

a lot
of
moving
parts

book two

Eleanor Bauer

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book review

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page 5	Effing the Ineffable
page 23	No Time for Judgement / More Time for Judgement
page 45	Documentation / Examination
page 53	Author's Hand / Epitaph



Effing the Ineffable

Introduction

I'm thinking about thought. Thought is propositional: one thinks about, with, through, of other things than thought itself. Thought is also mediated: situated and modeled in a medium that forms and informs it. There are many media of thought through which thinking takes shape uniquely, idiomatically, and sometimes untranslatably. As a medium of thought, what is specific about dance? How does dance coordinate, organize, and synthesize sensed experience; what meanings and notions does it afford?

How (if at all) can dance-thought be translated to language-thought? What kind of language do we use to talk about dance? The way we language what we do deserves scrutiny, as it shapes what we do, in processes of preformation, collaboration and evaluation. If our language is constantly subordinated to the role of convincing people of the value or appeal of what we are doing, artistic discourse descends quickly into flimsy marketing jargon. How can dance-thinking, in its various techniques and practices of embodied sense-making, push language-thinking into new forms, new poetics?

To experiment with ways that the dancing mind can express itself in language offers an opportunity to re-think how *choreography*, as dance-writing, is influenced by and re-imaginable through language. Rather than refusing language, as there is eventually no escape, my question is how I can use language more precisely, to make words work for dance. Affirming that “activities dedicated to thought and writing are inventive”¹ is a call to abandon language that reduces, confuses or misrepresents dance-thought, and invite words to come closer to, brush up against, and be swallowed by structures of thinking that originate in dance. Now “choreography as expanded practice” which left dance behind is supplanted by dance as expanded practice, putting dance-thought in the driver’s seat and exploring onward.

¹ Massumi, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press, 2002, 12.

Is there an “ideal language”. capable of transcending, comparing, or intermediating all other media of thought? Is there any thought which is not situational, nature-culture artifactual, entangled in the perceptual constraints of skill and ecology? Could there be “a method of analysis that allows conceptual invariance to emerge progressively across different domains”? Thinking, as native to the mind, is shaped by all the practices that a mind engages. If a meta language would be successfully conceived and deployed to transcend and connect all other media of thought (dance-thought and language-thought, for instance), the fact remains that thinking is always and only situated in minds which are of sensing bodies of and in the world. There is no thought untouched by specific and limited practices, and hence no mind bearing of the objective qualities to conceive of such an ideal language. It is perhaps the wet dream of artificial intelligence to be able to achieve such omniscience by means of gathering enough data-experience from all the situated perspectives in all the possible languages and media in the world, but programming language itself is a cultured invention.

Yet perhaps there are qualifying characteristics common to all thought in any medium. Thought always has *movement* and *relation*³. Moving an idea around, studying or changing its relationships, is thinking. To claim that thought is movement certainly doesn't mean that bodily movement is the ideal language, nor imply that radical empiricism transcends or underpins all other forms of thought, but that thought is movement *within* a particular medium of thought, and that thought is always *in* relation. Language expresses movement, as it comes from human subjects with moving bodies. What specific relations are forged in dance, and are they translatable to language?

2 Hare, Matt and Ben Woodard, *Anti-Eureka*. Journal Site 1: Logic Gate, The Politics of the Artifactual Mind, 2017. In this paper Hare and Woodard examine the tensions between the empirical and the formal at stake in the pursuit of an “ideal language”.

3 While I am certain that this notion has its precedents and champions in phenomenology, philosophy of mind, post-colonial and feminist theory, and countless others, I am indebted to performer Chrysa Parkinson for this bridge in my inquiry, as it landed in/came out of a conversation of ours on these very questions in November 2017.

Effing the Ineffable

Language mediates our agreements, about the rules by which we live, about what we are doing, about the conditions we are moving within. Dance and performance are no exception, as essentially social thought-activities. In experimental dance, we verbally define and modify the terms and conditions of our movement beforehand, we often work with verbal direction or scoring while moving, and we articulate and discuss our perceptions of what we have done afterwards, in order to create common understandings and workable material out of subjective ephemera. The increased presence of language as a tool to delineate and transmit movement for dance in the last fifty years is due perhaps to the influence of language-based and task-based scoring from the Judson and Fluxus movements, as well as the spread of somatic techniques in which the mind of the mover is directed towards certain physical experiences by instruction of attention. With the use of verbal language, the mover's imagination is inscribed in choreography, so that how the dancer is thinking about what they are doing supplements or even replaces mimetic or nonverbally transmitted information. Language always leaves room for interpretation, which is why a performance is more than its score. We still have to do or see the dance to "know" what it is, to think with and through it.

During a workshop in the summer of 2014, dancer and choreographer Ellen Söderhult asked dancer and choreographer Alice Chauchat for disambiguation of the score for what would later become *Telepathic Dance*. Chauchat answered, "Say yes and then do whatever you want", quoting a dancer's life hack she'd acquired from dancer and choreographer Alix Eynaudi on what to do with confusing choreographic instruction. Söderhult decided to "do what you think it means", or later, "make it mean something to you".

The agreement that supports *Telepathic Dance* is that an observer mentally "sends" a dance to a receiving person who performs the dance. The not-knowing is such an explicit given that subtler intuitions and stranger sensibilities than mimesis or interpretation of instruction are necessarily called upon. In this situation, the doer decides and the subject-supposed-to-know cannot be interrogated,

for both parties are granted the status of subject-who-assumes or pretends. Here “do what you think it means” is more or less what a dancer always does as an interpreter of an instruction. “Make it mean something to you” is even more active, and maybe more appropriate way to describe the experience of generating a dance from an instruction in language. Whether in language or modeled otherwise, in order to find out what any embodied action is, we have to roll up our sleeves and “eff the ineffable”.

Vagueness and Paradox

If the words don’t fully define what we are doing, we have to rely on other ways of understanding. Even when the words do overly define what we are doing, what we are doing remain something else. We fill words with meaning through our experiences. We imbue scores, instructions, choreographies, somatic practices, and dance techniques with information that passes through teachers and colleagues, between bodies, and thus we define all of those forms and frameworks by doing them, performatively and intersubjectively. Indeterminacy of instruction and purposefully open language are tools for forcing tacit knowledge to the forefront. Imagine a door, left open in the words, for dance to saunter in.

In 2013 in conversation with me, Chrysa Parkinson puts her fingertips together towards me and her wrists apart in an isosceles triangle, saying “words do this”, and then inverts the triangle, joining the base of her palms together towards herself and pointing her fingertips outward to infinity, saying “movements do this”. Her formal illustration of the denotative tendency of language and the connotative tendency of dance she then extends to a comparison between concentration and awareness. If we adopt Parkinson’s model, what can the denotative tendencies of language do in relation with the connotative tendencies of meaning production in dance? What language is fit for the volatile experience and fugitive poetics of a moving body?

Let us not assume that words can only denote and movement can only connote, nor settle for a simple exchange between dance’s connotative tendencies and language’s denotative tendencies. We risk flattening what both can do well within their own dynamic

systems of sense and signification. Both words and movements are capable of extreme precision. Both words and movements are also capable of escaping finite definition, and both, through use, evolve and drift away from historical meanings towards new meanings.

We can note a penchant for fuzzy terminology in dance, with frequent use of broad unspecified terms like “energy” among teachers and directors to refer to and conduct the invisible stuff going on between or within bodies. For better or worse, dance is very good at taking advantage of vagueness. After all it’s a great way to avoid being pinned down. But vagueness is not always a verbal shortcoming, it can also be a mobilization of thought to meet dance:

The logical resources equal to emergence must be limber enough to juggle the ontogenetic indeterminacy that precedes and accompanies a thing’s coming to be what it doesn’t. Vague concepts, and concepts of vagueness, have a crucial, and often enjoyable, role to play. [...] Generating a paradox and then using it as if it were a well-formed logical operator is a good way to put vagueness in play. Strangely, if this procedure is followed with a good dose of conviction and just enough technique, presto!, the paradox actually becomes a well-formed logical operator. Thought and language bend to it like light in the vicinity of a superdense heavenly body. — Brian Massumi⁴

Let’s say dance-thought is the “emergence” that “the logical resources” of language must be limber enough to equate. “A good dose of conviction and just enough technique” is what a dancer is often expected to provide in order to make choreography something other than the writing itself, to reveal the thing’s coming to be – in short, to perform. Rather than modeling a concept outside of dance and then executing it, dance is both concept and model, the matter in which the concept emerges and plays out. Vague lingual concepts can be a way of getting language out of the way of that process. Because a paradox is unresolvable, it creates a friction,

⁴ Massumi, Brian, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press, 2002, 13.

anchors a tension within which perpetual movement can unfold. A simple paradox can produce endless complexity.

