

## **Deer, Tigers, Perec and The Everyday**

- a choreographic approach



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#### **Abstract**

This exegesis delineates a practice-led research enquiry, the outcomes of which are two choreographic projects titled I DON'T SEE DEER and WE ARE NOT TIGERS. These have been performed and documented through various media as can be found in the accompanying portfolio. The written exegesis serves as a documentation of the creative process and examines the key theoretical concepts that have shaped the work. These derive mainly from a sociological approach of observing movement in the public space as a tool for choreographic creation, in order to peruse and convey a notion of 'the everyday'. Furthermore, different types of spaces are discussed in relation to the types of movement they encourage or impose. The research is inspired by the writings and methods of French writer Georges Perec and the ways he approaches 'everydayness' and the concept of space.

#### **Keywords**

The everyday, everydayness, observation, public space, urban space, gesture, walking, choreographic research, georges perec, deer, tigers

### **Signed Statement of Originality and Authorship**

The work contained in this exegesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the exegesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Signature: Stella Mastorosteriou



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## Introduction

My research focuses on the interrelations between different types of spaces and the types of movement they encourage or impose. The research is inspired by the writings of writer Georges Perec and informed by concepts and methods from the fields of sociology, anthropology and architecture.

This paper is an exegesis of my practice-led research process which revolves around two interwoven strands / projects, and serves as an analysis of the artistic outcomes and as documentation of the artistic processes. The practice research has been constantly informed by theoretical concepts deriving from an extensive theoretical research, which will be selectively reported. Several smaller projects, experiments and workshop processes that I will briefly delineate in this paper, led into forming two more elaborate projects that I have been developing in the past year and will be more extensively reported in this paper.

The first strand has to do with working in the public space and aims to devise ways of thinking and creating in and for the public space. Under the title *I DON'T SEE DEER*, I work with observation and writing as a tool for studying everyday life and movement in the public space, in order to highlight existing aspects of the city and propose new site-specific situations. Both the research process and the artistic outcomes were located outside – in the urban space. The process and the outcomes of this part of the research have so far been translated into various forms: a video work, a live performance, a photographic series, a workshop, and most importantly the outline of a flexible way of working that I can bring into different places and groups.

In the second strand, I attempt to incorporate concepts, tools and findings from working in the public space into choreographic research and creation for the stage. While keeping observation of street life as one of my main tools, the practical research here was mainly studio-based. This strand led to the creation of the work *WE ARE NOT TIGERS* that I presented as my final project for the master.

The two strands did not follow any successive chronologic line. Instead they emerged and were developed concurrently, as autonomous processes that constantly affected and informed one the other, throughout the past year. In this paper though, I will mainly follow the chronological order of how my research path evolved, while linking the practice-led research to the theoretical research.

Additional documentation of the process can be found on the Research Catalogue portfolio: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/655011/656023>

### **Starting point - collecting knowledge and inspiration**

The starting point of the research has been my personal interest in working in the public urban space and in studying the interrelations between space and movement, rooted in my background as an architect.

My interest in the ways dance and space can inform one another go back to my architecture studies, where I focused my theoretical research project in studying the interrelations of dance and urban space. That was a purely theoretical research with references to the history of modern and contemporary dance and art in general, and then went into studying the work of four choreographers that put different aspects of space as central in their artistic processes. My resources back then did not allow me to develop a concrete practical research, but this initial theoretical research has shaped my thinking and sparked my curiosity to study further those interrelations and seek ways for creating in and for the public space.

