by part – in order to allow for the realigning and reassembling of the body, bit by bit, segment by segment, its muscles, joints, bones, fascia, tissue, and so on.

Release of tension

The receiver cuts all volitional movement and allows him- or herself to be moved by the giver. By constantly peeling off muscle tension, the tonus of the muscles is softened and the texture of the body is changed. Lying in a horizontal position, the receiver no longer needs to invest in muscular effort to keep the body in an upright position and, instead, can fully surrender and let the body's weight drop into the floor. In this lying position the vestibular system (sense of balance) is put into a state of at-rest.

Three questions are meant to facilitate the work of minimising muscle tension by directing the receiver's attention to different types of tension: First, where do I sense any muscle tension? Can I cut the tension and reduce it to zero?¹⁰ Second, are there any places of holding? Third, is there any part of my body that is in a mode of stand-by, i.e. ready to move by itself? The receiver actively checks the body for all three types of tension, and, by cutting, minimises muscle tension. As the tonus of the muscles is reduced, the texture of the body is changed; the body becomes softer and more permeable, and body parts become more available to be isolated and to be moved by someone or something else other than the 'owner' of the body.

The reduction of muscular tension enables an enhanced sensitivity and a process of differentiation of the body. This process allows practitioners of the Manipulations to develop an understanding of how body parts can be isolated and related differently to each other. For example, as the muscles in the neck are getting released, there is more freedom for movement of the vertebrae of the upper spine, the head can sit more loosely on the atlas, allowing for more looseness and rotation of the head, changing the alignment between spine and head.

Sensing and perceiving

As the body is being dissected and decomposed into the smallest possible units, its capacities for listening are increased and refined, changing the depth and the content of sensory perception, in particular of touch and proprioception. The body is rendered open and more receptive, allowing for new sensory connections to previously dormant and unperceived (disconnected and disintegrated) areas of the body. This sort of collaborative negotiation and reconfiguration of an altered body with different sense-abilities disrupts and displaces the receiver's perception of self, ownership, authorship and agency. The physical boundaries between the body of giver and the body of the receiver become increasingly blurred; one's own body is no longer perceived as a single and separate entity, but as a multiple and open organism. What emerges is a form of co-embodiment, a meshwork of selfless selves,¹¹ where bodies and their environments intersect and permeate each other, where the agency for movement is renegotiated and where the authorship for sensations is constantly redistributed.

10 It is impossible, of course, to attain a state of 'zero' muscular tension. The point is to work towards the impossibility of 'zero' as a means to observe what happens along the way.

11 On the notion of the 'meshwork' see Francisco J. Varela (1991) and Tim Ingold (2011).

Reflection enacts perception

Who is moved by what and how? Who is touching and who is being touched? Who perceives what and how? In the Manipulations, the process of altering perception is something that does not just happen to a body, passively; it is something that is co-enacted by two actively reflective bodies that negotiate the dynamic relationship between giving and receiving. The receiver is constantly observing and monitoring the working process, consciously installing a multiplicity of tasks while maintaining the process of questioning: what does it take to minimise muscle tension and to allow for the undoing of holding and resistance? What are the mental and physical properties of surrendering? How to avoid falling into a flow and fixing the observation? When is it necessary to make a cut in order to redirect attention and to prevent the receiving from becoming controlled by the autopilot? Reflection is closely in touch with sensory perception; it emerges from, and at the same time also intervenes in, the relationship between sensing and perceiving. Reflection, thus, plays a pivotal role in the enactment of an altered mode of perception. Reflection is not a detached process of thinking about, but in and through, the body's experience.

The research score as an approach to embodied reflection

In the research score, I am modifying the original set-up of the Manipulations while maintaining all the questions and the points of attention that I just described. Instead of working with an actual giver, I enact being given/receiving by imagination. Removing the actual giver from the couple-network and turning the Manipulations into a solo practice is obviously a major intervention into the original practice. Without a giver, there is no longer a direct physical relationship between two actual bodies; a profound change in the actor-network has happened. Now, the receiver imagines the action of receiving and actualises the memory of being given: how the hands touch the body; how the weight enters into, and is directed through, the body; how body parts are being moved; what sensations are triggered by being touched and moved, and so on. One body artificially enacts a relationship between two bodies by imagining this second body. This is more than acting as-if. The challenge is to imagine being given with such fidelity, and to recreate the sensation of receiving in such great detail that the boundary between reality and imagination is blurred and, thus, the translation succeeds.

It is an impossible task, of course, to completely collapse the distinctions between reality and imagination. But this is not the point. The point is to work towards the impossible as a means to shift towards an altered mode of perception while acknowledging that the shift can never be fully accomplished, that it always remains a shift-in-the-making. Observing the shift-in-process and tracing how this shift is experienced, I suggest, allows for insights about the constitution of bodily habits of perception, behaviour and thinking, and about the potential for doing the body otherwise.