In a talk on generative systems hosted by the Long Now Foundation in June 2006, Brian Eno and game designer Will Wright discuss the example of the board game “Go”, as a system with very simple rules and an extreme depth of strategy⁵. The idea, algorithmically, that simpler rules engender more complex outcomes, and that they are inversely proportional – more complex rules limit outcomes – is visible in games, nature, politics and finance, and can be applied to artistic authorship. In the same talk, Brian Eno described generative art and music as “designing seeds rather than forests”.

A generative relationship between language-thought and dance-thought, between word and action, flourishes in their un-translatability. The proliferation of meanings that spring forth from the friction of paradox or the gaps of vagueness reinforce the non-indexical relation between action and language. One who gives an instruction never knows exactly what will happen. That unpredictability sustains ongoing inquiry in practice.

Truth has proper respect for the accidental. — Pauline Oliveros⁶

Accidental Truth

The transport of thought and experience from one medium to another over the frictions and gaps of translation, arouse the pleasure of metaphor. Differences between systems of meaning production invite us to explore new terrain, with the gamble that in the surrogate space of another system of ordering and sense-making, the thought or idea translated may be rearranged and with that, something revealed. But not all metaphors are necessarily useful. In the words of Chris Swoyer, “Not all representations allow

⁵ Eno: “In a book by Frances FitzGerald called *Fire In The Lake*, about the war in Vietnam, she asked a Viet Cong general after the war, ‘Why do you think you were so successful?’ and he said, ‘the Americans were playing Chess and we were playing Go.’ That really captures the difference between the two games”. Wright: “Go is about a hundred times more complex than Chess in terms of range in strategy. The compression ratio between the simplicity of the rule set and the depth of strategy is amazing. That ratio is in the entire world around us, between generative system and emergence”.

⁶ Oliveros, Pauline. *Divisions Underground: A Psychologist vs. A Feminist – Why Haven’t Women Composed Great Music? Why do men continue to ask stupid questions?* Published in *Software for People, Collected Writings 1963-1980*. Smith Publications, 1984, 103.

detailed reasoning about the things they represent; no amount of pondering the embroidery of Hester's 'A' will reveal the details of her exploits"⁷.

Manipulating or reformulating language to better express *structures* of dance-thought gets us away from indexicality of vocabulary and towards the internal *relationships* and *movement* of thought within dance or language. The Aristotlean definition of poetics (*poetikai tekhnai*) refers to the art of making, forming, and composing⁸. Making use of structures of writing as in Concrete Poetry, or challenging grammatical and syntactical rules to underline the internal relations of symbols and signs as in Language Poetry, are a couple ways that poetry offers potential *structural* representation of dance-thought. The word "text" comes from latin: *textus* as "tissue", *text* as "woven", from the verb *texere*. Text is stuff, it can be made sticky, fleshy, slick, prickly, sharp, smooth, linear, broken, or cyclical. Poet Marie Howe said, "Poetry is a basket of words to hold experience"⁹. The poet decides what kind of basket, of which texture.

Many of my peers and students have reported the common experience in their dancing that lingual thought appears like islands in a sea of extra-lingual and sub-lingual sensory experience. The archipelago of graspable word-images in a sea of sensation is an example of a useful metaphor. It gives the sense of the opaque depths and endless horizon of unutterable flow that surrounds the occasional terrain habitable by words.

In July 2017, sociologist Rudi Laermans remarked in conversation that "all language is metaphor". Which is to say that words are carriers of things – meanings – other than the words themselves. This suggests that language is *always* a surrogate for experience

⁷ Swoyer, Chris, *Structural Representation and Surrogate Reasoning*, *Synthese*, 87, N° 3 (Jun., 1991): 451.

⁸ Aristotle delineated between *poetikai tekhnai*, above, *praktikai tekhnai* (practice), which performs itself in relation to public life but with no finite end or product, and *teoretikai tekhnai* (theory), a purely immaterial and not practice-bound investigation. (Cvejić, Bojana. *An Unfaithful Return to Poetics*, 2017).

⁹ *On Being with Krista Tippet*, National Public Radio, May 2017

external to it. Over a century ago, structuralism already heralded the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified. With the exception of onomatopoeia, a word and what it refers to are bound only through history, practice, and repetition, everyday language full of floating signifiers. Words only have meaning because of the experiences tied to them over time, over decades and centuries of people using words to name an expanding and drifting set of experiences that in turn define those words through use. If the meaning of a signifier were given, immanent, and impossible to detach from the thing it signified, language wouldn't drift and etymology wouldn't have anything about which to *-ologize*. Signifiers gains surrogative status, or signification, first in relation to the things they represent, and secondly on a scale of internal relations. Through the *relationships* it structures, thought *moves* through the floating shadow-realm of words.

There are artists and audiences who fear language will over-determine experience. But words don't define and close the meaning of the things they name, words acquire meaning over time. Thus it is use that remains the formative referent for how language evolves. People's intuitive and affective sensibilities about which words feel right for which affects constantly push words around, along with other forces (education, economy, technology, geography) in the cultural evolution of language. I am interested, as an artist and specifically as a dancer, in harnessing this malleability of language and ask what language can do for movers and perceivers, for creators and appreciators of ineffable and complex realities.

The nonequivalence of signifier and signified, of what we say we are doing and what we are doing, of theory and practice, all create a gap, allowing for negotiation and invention. This gap can be decreased by granular vocabulary and a willful drive for coherence, but the preservation of this gap can also be productive of dynamics and complexities. Without a gap, a metaphor has no use. Without metaphors, thought doesn't travel very far. What language offers dance is distance, a structural representation to extract from the flood of experience¹⁰. What dance-thought offers language-thought is the opportunity to expand, to leak. Tethering language to dance with a bit of elasticity lets the connotative stretch

the denotative, adding up (the *con-* in *connotation* meaning “with” or “next to”) the possibilities held within the container of an articulable notion.

As we accumulate experiences that to attach themselves to concepts, ideas, symbols and words, we participate in the drift of what those concepts, ideas, symbols, and words mean. As the world changes and as people change, language changes, because we need different figures of speech, different words to render how the world feels and appears to us. Dance is part of our performative exploration of what words mean. Dancing is one of the many substantive instances that form and inform our symbolic, representational, and linguistic realms of thought, and a unique one in its complexity and range of effects.

Productive Misunderstanding

An amount of wiggle-room between what we say we are doing and what we are doing allows for the mutual liberation of language-thought and dance-thought to serve and reflect each other from a workable distance. An acknowledgement of their basic difference is a necessary minimum for addressing their relation. At most, the difference between language-thought and dance-thought can be a source of so called “productive misunderstanding”, in the words of dramaturg Jeroen Peeters.

When working with choreographer Meg Stuart, and navigating what performing artist Janez Janša refers to as Stuart’s “mumbling strategy, Peeters found himself in the role of trying to translate or clarify Stuarts’ mumbled instructions for the performers. It occurred to Peeters that her inaudibility was an intentional opportunity for “productive misunderstanding”. He observed how Stuart’s half sentences allowed her collaborators to make up the other half, following their own intuition or imagination in whatever direction she had initiated, just an impulse for their own thought-movement.

¹⁰ The analytic or distancing capacity of language, it should be noted, has its historical roots in writing. Primarily oral cultures did not think analytically, as language was embedded and situated in the time and space of live speech, each utterance bound to its lifeworld. The capacity for language as a tool for distance and analysis emerged only with writing. This concept is thoroughly and historically explored in Ong, Walter J., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1982).

Jeroen later recounted this story in 2010 while working with me on the sextet *A Dance for The Newest Age (the triangle piece)*, as a way of giving me permission to digress from the theory I was reading or to move from it tangentially, catching the momentum of whatever half-sentences sparked my interest. The advice as I understood it, coming from a scholar like Peeters, was not to undermine the value of reading and writing, but rather and more importantly to leave room for ambiguity, for dance-thinking to fill the gaps. Productive misunderstanding is a subversive and inventive abduction of what is intended. It grants permission to the reader or listener to actively “make it mean something”, without getting bogged down in technical concepts.

Of course productive misunderstanding, however generative, is not to be mistaken with study. Productive misunderstanding if taken too far or too soon, can also be a resignation from the grappling with what one does not understand right away, a missed opportunity for grasping whatever sense-making or world-view an author is trying to propose to others for consideration. When understood, language can do for dance what any surrogate can do for its referent: hold a place for an idea to incubate within a certain environment, nurtured by certain conditions and structures of thinking. Theory, as a *practice* of thinking in language, like any practice taken seriously, shapes its practitioner. It changes the mind. A changed mind then moves into action, makes decisions, relates to meaning, arranges and composes in any other medium than language, changed as such. Not because theory is instructive, but because it is one way to reorganize the mind¹¹. As is dance a way to reconfigure oneself. Every practice changes the practitioner, their sense of themselves and their lifeworld, in short, the organization of their very subjectivity.

¹¹ When I say mind, I mean the whole cognitive-affective complex of sensation, perception, reflection, representation, observation, imagination and memory that is located not just in the grey matter suspended in cerebral fluid inside the skull, but throughout the entire body, always in relationship to an environment.