Living in a country with very limited support towards the arts, working in the public space offers an opportunity to produce and present work with limited resources. Both through festivals and as collective or individual initiatives, artists are opening up their work into the public space, not only because of logistics, but also as a way to address wider audiences. Many established festivals are offering a side 'public space



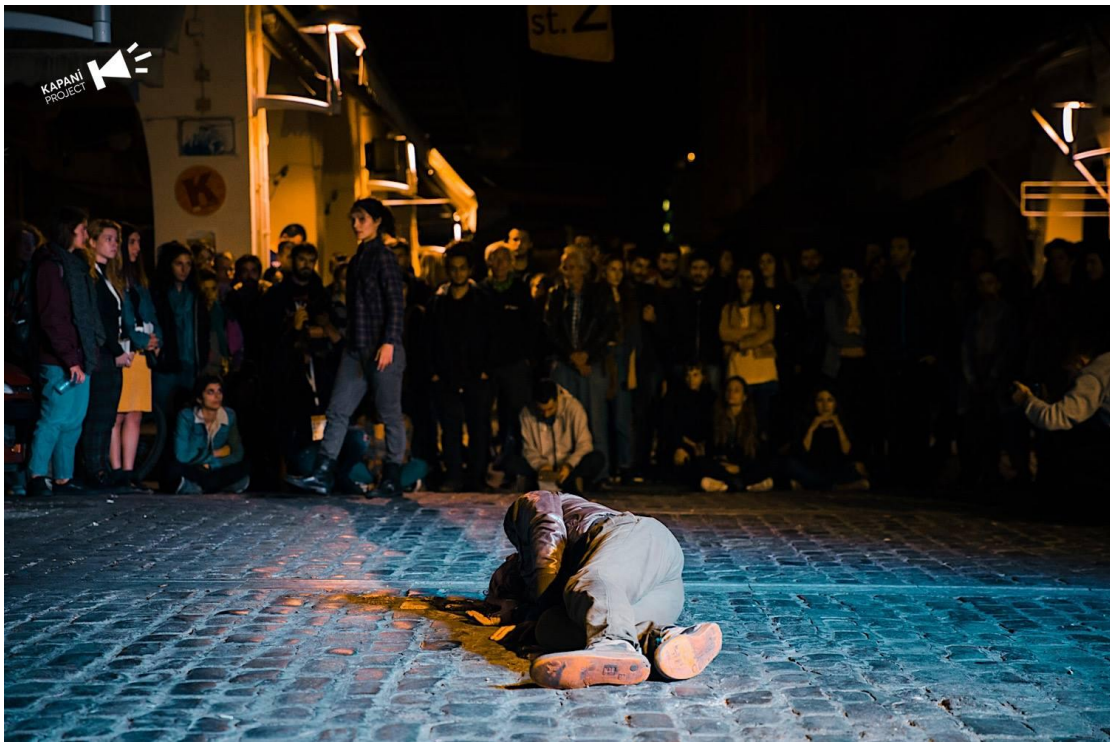
programme' that is more accessible for new creators. In this context I have also had several opportunities to present short works in the public space and to get acquainted with the unpredictability of working in the public space, which can be at the same time difficult and beautiful. In this paper I will reference the street performance Oun Kapan that I created for a local art event in my hometown Thessaloniki. As its creation coincided with the beginning of this research, it became an important moment where some of my first insights emerged.

In Oun Kapan, I brought into play another of my main sources of inspiration when it comes to thinking about space, the writings of Georges Perec. A big part of this research is infused with Perec's approach on space and everyday life and the way he transcribed those into his creative processes and eventually into his writing.

## PART ONE

In this part, I discuss several smaller scale projects and experiments that have been part of the initial phase of the research and have served for testing out ideas and defining concepts, tools and methods.

### OUN KAPAN – a street performance based on texts by Georges Perec



Oun Kapan – performance photo

In the beginning of October 2017, I presented a short street performance in the context of Kapani Project, an urban arts festival in my hometown Thessaloniki. Using Perec's texts as a tool for composition, I worked with two dancers and two actors to create a piece that talked about the relation of the city with its inhabitants. How do we as city dwellers understand and inhabit urban space?

What fascinates me in Perec's writing, is the way he manages to be bluntly neutral and deeply personal at the same time, and carries the potential to be universally

relatable. He writes about 'the city' and in it one can recognize any city, he writes about himself and one can recognize themselves in his story.

We used Perec's essay *Species of Spaces* (1974/1997) not only as a source of inspiration, but as a fundamental element of the piece. The text was employed as a performative element: some excerpts were recorded and some were recited live by the actors, inviting the audience to observe the urban space alongside the performance. Thus, the urban space also became part of the performance and not only a setting, a background in which we performed.