How is it possible to recreate the sensation of being given/receiving without an actual giver, just by imagination?

How much muscle effort does it actually take to recreate the sensation of being given?
How much effort do I think I need to make, when actually I don't?
What are the limits of my imagination?
When does my imagination feel real?
How real can I artificially make it?
What is the physical difference between 'real' and 'imagined'?
Is something changing in the body? What? Where?
How does this change affect the process of perception?
How does a change in the mode of sensing translate into a change in the mode of perception?
How does this change materialise?
What are its mental properties?

This is one series of questions that activates the practice of the research score, and that articulates the issues that emerge in the process of translating the duo practice of the Manipulations into a solo practice.

Another field of observation is the process of thinking that happens while the score is practised. In my experience, the observation of thinking has been a neglected aspect in the practice of the Manipulations, even though it seems to me that it ought to be considered an equivalent part of experience – much on the same level as the processes of sensing and perceiving.¹² Typically, however, what tends to happen is a foregrounding of sensory perception, while the observation of the process of thinking is backgrounded.

In my view, this primacy of sense perception over conceptual thinking is reiterating a false body–mind binary. It has taken me a while to understand that I myself have unwittingly reiterated a false opposition between sensing and thinking in my way of practising the Manipulations. *Don't think too much about it – just do it!* There seems to be a prejudice or misunderstanding that whenever we engage in a physical practice we ought to suspend our thinking in order to get more deeply immersed in the experience.

The research score has been the main medium of my practice-as-research in order to study, observe and document, to a certain degree, how the processes of sensing, perceiving, reflecting and thinking can be related differently. The score is designed as a technique to destabilise and displace this sensing–thinking–binary and to explore the score's potential for reconfiguring the relationship between sensing and thinking by actively redirecting the distribution of attention.

With the research score I transformed the Manipulations into a medium of embodied reflection, where it is no longer a question of either sensing or thinking, but a matter of how to inhabit the in-between of the both-and. I suggest that the score is an approach to observe both the process of sensing and the process of thinking under highly specific conditions: an artificially altered mode of perception in which the relationship between sensing and thinking is considered to be affective. Accordingly, the research score is activated by a second series of questions around the notion of 'thinking':

How to disrupt habits of thought?
How to think otherwise, differently?

¹² A definition of my notion of 'thinking' would contribute to a clarification of the complexity of 'reflection', but I cannot elaborate on this subject here.

*How are sensing and thinking interlaced?
 How do they touch upon, and affect, each other?
 How are sensing, perceiving and reflecting disentangled in the research score?
 How does an altered mode of thinking relay the modes of sensing and perceiving?
 How does a body with an altered mode of perception (make) sense?
 How does the altered body think?
 How does thought emerge from an altered mode of perceiving oneself in relation to others?
 How does thought materialise under altered conditions?
 What is the temporality of the altered mode of thinking?
 How does sensing-thinking translate into language?*

A thick description of the research score

I have been experimenting for some time now with the research score as a means to connect both series of questions, on translation and on thinking, into an embodied approach to reflect on particularly chosen words, notions or concepts. This is how I usually go about it:

Before I start the practice of the research score, I choose a word or a notion or a concept that I want to work with. Then I lie down, let my weight drop, take a couple of breaths, and sink into the practice. I install the word in my peripheral consciousness, not focusing on it, but allowing it to be there. I start scanning my body, in particular for muscle tensions. I breathe out audibly with a hissing sound, directing the breath through my body (e.g. through the soles of my feet, the back of my knees, my neck, the top of my head, through bones, fascia, tissue, skin) and through areas of tension. Then I start with Manipulation No. 1. I imagine how my arms are lifted by the giving person, how, firmly gripped by the wrists, they are pulled and extended backwards, out and away from the torso, opening space in the shoulders, the ribcage, the spine, the lower back, creating space for the breath to pass through. I direct my breath simultaneously also to other places in my body, places that are not directly affected by the stretch of the arms, or at least seem not to be. Following the breath, I direct my attention throughout my whole body and observe its sensations, from segment to segment, part by part. The attention spreads rhizomatically and moves nomadically, never getting stuck in one place, allowing for a close reading of the body's multiple experiences. The listening doesn't stop at the body's boundaries; it is both interoceptive and exteroceptive – that is, receptive to stimuli both from inside and outside the body. I remind myself of the chosen word. Without deliberately thinking about the word, without making an effort, I give time and let it slowly do its work. I constantly keep on minimising effort and muscle tension while observing sensations and thoughts. Minimising the effort of thinking simply means that I am not thinking hard in order to grasp an idea. I am not trying to get a thought. I let it come and emerge. I wait for it. I receive it. I observe the thought that is released by the word. Its arrival happens sometimes slowly, other times suddenly, almost always at the moment of breathing out. Non-volitional thinking. Sometimes, the taking form of an idea and its crystallisation in language takes more than