Mind The Gap

If everything we do shapes us, then what is the difference between the passive or active accumulation of embodied experience (learning) and movement *research*? What aspect of *research* makes the doing more than the acquisition of tacit knowledge? Doing to know *how to do* versus doing to *find out what the doing does* is the difference between wanting an answer and having a question. Research implies a rigor of inquisition, the formulation of a problem, an active relationship to the unknown. The problem does not have to be formulated in words. One's wonder, a contour of one's curiosity, can be sensed or modeled in another medium, but the edges of what is known and not known are what is important. Research, in any field, is using what one knows to move towards what one would like to know, including rational or intuitive methods of knowing.

In a discussion on methodology, dancer/choreographer Juliette Mapp said, "A question exists, and does something". Some questions do their work in just being asked. To that I would add, an answer exists and does something. The two don't need to satisfy each other in order to collaborate.

I need a question to go into the studio or a performance, and not looking for an answer is the hardest work I can do. — Deborah Hay¹²

Holding a question in mind and doing to find out what the doing does, to the doer, to the watcher, and to the idea itself, is a way in which dance can research without ever having to come to a conclusion. Taking on the question of what dance can actually put into question, the 2001 duet *Weak Dance, Strong Questions* by Jan Ritsema and Jonathan Burrows tackles the paradox of dancing only questions when "every movement is a statement"¹³. While there are other ways than in words to know what you know and what you don't know, the purpose of language in the context

¹² Hay, Deborah. Live lecture performance at Stockholm University of the Arts. September 13, 2017.

¹³ Burrows, Jonathan & Jan Ritsema, *Weak Dance Strong Questions: from the notebooks of Jonathan Burrows and Jan Ritsema*.

Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts, Volume 8, 2003.

of movement research can be to explicitly mark what we know and recognize in order to circumscribe more precisely what we don't, and thus what we have to do to find out.

A quote I carry with me from my time studying with Chrysa Parkinson at P.A.R.T.S. (2004-2006) is "attention is the medium of performance"¹⁴. In performance we are giving and getting attention, shaping it, directing it. The way we attend to what we do shapes what we do and how it is seen. Attention make things sensible for others.

Attention also makes our knowledge sensible to ourselves. If a question instigates research, attention makes answers possible. When attention guides and follows movement, we observe *how* the doing does. Where learning of behaviors and patterns is concerned, perhaps the only difference between habits and knowledge is attention. In the careful garnering of attention to what we do and how we do it, to how we attend and how it shapes us, we have opportunities to identify patterns and actively participate in their reinforcement or interruption.

What the Doing Does

Our intelligent bodies are dirty containers; dense cyphers of socially, biologically, historically, culturally, and critically acquired filters through which information passes; imperfect processors full of corruptive tendencies. Everything that passes through and over us leaves its trace. Those traces form sensorimotor grooves in us, whether or not we like or choose them. When we move, we shake our dirty containers, run our imperfect processors, invite forces to pass through our filters and rattle them, making visible and sensible the beings, teachers, influences, desires, histories, fantasies, ancestors and ghosts who populate us, who have shaped and continue to shape us.

¹⁴ Parkinson notes this as an adaptation of a Deborah Hay quote, "perception is the material of performance".

The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is mine and not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life, the body is only later, and with some uncertainty, that to which I lay claim as my own. — Judith Butler¹⁵

Our protean and remembering bodies are continually structured by cultural and natural forces, are expressive products of power relations, archives of technique and education, living palimpsests of embodied history. Our symbolic order is also evolutionary, bound to our changing selves and changing reality. Sometimes, however, the symbols don't change as quickly as our experience of the world does, as we reproduce ancient values and stubborn biases, passed down through our speech, codes, sociopolitical conventions, institutions, in our bones and DNA.

In this light, dance as movement research is more than navel gazing. But how inventive can it truly be? Certain somatic and release techniques concerned with embodied patterning promote the exercise of choice in how we habituate our patterned body-minds. The ability to redirect one's own patterns suggests agency in relation to broader ideological or historical contexts. But choice is always limited by possibilities rather than directed towards potentials. Choice cannot reinvent, it can only select from within extant givens. The choice to do or not to do, to inhibit or enforce a movement or thought pattern, to go with or against our preferences in the continual bifurcation of movement pathways, are all movements *within* a set of coordinates. Choice can be evolutionary, but never revolutionary. Furthermore, when we consider that the doing does the doer, acting is always a process of being acted upon as well. Not only is choice inherently limited to givens, but those givens are also different for everyone and acting upon each being uniquely. Movement of thought for the movement researcher is always contained by and in negotiation with

¹⁵ Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. Psychology Press, 2004, 21.

larger patterns of access and conditions. Navigating through such entanglements renders emancipation from one's habits and history an absurd goal.

What is particular and consistent about dance as movement research is that typically, the mover is both the researcher and research subject, both the subject researching and the object of study. This demands a level of dis-identification with oneself, with one's own body, perceptions, sensations, feelings, experiences, values. The dancer has to be able to observe analytically and synthetically the layers of their action and understanding, including their own being-formed-by what they do, and made continually aware of their biases. While the embodiment of pattern forms identity, to distance oneself from those patterns is where movement research suggests a split between two thinking-selves: a performing self and an observing self.

The potentials that emerge between these two selves have nothing to do with choosing *what* one does, but rather *how* one does, *how* one positions oneself in relation to *what* they do. Agency emerges in the potentials of relation between the doer and the doing; the degrees of distance, criticality, immersion, fiction and fantasy. *What* can be almost anything, as the attentive and performative skill emerges in the *how*. The ability to do and observe simultaneously without conflict, with equal attention to imagination and observation, or intention and sensation, the calibration of one's own many minds, makes dancers experts in finding the tiny interstices for invention through, *within*, and under the limits of possibility in a given condition. Shifting the attention from movement as displacement on a predetermined grid to movement as transformation within, and consequently possible transformation of the grid itself due to what such transformation manifests, is where even the smallest possibilities for larger change do appear.

Sifting through the first, second, and third impressions, through the findings, expectations, and meanings, through how it feels and how it makes one feel, how it makes one see, hear or think, movement with an attitude of research allows the movement to displace and de-center the mover themselves, in order to step out

of the way of their own transformation. A movement practitioner's ability to embody a movement practice as a kind of subjectivity in itself opens the space for not being one unitary self. The capacity for dis-identification with one's movement that research engenders allows that it's not just about how one thinks through movement practices, but how any particular movement practice thinks through the mover. In the same way that language speaks through the speaking subject as much as the speaking subject speaks through language, revealing the language's structures and limitations in every utterance, dance moves through the dancer as much as if not more than the dancer moves through dance. Dis-identification and differentiation between the dancer and the dance highlights the epistemological nature of dancing, liberates the dancer and the dance from the grips of identity production, allows for dancers to hijack and embody all sorts of subjectivities, all in the subtle and modest prioritization of internal displacement over external displacement.

Techniques of attention, from performance to somatic practices to meditation, tell us that we are not victims of some Darwinist law of survival of the fittest, not reduced to instinctual and automatic reactions to our environment, not directed by biological imperatives, not limited by archetypes and destined to fulfill systemically defined choreographies, but that each subject with an amount of self-study and can actively participate in their own behavioral transformation. From the Esalen Institute in the 1960s to the guided meditations on YouTube to Mindfulness Apps for smartphones, training for self-transformation has seen increased popularity under neoliberal capitalism, when our own flexibility and variety of skill as workers in a post-Fordist economy is not a question of emancipation, but rather of optimization within an increasingly precarious, variegated, and unpredictable set of working conditions. Attentive practices also bear relevance in an era in which attention itself is a viable commodity, sought after through all media in the so-called "attention economy". The same techniques of transformation that are in one instance subversive and rebellious are in the next instant one hundred percent compliant. We can throw our hands up and say there is no practice that is truly inventive, or we can be even more tenacious with the minor,

modest, slippery and intractable power of our attention to unhinge the codes and grammars of behavior that structure our lives.

Every movement is a unique system of infinite nows that, when coupled with a spirit of curiosity, discloses to the senses the relation between memory and anticipation, between history and potentiality, between knowledge and the unknown, in an experiential and immediate coordination of intelligences. Through becoming intimate with the way we pattern and prioritize order from chaos, information from noise, and the biases that guide our criteria, the sharpening of attention offers us opportunities to order and reorder the sensible, to change and be changed. Dancing brings us into direct affective and cognitive contact with the continual structuring of our being in relation to the world. Every bodymind as a world within the world, is changing in concert with the world it inhabits and the worlds it encounters. The degree to which the mind as a world changes is a question of receptivity and willingness to be changed.

As a functioning and interacting subject, there is no absolute erasure of bias. As long as we exist within sociality and in relationship to a context, there is no neutral body and no free mind. The improvisatory assumption of avoiding habits just forms habits of avoidance. There is no such thing as de-skilling to the point of not having skills. Every undoing leaves fertile ground for another doing to seed. Compost is the richest soil as decay and entropy offers invitation for new orders.