Another thing that interested me in this specific text is how Perec alternates between the public and the intimate, the scientific and the poetic, the sociological and the autobiographical. Both the morphology and the content of the text were used as a source for movement research and composition. *Species of Spaces* is a collage of different forms of writing: lists, essays, poems, diary entries and personal letters, all addressing the subject of space. I employed this variety in writing form and texture as a tool for experimenting with the form of my composition. *Oun Kapan* was also an opportunity to research the specific space of the Kapani market, as a live scenography, that decidedly influenced the final form of the piece.

### **Rehearsing the interruption (or, rehearsal *is* the interruption?)**

The special circumstances of creating and presenting work in the public space, got me contemplating about the reciprocal impact between art and urban space, the opportunities art creates for re-imagining the city and the way in which we utilize or restrict this potential. Gielen (2015) refers to this potential as *interruption* of the public sphere.

While creating our piece, together with two dancers and two actors, we frequently visited our chosen spot at different times of the day and night. What struck me in

those visits was the unpredictability of the urban space and our interaction with it. The space challenged us with unexpected conditions, much as we were challenging the place and its frequenters with our unexpected actions. This sensation of interacting with the space was more prominent to me during rehearsals than at the actual performance time. On the day of the performance the place was discreetly 'sanitized': cars were removed, special lighting was arranged, the cobbled streets were thoroughly cleaned and dried, volunteers were guiding visitors from spot to spot in the market's labyrinth. All these precautions, we had agreed with the organizers beforehand, as a kind of safety net, a guarantee that our work would be presented without any disorienting disruptions. But in rehearsal time, there was no safety net: we had to deal in the moment with anything that came up. We had to wait for the last tavern customers to finish their drinks and leave, after the market closed down, in order to have some quietness. We kept finding the street wet in various times of the day, due to the irregular cleaning schedule. We had to fight for our space against the car drivers who were looking for a place to park, since we realized that the place becomes an unofficial parking place after the market closes down. The little roma kid, eager to watch us rehearse and play beats for us on his tambourine. People stopping to watch, filming on their phone or hastily passing by the performers. Others, worrying for the dancer who was rolling on the cobbled street – is he alright? Does he need help? Be careful son! The guy from the nearby tavern, commenting on and correcting the text we were reciting. The huge, friendly dog, that got excited by all the movement and kept jumping on the performers. Later, a butcher discarded an enormous bone and the dog decided to enjoy it right in the middle of 'our spot'.

I found the power of interruption to be manifest in these moments when we had to negotiate with the place and its dwellers inside the flow of everyday life, accepting it as is and proposing small disruptions to it, by moving in space in unexpected ways. That was when our intervention in the public space attained its meaningfulness, if any.



Oun Kapan - Rehearsal photos

### Conclusions and findings – feedforward

This creation process was a first attempt on working with Perec's writings. Also, although I already had some previous experience of creating work for the public space, here I was more intentional on noticing and reflecting how the different elements – text, movement and the public space- came together. Several ideas that sparked in Oun Kapan followed up in later projects and shaped into more concrete concepts.

Here I used Perec's text itself as a starting point for movement – in subsequent projects I attempted to identify Perec's tools for creating text, in order to create my own texts that would then be used for movement research. Also, the different attributes of different types of space emerged through the text and the creative

process. We basically use two excerpts from *Species of Spaces* – one that talks about observing the city and one that is in the form of a personal letter, thus revealing a more internal, intimate space.