13 I used to instantly make written notes of thoughts, the Scriblings (see above). More recently, I worked with audio recording. To my surprise, the recording of my voice uttering thoughts interfered much less with the process of observation than I had assumed.

one breath; it needs more time, stretching over a couple of breaths. I articulate the idea with my voice and make an audio recording of it.¹³ I breathe in. My attention moves to the space between my lower back and the floor. I imagine weight gradually entering my body through my upper chest ...

When I recently prepared a presentation for a conference on the subject of 'method' in dance research, I practised the research score several times reflecting on 'method' as a way of activating the process of thinking, reflecting and writing. This is a transcript of the audio recording taken during one of the sessions:

Time Voice (recorded)

1.19 Observing the movement of attention
 1.45 Observing the movement of breath
 2.30 Observing tension, sensation, release ... pain
 3.06 Getting ...
 3.20 ... sinking into a state of ...
 3.32 ... affective ... detachment
 4.43 What's the difference between practice and method?
 5.00 Am I practising a method or ...
 5.05 Am I turning a practice into a method?
 5.55 Does it have to do with the intention underlying the practice, the doing ...
 6.03 ... whether something is 'practice' or 'method'?
 8.30 Or is it that ...
 8.43 ... a sort of ... systematically researching training ...
 8.50 ... is also training research?
 9.06 ... that practising, or researching a practice ...
 9.23 ... eventually becomes a mode of practising research
 9.39 That would mean that practising practice ...
 9.52 ... shifts ...
 10.06 ... towards researching the practice ...
 10.16 ... and that researching practice ...
 10.27 ... shifts ...
 10.32 ... to practice as research ...
 10.41 ... and that practice as research ...
 10.53 ... becomes ...
 11.03 ... *practising research* ...
 11.24 ... and that at the end of this continuum ...
 11.43 ... stands 'researching research', or 'researching the practice of research'
 12.51 Maybe the word 'research' ...
 13.03 ... is such a heavy word that ...
 13.10 ... maybe 'study', as Erin Manning suggests ... that 'study' is ...
 13.20 ... a bit more light – a word with a bit less weight ...
 13.28 ... so ... replace 'research' through 'study' and ...
 13.39 ... trace ... make again a similar trace of the transformation from 'practice' to 'research', so from 'practice' to 'study' ...
 13.54 Could systematically studying, observing ...

14.04 ... experience ...

14.20 ... thereby ...

14.31 ... changing or redistributing ...

14.42 ... mental and physical activities

end of practice

Research score, reflecting on/with 'method', 5 May 2015

Rounding up: from writing on practice to writing with practice

By providing a thick description of the research score and by sharing a transcript of an audio recording taken during a practice session in which I was reflecting on/with the notion of 'method', I wish to indicate a gradual change of register that has emerged in the approach to writing. What I noticed happening after having practised the research score many times and over an extended period, is a shift in the mode of reflection: from reflecting and writing *on* practice towards reflecting and writing *with* practice. This shift is small and subtle, but I want to argue that it is significant, because it points to an altered relationship between artistic practice and reflective writing, in which neither is subjected or subordinated to the other. In the research score, I want to suggest, reflective writing and artistic practice no longer pertain to supposedly separate domains that are arranged in an uneasy relationship, but they are intimately interwoven. The relationship between reflective writing and practice has become one of co-creation and of composing-*with* the other as an equal partner.

I want to conclude by sharing two more observations made in the course of my research. The first observation concerns the expansion of a training practice into the medium of artistic research. At an early stage of my research the aim was to investigate the impact of the Manipulations on the performer. However, what seems to have happened, in the course of time, is a gradual reversal of perspective: from focusing on the impact of the training on the performer towards observing the impact of the research on the training. Under the impact of the research score, the training practice has become expanded into a medium of artistic research, and is both the subject and the object of research. In this process, the status of the body changed: the body is no longer merely some *thing* that is investigated and reflected upon, but the body itself has co-agential capacities in the process of reflection.

The second observation has to do with the relationship between training practice and artistic research. What slowly begins to emerge from my ongoing practice of writing with the research score is the intuition that the score may not only function as a tool for conducting research into a specific training practice, the Manipulations, but that it might as well offer a way of *training* research: that is, training an embodied approach to conduct research *with* practice.

Would these observations indicate that my research into training was on the way towards becoming an approach to the training of research and to embodied reflection? I leave this question open to further investigation and future discussion.

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