Beware “the illusion that consciousness is capable of change”, warns performance theorist Bojana Cvejić¹⁶. The movement researcher should not over-estimate their conscious mind, will, or intentionality in regards to influencing sensorimotor patterning. The majority of our embodied history remains non-manageable by means of our own consciousness, no matter how acute. To saturate

¹⁶ Quoted in conversation with Bojana Cvejić on 31 October 2017.

with our own consciousness the full scope of how we are done by what we do is impossible. Any embodied perspective will always and necessarily be a partial view.

The whole sea beyond the rickety raft of articulable experience is the unknowable, unobservable dance that escapes being named, the doing that does us without our grasping, and so we continue to rely on subtler intuitions and stranger sensibilities, effing the ineffable indefinitely. Our bodies and our experiences of our bodies shape our ideas about ourselves and the world. Sharing those experiences socially and questioning their articulation discursively is one of the tiny ways that the personal is made political. Observing as closely as I can to decipher how dance thinks through me, I shout back over my shoulder from time to time at the symbolic ordering of language to catch up, and invite you to give it a try too. In the wording of our subjective life-worlds, our common language has an opportunity to continue to be shaped by particular and singular experiences, rather than determining and over-coding them. In the jumping of registers between any media of thought, in the efforts of translation and the adjustments of transposition, we can create new forms, new concepts, new symbolic orders in the interstices and slippages between existing structures of thought¹⁷.

17 A version of this text was first published in *Movement Research Performance Journal*, Issue 51, in April 2018. The invitation from Managing Editor Moriah Evans and Guest Issue Editor Mårten Spångberg was to write about what “movement research”, is or means.

No Time for Judgement / More Time for Judgement

Eleanor Bauer: As agreed, we'll take my *PhD* research as a point of departure for our conversation. That's so weird to say those words, PhD, it's happening.

Ellen Söderhult: It is quite crazy.

EB: But when I start to write pretentious books like *A lot of moving parts* I feel it's getting real, (*laughs*), speaking with authority.

ES: Yes.

EB: Just taking it. Riding it. Hammering on this keyboard.

ES: "No time for judgement", as Deborah (Hay) once said. I think when she said it she was referring to being so busy with dancing that there is nothing of you left to be the judge. Because you are in that flow state, busy with the doing.

EB: Well, I guess, there is a time for judgement, that's called editing.

ES: Maybe there should be more time for judgement.

EB: No time for judgement / More time for judgement. Good start.

ES: I think paradoxes like it in contemporary dance.

EB: My research project, *choreo|graphy*, it's built on a kind of paradox between respecting the separation of and looking for a relation between thought in dance and thought in language.

ES: Thought in dance?

EB: Yeah, the premise is that there are several media of thought, of which language is only one, and that any language speaks through you as much as you speak through it. When I speak in English, the codes, culture, histories, grammar, syntax, rules and structures of thinking that are implied in the organization of the English language express themselves in all my utterances. They limit

and define what is possible to think. People who speak several languages fluently might feel like different thinkers in each language. It's a social, cultural, anthropological thing but it's also a structural thing. And we can extend this structural difference in thought beyond natural or spoken and written languages, to *other* media of thought. A medium of thought, in my mind at least, is any vehicle through which one organizes, synthesizes and processes experience, whether it's representational, metaphorical, a modeling system, or some other kind of reflection or rumination. It usually involves some system of signs or surrogate containers which allow the thought to be modelled and moved around.

So I ask myself what is dance as a medium of thought? What is *specific* about dance that is maybe not translatable to other media of thought. There are many things: It is radically synthetic. It coordinates all the intelligences, senses and sensibilities at once in a simultaneous, nonlinear, non-hierarchical way. It calibrates imagination and observation. It's full of meaning but non-indexical, there is no dictionary for most movements. With the exception of some rituals, folk dances, or ballet gestures, it has almost no consistently fixed meanings or representations. So what is specific about dance, *and then*, how can that specificity be expressed in language, with all of language's own untranslatable medium-specificities? Is that even possible?

Why the relationship between language-thought and dance-thought in particular – and not math and dance, or drawing and language – is because I think language is still the primary medium of “knowledge production” in a conventional sense. We live in a logocentric world. Even in a hyper-textual and image-oriented society, or an experience-based affect economy, language is still a very strong force in determining our agreements about what we consider real and true. Which is interesting because it's all up for grabs right now, in the so-called “post-truth era”. Since “*choreo|graphy*” proposes a split between these two media of thought, dance and language, and investigates their relation to each other (translation problems included), and given that the *logos* side of things is very fractured in this chaotic “post-truth” moment, the unitary ways that language has typically made coherent sense of the world are not working anymore. So we could say that

language is having a little crisis that brings it into relation with what I think is specific to how dance thinks. I experience dance-thinking as internally diffracted and highly subjective in its world-making, which is maybe how people are experiencing language-reality right now. In that way, dance can offer us ways of thinking through post-truth (*laughs*) with more synthetic sensibilities and sensitivities. A dancing mind already knows what post-truth means, it's a mind full of contradictions. Dance is psychedelic. Everything is true at once in dance. Fiction and reality are friends in dance, necessary collaborators. As you say, paradoxes like it in dance.

In trying to language danced experience, I'm interested to find precise language that is not appropriated from theory or rooted in some kind of legitimation wherein e-flux or universities or whomever decides that if we say "Deleuze" then we have the golden ticket. Put it aside for a second, language that wasn't intended for dance, and then ask what is the specificity of dance thought. If I can bring language closer to dance, if I can harass my language brain with my dance brain, what happens? Maybe it's a question of poetics, or the materiality of the language. Maybe it's granular vocabulary, or a new kind of essay that is called for.

If *choreography* is the writing of the dance, that always involves some languaging at some point – whether it's literally in scores that are very precisely language, like Deborah Hay's or Alice Chauchat's, or just in the way we talk about what we are doing, naming sections of things when we are in the studio, or how we write a program text, or even how we gossip – what new ways of choreographing could come from new ways of wording what we do? Question. I don't know, gotta do to find out.

ES: Alright. Intense. I totally get this problem of using theory as a legitimation, but don't you think Deleuze's writing actually brought something else into the picture?

EB: Yes, I think his way of writing is almost hallucinogenic.

ES: It proposes another logic somehow.

EB: True. People don't just bring in whatever theory because it's gonna help them sound clever. For example, it's because Merleau-Ponty had a way of describing experience that resonates with what I experience, that it's been useful for me.

ES: It's funny because a lot of language that I've heard in a dance training context is almost repressive or conservative. In contrast to such traditional dance training, it might actually be emancipating to read Deleuze rather than to listen to supposed truths about form, discipline, or authentic self-expression.

Language in my experience has a big influence on how dance is practiced, or vice versa. For example, I have heard so many times, "now you have the steps, make it yours. Express yourself", or "follow your impulses", but the teacher actually more often in those situations wants you to look like A) her/himself, B) a commercial music video, or C) like you are having strong experiences while flopping your limbs. (*laughs*) Or for example, "really *dance* the warm up", presuming that some things are clearly *not* considered dancing despite the students following the steps. But the comment in my experience is never elaborated into what *would* make it dancing. All this language turns dance into a very introspective, removed expression with a lot of trust in authority and an obsession with self-expression, or "authenticity", or, as (André) Lepecki once put it, "the charisma" of the dancer. In that light, is your project also one of changing or influencing spoken and written language?

EB: Potentially.

ES: Or how else would you make those non-linguistic intelligences or ways of thinking communicable, if not through language?

EB: They are communicable in dances. It's also about giving people tools to feel permitted to understand what they are looking at (*laughs*) or to honor their own thoughts and feelings as "understanding". Developing sensibilities for understanding art is ultimately subjective. It requires confidence in your own process, in your experience as valid. Developing aesthetic, cognitive, receptive skills and then just noticing what shows up. We don't need language

to explain that, or to explain dance, but that is definitely one of the considerations. Like the whole vocabulary around wine tasting can be super intimidating but that's just people giving names to things anyone can taste if they open up their tongues and noses. Calling it "oaky" or "floral" is a way to make a private taste-experience common. It's a translation, it's not the taste itself, but it's useful for people not to be totally isolated in their experience of wine, crying all alone into their glass (*laughs*).

ES: I am thinkin of forms of *dance* vocabulary, and how those sometimes require receptive skills. For example, the first time I watched a Trisha Brown dance I did not have the tools to see the skills. They were not recognizable to me, and now I think of that movement as a *vocabulary* but I don't know if it's a mode of thinking or if it... what would it otherwise be? Becoming more precise in articulation, yes, but why would I want to use the notion of *thinking* instead of *bodying* or whatever. Dancing. In a way it feels like a reduction of all of this (*points to whole body*) to this (*points to head*).

EB: Yeah. That's not what I mean by thinking. I consider thinking more in the way that (Édouard) Glissant talks about it as something that's always in relation, not as a removed, disembodied act of distancing oneself. Or the way Alva Noë writes about thinking and perceiving as completely "out of our heads". Or phenomenological relationships to thinking. Or Elizabeth Grosz. Thought is totally embodied and situated. That's just a given for me. So when I say thinking, I don't propose that it happens in your brain alone, but that thinking is absolutely stimulated by relationships to an entire environment and context outside of your brain, through sensory stimuli that move through your whole body, that thinking even takes place beyond you or what you consider "you". Thinking is not just cognitive reflection and representation but also the affective "skin faster than the mind", stuff that goes on way below or beyond the tip of the iceberg of consciousness, identification, and representation.

ES: And how do you think in terms of *score* versus, I don't know, *vocabulary*? I am trying to wrap my head around how to

differentiate between a dance vocabulary that one maybe could think of as a language to study in itself, let's say Trisha Brown vocabulary or Ballet vocabulary or Flamenco vocabulary, and a score which, in the interpretation or execution of it, is translated into dance from written language. I'm wondering if the thinking inside a language, inside a specific movement vocabulary and its organizing system, could be considered "Trisha-Brown-dance-thinking" or "ballet-thinking" or "flamenco-thinking". And then there is trans-media thinking, that I would say is the practice of, for example, a Deborah Hay score, or for that matter any translation through metaphor, from language to dance. I think the word "vocabulary" might be a bit insufficient for some less formalized kinds of dancing, like BMC (Body-Mind Centering®) or Authentic Movement, and I wonder if the use of language in relation to the practice of *those* forms is *so* implicated in the articulation of the dance that it becomes part of the thinking through or within those forms.

EB: That's an astute distinction. Exciting! It's the difference between language as *structural* metaphor, where the idea of "thinking" is analogous to language as a *vocabulary* plus a *system* of organization, and language as *direct* metaphor, where you basically *translate* words into action. They are very different practices, different methods of dance-making and dance-practicing also. Which maybe has to do with time, the time to develop a vocabulary. The time for a culture to set, to develop serious codes. Language, like language proper language, written and spoken, it forms over time and needs repetition to take purchase.

Interesting that the latter category, the second category you delineated, what I was calling the language as direct metaphor kind of dance-thinking, the words-as-choreography group, is pretty new, historically speaking at least in Euro-centric dance canons. I think a lot of these language-based instructional practices in dance come from healing or somatic practices that maybe weren't intended for dance first and foremost, like Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, BMC, even Authentic Movement, none of them have explicit aesthetic means or ends. Maybe Alexander Technique proposes an aesthetic ideal in terms of posture, but I mean as an identity-(per)

forming culture, these practices are not rooted in an aesthetic vision, or at least they claim not to be! They don't propose a movement-vocabulary like more canonical dance forms and traditions. I mean, with Deborah (Hay)'s work, and many others who use language scores, the visual aesthetic values and taste judgements of these language-instruction-based practices are usually implicit rather than explicit. Which can produce a real aesthetic regime under the guise of freedom. As vaguely oppressive as your other examples of "authenticity" or "charisma".

ES: It's the "tyranny of structurelessness" as Jo Freeman so nicely put it¹. I'm thinking maybe it also has to do with the difference between reading and writing. In the sense that one could for example study a vocabulary and then that would be a way of getting more articulate.

EB: Right, internalization and externalization in learning.

ES: Is externalization in your case like making your own poems?

EB: Well, maybe yeah. But I mean to propose that in every media of thought, you have a media-specific loop of internalization and externalization. Like in language it's reading and writing or listening and speaking. Which are the primary ways of learning anything in language, or even of learning a language itself. It's like you read and write or speak and listen and through these mediated loops the patterns are engrained and stuff gets learned, memorized. Not just memorized but placed in a cognitive framework where it becomes a tool, is movable, manipulable.

In dance, internalization and externalization loop of learning movement is mostly by imitation. Seeing and copying. Watching performances and making them. Learning in dance is performative. There is a whole stratum of that which doesn't need any words.

¹ Freeman, Jo. *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*. (Essay, 1970)

But language is often present. It's all around, language is like iron fuzz to a magnet. There is all this stuff that is happening without language, but we are still sitting here explaining it before and after, with more or less success or accuracy. The inverse is also true: in reading and writing or speaking and listening my body is always present, so is affect. When I say "media-specificity", we also have to acknowledge that there is no medium that is ever alone and pure. Each of us is always a complex human who has all of these overlapping skills.

ES: With the reading, or internalization half of the loop, I'm wondering if there is actually space for it to happen, in terms of research.

EB: Is there space for it to happen on a physical level?

ES: Yes. I'm thinking maybe there has been an over-emphasis on externalization in dance recently, that considers the externalization half of the loop to be more empowering. Like one should not do forms that somebody else has already decided, rather "find your own". It is appropriate to the personality-centered culture of self-expression in the "century of the self"². In my BA in dance program, for example, most work was "experimental" or "practice-based", also the repertory work. A lot of the teaching was based on improvisation and movement exploration. In my previous dance, circus, and music training, most of our time was used to study existing forms, learn pre-written pieces of music, specific (circus) tricks or (ballet) steps. I connect this move away from studying specific forms to general changes in how to think of an artist, in history, and how the idea of universal truths of beauty or value were rejected. I see it all connected to how studying set material went out of fashion, in a search for a more "emancipated" dancer role.

² Curtis, Adam. *The Century of the Self*. (Documentary, 2002)

EB: Dance is often late catching the memos in Art History. The temporal lag of dance in relation to other cultural movements is a whole other conversation, but I will say that the time it takes for dance to change is related to its process of internalization and externalization. When habit-formation is vocabulary-building, the time it takes to undo or learn new physical practices is much longer than whatever it takes to throw a urinal on a pedestal. Disruptive innovation is hard in dance. You can shoot a bullet through a canvas and still have an art piece, even boost your career. But if Nikki de Saint Phalle were a choreographer and shot a dancer, well, she'd just have a law suit on her hands (*laughs*).

ES: It is also time consuming to set material, which makes me ask myself: when do I rely on improvisation or practice-based choreography because I think it is the best choice, and when is it because I do not have time for the editing, memorization, and study that set material requires? Does the rejection of discipline in dance training liberate me or bring hidden agendas and “tyranny of structurelessness”? Next to individualism, I think obsession with the new is at work. Together, they obscure the ongoing and collective aspects of invention, as well as that most creation emerges through making derivatives, elemental arrangement of or variation on existing things. I feel like I have been educated within and part of a paradigm that was very much about producing new things all the time, or finding new exciting ways to move. Relatively little has relied on learning through studying “old” or existing forms.

EB: And a lot of unlearning patterns instead of learning patterns.

ES: Exactly. I think that internalization via repetition, returning to the same, studying through practice – is undervalued in the experimental dance field. I wonder why the study, the reading, or the internalization doesn't feel valued or valid. Of course it has something to do with having to be productive and creative and commodify the new all the time.

EB: I think it's nice that you bring up the societal level of values because it's not only in dance or art that you are encouraged

to make your thing, make your mark, make it up, express yourself. That's generational. People are internalizing and externalizing at different rates on different scales. Twitter, Facebook, all social media, encourage people to talk more than read, or at least talk *as much* as they read. That's the only way to generate content. The feed. You gotta feed the feed. Whereas before social media, maybe trying to sell books for example, book sellers didn't necessarily profit from or care about *everyone* who read a book having *something* to say about it. Now that's all that matters. We need to keep making noise so that "they" can keep understanding what to sell us, according to what we are saying, doing, what we like, who we are. It's nice to have time to digest what's coming in instead of being in the feed all the time. It's a time thing.

ES: It's totally a time thing, which makes study even more valuable to me, ideologically or politically. When hyper-productivity, workaholism, and self-exploitation is the norm and so common especially among artists, it feels valuable to insist on taking time for precision, staying with the craft aspect of art-making, as opposed to proposing laziness as resistance.

EB: Internalization demands time.

ES: Exactly. I am thinking a lot about this.

EB: Time for reception.

ES: Time for reception or even synthesis. Or what is the word that Chrysa (Parkinson) uses? Rendering. What does that mean?

EB: Yeah, she talks a lot about rendering. When something is rendered it's formed, it's a word from drawing I think. (*reading from dictionary*) "To provide or give, to submit or provide for inspection or consideration, to deliver, to give up, to surrender". Oh! I didn't know it meant surrender!

ES: It feels like a lot of artistic research seems to be about finding something new, going to the outer edges rather than in. It makes

me wonder if research should be about diving deeper somehow. I'm thinking of ground research, *grundforskning* in Swedish. You don't even know what it is good for when you are doing it. That's what I would like to see in artistic research, more ground research! (*laughs*) I think this wish springs from working within projects, applying for funding by describing what you hope or think is going to happen and then trying to execute it according that plan, when in my eyes, this so obviously reduces what art is and could be or could do.

EB: I absolutely relate. It is interesting to go back to the beginning, the ground, the base, the epistemological roots. In my case, that's where I say *if* dance is a medium of thought *then* how, precisely, does it think. That could be a whole PhD in itself. I could do just that for a lifetime. There are plenty of people probably thinking about it, talking about it, and practicing it to talk to and work with.

ES: There is something in the current externalization-obsession that is so much about spitting out things. Even things that look very innocent, for example that it should be emancipatory for me to dance a score because there is more space for *me* in that score. I'm mostly not interested in that kind of space. I would much rather spend time with something very set and precise. Like I would like to go to the gym with you.

EB: What? Go to the gym?

ES: Yeah, I would sometimes prefer to go to the gym with you than do a vague improvisation score. I do see the point of vagueness since I believe always relying on clarity can create convergent rather than divergent development. But I have gone to the gym or done other forms of workout with you and I usually copy your every move and sweat a lot, so it has some resemblance to a dance class (*laughs*).

EB: (*laughs*) We should do that one day, go to the gym and then write after every exercise –

ES: We should!

EB: – write Kathy Acker-style poems after lots of swimming or weights. Acker has this one text³ about how she thinks at the gym, lifting weights, counting reps.

ES: Who talks about internalization and externalization?

EB: Bernard Stiegler, Richard Beardsworth, and George Collins, in a book from 1998 called *Technics And Time*. Oh, and they write *exteriorization* of knowledge, not *externalization*.

ES: I had some more things I wanted to talk about concerning research. If language dictates how we perceive reality, then how can you make what you find in *dance* sharable? I feel like the knowledge that I think could be produced through dancing as much about developing perceptive skills through the doing as it is about acquiring skills to show the thing or share the thing. Let's think of dance as a form of knowledge production in and of itself. Then my question would be how – and this is not only about documentation, it is also about the thing itself– how can the tools of perceiving it be shared? How can the produced knowledge be shared when the skills to perceive it take so long to develop? How can I share the way my practice influences and informs the way I perceive the world, if I cannot share the practice, as in I can't share the hours, the in-depth study? I cannot share 10,000 studio hours with everybody that will be in my audience or with whom I want to share my research.

EB: If artworks are possibly about sharing ways of seeing, are containers for transmitting or communicating sensed experience of the world, what can we know from watching a thing being done and not doing the thing? This is a question for me about how to share knowledge in art with people who are not artists themselves. I think we do have to develop better skills and ways of helping making

³ Acker, Kathy. *Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body*. (Essay, 1993)

sense of what we do. I'm thinking of literary theory. Literary theory is unique because people are writing about writing. We are not dancing about dancing. Literary criticism stays within language all the time, which I think allows a certain –

ES: Refinement.

EB: Maybe. Things aren't lost in translation, it's tight, it's granular. How can we get that close to dance from outside of dance, how can we foster more granular, refined ways of seeing or watching dance. I think something that can be discussed more is what faculties are we bringing to our watching. I think dance audiences are profoundly confused sometimes. I often hear, "I don't know what I am looking at, I don't know what it's about, I don't understand dance", and I think it's maybe because the context is confused and confusing!

ES: Maybe we need literary criticism but for dance, through and in dance.

EB: Having like dance-backs instead of talk-backs after a show? *(laughs)*

ES: I think it's an interesting example because literary critics are really experts in "internalizing books".

EB: So then what would be dance criticism?

ES: It would maybe be... it's hard actually.

EB: I feel like there are a lot of tasks that came up with people like Lisa Nelson or Simone Forti, in this movement research culture of the 60s and 70s that improvisers continue to pass down, where somebody dances a dance and then you dance what you saw, you dance the dance, but it's really about processing what you perceived, rather than replicating or imitating.

ES: Yes, that's true. The "problem" with the audience, or whoever

would want to take part of the findings of any practice-based research “outside of language” would be that they are very articulate in language but not dance.

EB: I think it’s also about how you relate to what you see. Because people watch sports without any confusion and they are not athletes, right?

ES: But sports are SO clear!

EB: Exactly. There is transparency. That’s why transparency became such a big thing in dance, I think, people were trying to make dance legible. Sports was a useful metaphor, or even more than a metaphor in the case of *Project*⁴ which is a bunch of sports games piled up on top of each other until it is almost no longer possible to follow all the games at once. People’s ability to be excited by sports is about more than mirror neurons. If it were about mirror neurons then dance would have no problems. Everyone would be happy to “feel” the movement and not have to “understand” a thing. What makes sports legible is that people know the rules of the sport, they know what it means to do this thing well, they know what’s at stake, they know what is style and what is strategy. You watch *how* a person navigates a sports field because you know the rules so you can see the *how* because you know the *what*. The audience knows the *what* in the sports. I don’t think the average person thinks they get the *what* in dance. You said that when you saw Trisha Brown’s work the first time you didn’t have the vocabulary to appreciate it, you needed the tools to see the skills. I think there is something literally about recognition there. People don’t know where to look if they don’t realize that the artwork itself tells you where to look.

Which relates to this literary criticism idea I encountered recently from Peli Grietzer, this kid who was at PAF, young guy,

⁴ Le Roy, Xavier. *Project*. (performance, 2003). Conception: Xavier Le Roy. Choreography: Susanne Berggren, Raido Mägi, Mart Kangro, Amaia Urra, Raquel Ponce, Juan Domínguez, Tino Sehgal, Paul Gazzola, Frédéric Seguet, Mårten Spångberg, Alice Chauchat, Carlos Pez Gonzalez, Pirkko Husemann, Ion Munduate, Nadia Cusimano, Geoffrey Garrison, Kobe Matthys, Christine De Smedt, Anna Koch.

just finished his Harvard doctoral thesis on ambient meaning and auto-encoding⁵.

ES: What is auto-encoding?

EB: Auto-encoding is like machine learning. He uses machine learning as a structural metaphor to talk about style comprehension in culture. How a work of art contributes to an oeuvre, how oeuvres contribute to style recognition later. Basically in machine learning there is this compression of many instances of a certain thing in the world, processed and condensed into a set of recognized patterns, which is called the bottleneck layer, which then expands out again into possible reproductions or novel expressions that carry same basic structures as identified in the inputs. He uses machine learning as a model to think about how we humans, culturally understand through our own I guess social bottle neck layers of compression and expansion, things like style. How we register and comprehend the diffused, immanent structures of thinking that appear in aesthetic experience. And how aesthetic experience gets compressed into a way of understanding the world, that then becomes reproduced or reproducible. How Kafka's whole body of work creates something that can be understood as "Kafkaesque" in the world beyond literature. It makes me think about how the things that appear through me, when I make a piece or when I dance, are expressive of processes that precede the appearances. If I make a drawing, it expresses certain things about me and my conditions that made that drawing possible, the drawing holds evidence of stuff in the world including but also beyond "my" process. All sorts of cultural values and systems are compressed in the thing itself of an artwork, through me. And all of that can also be expanded again to reflect stuff in the world. Because it's of the world, it comes from the world, it is evident of things in

⁵ Grietzer, Peli. *Ambient Meaning: Mood, Vibe, System*. (Dissertation, 2017)

the world, it can be used to look back at things in the world. There is a kind of weird symmetry, or potential of symmetry in the world-making and world-relating in art. I don't know if I did him any justice in my summary, maybe I'm borrowing and doing what I want with it. But that's my summary and takeaway.

I think it was Jonathan Burrows who said that a piece sets up a contract with the audience about how to look at the piece, and I really like that. I don't remember exactly how he said it, but the idea to me is that we can look at the thing itself for understanding of how to understand it. Maybe a little bit of alienation is necessary for part of that process, otherwise you are just recognizing, as in projecting what you already know.

ES: I think maybe that's the problem: that being in the world through recognition is kind of how you have to be in the world when it's fast all the time. There is very little space –

BOTH TOGETHER: for what you don't recognize.

ES: Exactly.

EB: Or identify with. I think that bombardment of information is totally fostering a neo-tribal society. The internet is making us more tribal because A) algorithms keep us in our bubbles by showing us what we already like and believe, B) because it's so much information to sort through that an emotionally-driven relationship to information takes over, the first instinct of attraction or aversion dominates whereby one seeks comfort in the familiar instead of challenge or dissonance, and the algorithms encourage reaction and outrage because it gets more clicks, and C) we are constantly encouraged to affirm our identities and boast our opinions, which feeds back into the forming and strengthening of the tribal processes of self-identification, and membership affirmation, in these bubbles. Unless, you know, you are being radical on purpose, going out and looking for something else, or browsing anonymously. If you don't know better, you are placed in a tribal logic whether you want it or not. One of the big missed opportunities of the internet is meaningful encounter with actual

difference. Instead what happens is affirmation of people's superficial differences, isolating them and making people more solidified in their identities and defaults of recognition.

ES: There is something about the solidifying thing makes it very hard to develop other ways of seeing let's say, or looking for other things, or looking without looking-for. That's frustrating.

(Silence.)

EB: "Looking without looking-for". That's very nice. Let's take this seriously. How to engender looking without looking-for? In order to resist or untangle cognitive bias. This is where a broad and synthetic relationship to the affective, emotional, social, spiritual, and contextual ways of understanding comes in handy. How to read the space, the setting, how to create a space, a setting. What does the ritual of a performance intend? If it does not intend to affirm habits of recognition, how do you create a deliberate situation and perceptual space where people can release their habits of seeing-to-identify what they already know and understand? If making an artwork is sharing a way of seeing the world, or a way of being in the world, or even of world-making, if an artwork can show us something – *if anything can show us anything* other than what we already know – it won't be through recognition. If an artist has an intention to show a way of seeing the world, *not* through identification, where does the audience member have to be? In what head space, in what heart space, in what mood, in what vibe, in what era, in what century, on what planet, in which environment, in what kind of room... I keep coming back to ambient meaning, it's just the thing right now.

ES: Ambient?

EB: Ambient meaning, it's that immanent, diffused structure, it's the Kafka-esque, it's the thing between the words, it's the vibe, the mood, the style. It's not just the units of meaning production, the words or characters or story-lines, but the movements, the appearances, the representations, the forms, the objects, the

shapes, the costumes, the colors, the relations between all the things that pattern the vibe. Ambient meaning uses style literacy, aesthetic sensibility. It's not about recognition of this or that *thing*, it's about senses, about feelings, which we all have. So maybe that's one way to unhinge identification, is through ambient meaning. Like ambient music was about removing the lead vocalist with the lyrics in order to attending to the whole environment of the music, the surroundings, rather than the message in the middle. When it's about a general ambience, people are perhaps allowed to forget themselves, or maybe a situation can exist where they don't even know themselves. I am interested in integrating sub-conscious, affective and more immediate sensibilities of taste, which *are* subjective, but without the necessity of a *subject* at the center.

ES: Just because you codify it –

EB: – doesn't mean you know what it is.

ES: Exactly. It makes it even easier to fall into the trap of thinking that you know exactly what it is because you can recognize it. But there could be more to it. I don't know, I think I'm just interested in how practicing things, doing things, experiencing things, reconfigures you so that also your perception shifts, which means that I am never seeing that same thing as you are.

EB: Or even that if you are reconfigured, you are never seeing the same thing as you saw it before.

ES: So how can I share with you what I have researched? For me it feels like a kind of dilemma with artistic practice-based research.

EB: The subjectivity of it all the time?

ES: Yeah. I think one aspect of this is well formulated by Donna Haraway in her notion of situated knowledges⁶. "Subjectivity" makes me think about stuff like who I am or where I'm from, subject-hood. I'm thinking even more on subtler level of how your practice shapes your perception over time, and ways of receiving

information through practice. When information appears to you as information and not just as –

EB: – noise.

ES: Exactly. Take the example of just going to a lecture when you have no background information or knowledge about the topic and it's too fast for you to follow, you don't have the terminology. It's just noise. Or you go to a lecture in Swedish, and it's just noise while of course for a Swedish person it is not just noise. It's like the more you know about the lecture the more it is, the more you get out of it.

EB: It's noise because you are not using the right filter.

ES: Yes exactly, but who has what filters?

EB: And how can you acquire new filters? Swedish is noise if I listen to it as English. But if I listen to it as Swedish, I might slow down enough to build the blocks, to start to understand where to words begin and end, begin to develop an ear for Swedish. It makes me think that the project of undoing cognitive bias which I'm so obsessed with right now, I want the whole world to be working on this – I think meditation works on it – is about slowing down enough maybe to allow the placement of the borders between information and noise to undo themselves. Like to be able to hear noise in everything (*laughs*) in order to hear information in anything. I don't know why in my mind it intuitively feels like everything has to become noise for a new information order-set to emerge. Maybe I have to allow English to become noise.

ES: Or maybe it doesn't have to become noise, but just a little bit noisy, for loosening the tightness of knowing and identifying.

6 Haraway, Donna. *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. (Essay, 1988)

EB: Just to move that border to another place. It's not like you have to undo all order and then replace it with new order. That's destructive innovation, that's not continuation and modification.

ES: Continuation-modification is more my style.

EB: Have you read Francois Julien, *Silent Transformations*? He is half-French, half-Chinese, and he writes about eastern philosophy being about continuation and modification. I don't remember precisely and I didn't finish the book (*Ellen laughs*) but I captured from that, and from concurrent conversations with my friend and brother-in-law Daniel (Rossen), so our conversations have merged in my mind, is that Western philosophy has been historicized or valuated with a lens of destructive innovation. The French had to behead the king to have democracy, Oedipus had to kill his father to love his mother, Einstein destroyed and replaced Newtonian physics when he came up with relativity, but those are simplifications of the full complexity of what actually happened. That's a Western heroic narrative of knowledge production and paradigm shift as dis-proving and replacing old models with new ones, as well as erasing collaborative or gradual developments. Even Thomas Kuhn⁷, when he talks about the anomaly of a given paradigm being the center of the new paradigm and outmoding the older one, proposes a hybrid between continuation-modification and destructive innovation. Continuation and modification explains also how things can become their absolute opposites, but not overnight, and not in a linear fashion. Like the way that summer becomes winter. There are a lot of concepts rooted in the observable world and in nature in eastern philosophy, probably because of how old it is, and the way that abstract language developed with writing over time. In Ancient Chinese you don't have a word for time, there are only words that indicate time passing, like

⁷ Kuhn, Thomas. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Book, 1962)

seasons, days and nights, or words that indicate change over time, like aging, or decay, because you can see in the world that time passes when stuff changes, but there is no word in Ancient Chinese for time as an abstract concept separate from the things it does or effects. So from summer to winter, the local climate becomes it's total opposite, but it's not a cross fade, and it's not opposites in a binary way, it's a whole erratic spectral shift. One day it's rainy, one day it's sunny, and then it's cold and suddenly the next day you're in a t-shirt and then it's snowing. There is a general fade, over time there is a full 180° shift, but through a crazy – like these colors changing (pointing out the window to the autumn trees) – there are a lot of radical events that happen on the way from summer to winter, which feels pretty revolutionary, but all within processes of continuation and modification. Or with examples like aging or falling out of love or healing, things that happen so continually, modestly, and on an imperceptibly miniscule constant level that you may notice them as if they happened suddenly, but they were there, happening all along. It implies a notion of progress which is not at all about destructive force or speed. It's just a lot of gentle oscillation between order and chaos. It's that little bit of noise you were talking about. A continuation and modification of information, a little noisy but not totally chaotic, slowly moving those borders between information and noise.

—Eleanor Bauer and Ellen Söderhult
in conversation on 10 October 2017.

Documentation / Examination

How is the memory structured
 spatially
 physically

How is the past
ordered
odored¹
adored²

When you drop something
 and it bounces back³
 off of what does it bounce

Edges and limitations of knowledge

Where is the knowledge stored
When it is externalized
When it is internalized
Where does it go
Is it knowledge if it is static
 or when it is moving

With the students of DDSKS⁴
 that school in Copenhagen
 we called the piece we made
 Universal Storage Space^{TM5}
 Because we thought:
 what if⁶
you could surf all the externalized storage
 without any device at all?

The Internet before the Internet
and the things we know as a we
distributed and diffused
immanent and ambient
vibe, structure, meaning
Peli Peli Peli⁷
Culture Culture Culture

aesthetic organization of experience
 the way the feelings make the sense
 the way the feelings make the order
the way the past creeps up or drops away
 lingers or burrows

remembering the *aha's*
the days in the studio when something landed
 remembering the reasonings and justifications,
 nothing remembered in the right order.

What if time is not linear
but all of our ways of ordering it are
 except in our memories
 and in our feelings

the most hurtful things in the middle but low
the most loved things tucked back for safest keeping
the fondest memories all around like a cozy bordering cushion

What happened
 Who asked for it
 What mistakes were serendipitous
 How did the piece get made
 Who's idea was it
 Whose line is it anyway
 How did it get so big
 When didn't I say no
 What did I learn
 How was it structured

*The style and form of feelings, also fleeting*⁸

the *Dancing Is's*⁹
all the writings
all the inescapable moods
coloring everything
 I have no more colors¹⁰

I am interested in how the words stick
how the words drift
how the words get ripped

I saved all the versions of the score
 in chronological order

I saved all the notes from all the runs
scribbled in the dark
I saved all the schedules of all the rehearsal days
revised and reformulated
I saved all the programs and tickets¹¹
I saved all the videos and recorded interviews
I saved all the writings and screen recordings
I saved all the sleepless nights
I saved all the emails and negotiations
I saved all the self-righteous moments of diplomatic triumph
I saved all the embarrassments
I saved all the mistakes

At the end of the day
I'm gonna take it from the top
and I'm gonna repeat myself
I'm gonna revisit the wounds
and perform the same errors twice
I'm gonna preach about the insights
and carry on rendering myself vulnerable
to fucking it up
or getting it right

This time
there is not an order
but a number of orderings
emergent forms
parts without a fixed position in the whole

There will be histories
like how a text went from this to that
or who said what that stuck and became a thing¹²
or how things made sense later and in retrospect

future and past selves leaving each other cryptic treasure-hunts¹³
under the undecided orderings and intuitive associations
the unturned rocks and the whispered inklings

There should be no end
But we've gotta stop somewhere

There will be a book series
called *A lot of moving parts*
and it will be just that
no beginning and no end
many minor figures
assembled in a system of relations

Essays

Stories

Poetry

Negotiations

Scores

Rants

Models

Letters

Insights

Fantasies

Problems

Maybes

There will be a solo
called *A lot of moving parts*
a live and ongoing documentation
of a practice and its generative consequences
the memory of flesh
impressionable and temporary

There will be a performance
called NEAR¹⁴
with all the dramas and revelations
that squeezed it out in a hurry
all the accumulated wisdom
that landed in a flurry

There will be a piece
called *New Joy*¹⁵
and it will be participatory

The process of documenting all of these has already begun

The question remains

What will remain

What sticks

What bounces

What's worth the storage space

What's worth repeating

For the children

For the futures

Maybe

it's less

than

we

or I

think

Maybe

it all comes down

to a feeling

a repertoire and a compass

the sea and the life rafts

the depths and the islands

the ineffable and the dings we ding

dinging

ringing

so maybe the question is rather

What Resonates?

— Eleanor Bauer, June 2018¹⁶

- 1 It is said that smell bears the strongest link to memory, of all the senses.
2 I have also heard that we remember better what impacts us emotionally.
3 My friend Chrysa Parkinson told me once, by way of talking me out of obsessing over an unrequited love, “drop it, and if it bounces back, then it’s worth your time”. In an artistic process, if an idea’s not working, I tell myself to drop it, and if it bounces back, then it’s worth my time. But I’m stubborn and tenacious.
4 Den Danske Scenekunstskole / The Danish National School of Performing Arts.
5 (2017). *Choreography and Direction*: Eleanor Bauer. Dance, Choreography, Text, and Performance: Agnes Grelinger, Amalie Bergstein Nielsen, Andreas Haglund, Evita Tsakalaki, Irma von Platen, Jon Andreas Hoff, Kalliopi Siganou, Paolo Gile, Sara Grotenfelt, Tilda le Grand, Tobias Skjöld, Vivian Pöldoja, Onur Agbaba.
6 This is not a reference to Deborah Hay, but an actual hypothetical question.
7 Peli as in Peli Grietzer, PhD from Harvard Comparative Literature and the HUII Einstein Institute of Mathematics, whose dissertation borrows mathematical forms from deep learning theory to model the ontology of ‘ambient’ phenomena like moods, vibes, styles, and ‘structures of feeling,’ and goes on to deductively derive something like Modernist poetic practice from this premise. (source: Glass Bead)
8 *The style and form of feelings, also fleeting* is the name of a score performed in a piece called NEAR (2018) that I choreographed with the dancers of Cullbergbaletten in commissioned collaboration with pop music artist Yung Lean. *The style and form of feelings, also fleeting* is a task that sources the felt sense of emotion for rendering formal movement material. The language comes from my practice of a task called *Dancing Is* (see footnote 9).
9 *Dancing Is* is the name of a dancing and writing practice developed by Zoë Poluch and Stina Nyberg that is used to give definitive language, however temporary in its accuracy, to one’s immediate subjective experience of what dancing is.
10 *Jag har inga färger* (translation: *I have no more colors*) is a line in Oktober Poem by Jonatan Leandoer Håstad/Yung Lean, from the piece NEAR (see footnote 8).
11 I don’t have paper traces of everything I have performed, but I keep a ticket stub or program from every performance I see. In some cases, I keep more, like from *Directory 3: Tattoo* by Deufert and Plischke at DeSingel in February 2006, wherein they gave the audience a signed artefact from the performance as if from an archive. I still have mine. It’s a white paper hat with charcoal markings from the show. In 2017, when I was moving out of my home of thirteen years in Brussels, I was convinced by my friend Povilas Bastys not to throw it all away. So the pile of tickets and programs is sitting in storage. Now most tickets are digital, so the archiving has kind of stopped.
12 like when Adam Schutt from Cullbergbaletten thought I meant *text message* when I said *text*, and I liked the idea, so the whole task evolved into people texting each other scores.
13 I have the impression when things fall together in a creative process that my past and current selves have suddenly made new sense to each other. It makes me feel that time is not linear. It makes me think that maybe

our past and future selves are always in conversation, and sometimes our present selves are let in on it.

14 Premiere 10 August 2018 at Way Out West music festival in Gothenburg, Sweden.

15 Premiere 23 February 2019 at Schauspielhaus Bochum in Bochum, Germany.

16 This text was written as the final examination material for a PhD course on documentation in artistic research at Stockholm University of The Arts in June 2018. The poem-essay is an attempt to address documentation as re-mediation through a form that is appropriate to my research (on a closer relation between dance-thought and language-thought) and methodological aims of poetic efficiency and accuracy. It documents my documenting.

Approaching the partial-ness of documentation via the selection processes of memory, trying to spatialize the felt sense of how reflection and memory organizes itself, and expressing the dis/integration of embodied history as an archive of its own logic in which details expand and contract in a dynamic manner, the essay-poem is at once a frozen slice of time in a continual process, just like any other writing in a life of writing, and an examination of what that continual slicing process captures, or doesn't, and how.

Author's hand / Epitaph

I have long been on a quest for *the simplest possible container in which the complexity of dance may thrive* but I only recently found those words for it.

For the love of dancing, for the richness of meanings and purposes it continually unfolds to me, without having to or being asked to, I want to give dance a very good home in which to dwell. A flexible, adaptable, efficient, mobile, lasting and durable house.

I'm still learning from dance what kinds of containers it likes best.

My dance likes soft and squishy containers, ones that fold and expand, are wrinkly and show their age, are receptive and good with people, are strong but don't grip too tight. I think my dance likes it in the palm.

The palm of the hand is our first container.

Impressionable but tough, both sensitive and resilient, the palm is full of lines that tell our history, and some say lines that tell our future. It doesn't hold much. Sand falls out, liquid is hopeless. It can hold another hand superbly.

The question of containers is not only what fits in them, but what doesn't.

What there isn't space for, what can't be held, has to go.

When a performance piece shows traces of clear and firm decision making, ordering and structuring from an outside perspective, people say they can see "the author's hand" in the choreography. Is it the hand that shapes the dance?

Many good choreographers, the ones whose "hands" are visible, they have editing hands. They can let dance go, cut it down, throw it away, tease it out. They are not afraid to hurt dance's feelings. They show dance tough love.

When discussing self-observation in dance, I often hold out my hand and look at it.

So the hand is both a metaphor for authorship and a stand-in for an object of attention and study. It is both *how* it makes and *what* is made.

The hand epitomizes the tautological nature of choreography's inseparability from that which it choreographs: the dance as the dance-making. The hand, as both the observed body and the discerning body, is the dance-thought which is always choreographing, learning, shaping, and organizing itself.

We can turn our own hand back and forth and observe it from all angles. This is impossible with any other part of the body. A hand can pose before its owner's eyes, like a man turning in front of a mirror. And the palm of the hand itself can be thought of as a mirror, also as a writing surface, as a stage.

—Harun Farocki, *The Expression of Hands* (film, 1997)

My palm has a lot of lines, the minor ones almost as deep as the main ones. One palm reader told me that it means I'm an old soul. One palmistry book said it means I have trouble parsing big picture from detail.

Everything is worth at least a moment's attention in my hands/eyes/mind.

Everything is connected. Everything has potential. Everything has its place.

While conceiving of and making this piece, *A lot of moving parts*, I have been moving myself from Brussels to Stockholm. I lived in the same apartment for thirteen years in Brussels. I crossed the ocean from New York with one red suitcase in 2004 and accumulated a whole apartment full of stuff until 2017. Going through thirteen years of life, parsing, purging, storing remembering, cherishing and letting go, has marked the making of this piece.

I am learning how to edit.

Knowing what to exclude is not my forte. My hand is more the thing I turn over in front of me again and again than the thing I drop or cut things with. People rarely say they can “see my hand” in my work. Maybe they just don’t know what to look for, or how my hand works.

Once, a few years ago, when I said for the umpteenth time that there were “a lot of moving parts” weighing into my considerations on an artistic decision, my collaborator Chris Peck said “A *lot of moving parts*” should probably be my middle name, or better yet, my epitaph.

One object has been with me since my first year in Brussels, given to me by my friend Anna Olujimi as a New Year’s gift. She made it herself. It is a never-ending card that folds in on itself in a continuous loop. It reads, in red ink, over three surfaces that interchange as the card folds and folds:

perhaps

indefinitely

we will perform

this dance

over

and over

until we

get it right.

Book 129