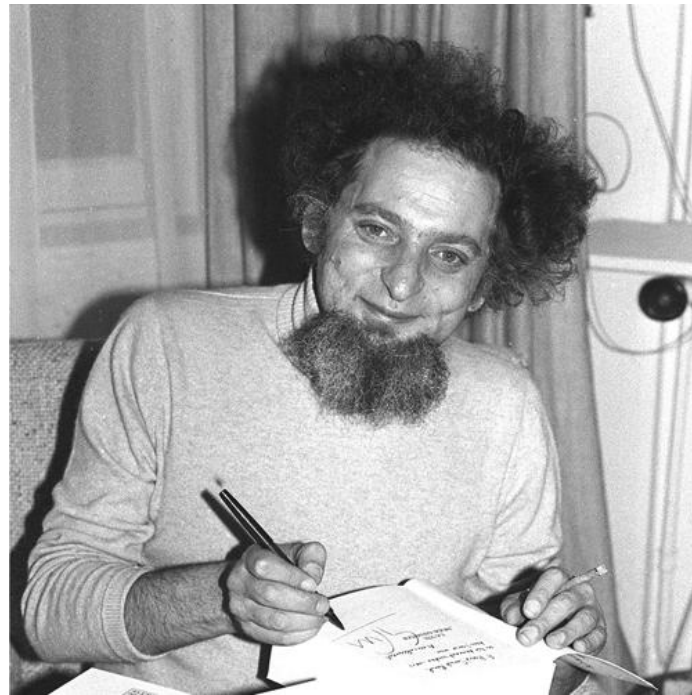
This juxtaposition between public and intimate space became central in my final piece *WE ARE NOT TIGERS*. Respectively, the research that was done in Oun Kapan considering the integration of the scenography of the urban space and the activities that happen in it into the performance were later developed further in my research project *I DON'T SEE DEER*.

But, what appeared to me as a most important and original insight is the concept of *rehearsal as interruption* when working in the public space that I came up with during the creative process and clarified through theory research. How can I carry this idea into other creative processes both outside and inside the studio? The idea of something unfinished, undefined, something that is still – or always – in process. Can this be useful and not lost in other processes, for example when creating for the stage?

At this point of my process, I went into a thorough study of the work of Perec, in order to identify his working processes, tools and methods and select those that might be of interest for my own artistic research. The next section of this chapter is a brief reporting of the bibliographical research on Perec, focusing on the types of writing that correspond to my own ways of working.

### Georges Perec – a brief introduction

Georges Perec (1936-1982) was a French writer of Polish-Jewish origin, with an extensive body of work in varied styles and genres: novels, essays, autobiographical texts, documentation catalogues and indexes, poems, crosswords and puzzles, to name a few.



Georges Perec

photo retrieved from

<https://cdn-ed.versobooks.com/images/000001/128/Georges-Perec-0093ba3b92b997ac2722b8cc4d102cbe.jpg>

Perec himself (2005/1985) distinguishes four main strands in his writing: The sociological, where he explores the world around him and devises new ways to look at the everyday, the autobiographical, where he looks at his own history and memories in an effort to establish his own identity, the ludic, where he exercises his penchant for games and rules, and the novelistic, where he projects his fondness for stories and storytelling. These strands are never separate, as every work contains each of them in different degrees. As a result, he produced various forms of text,

often innovative and difficult to categorize. Some of his texts read as novels, but are based on complex underlying structures or strict constraints.

Other works seem at first as mundane lists of things, of recipes, of memories, or descriptions of spaces, of places, of activities, until the reader discovers –but only after thorough and holistic study of his work- that they link to issues of loss and identity. Behind the quirky world plays and the strict rules, a deep melancholy and a sense of uncertainty is always to be found. This gap in his personal history and his memory of his childhood disrupted and destabilized his own sense of self. This identity crisis can be traced as a universal trait of the modern post-war world. Through this lens, Perec's writing was an effort to reinvent his own identity.

### **Empirertexts, essays and exhaustion – reappropriating Perec's experimental fieldwork**

In order to make sense of his inner world, Perec repeatedly turned to the outside world. There are a few recurring themes in his work. Loss and memory as mentioned above can be found in the deeper layers and understood in the context of his personal biography. What is more apparent is a preoccupation with everyday life, with the mundane, which he refers to as the *infra-ordinary*, the common-things. Perec set out to record, list and classify everything: dreams, memories and travels, rooms and spaces, streets and neighborhoods, recipes, carte-postal texts, anything really, in a knowingly futile attempt to grasp the passing of everyday life. This practice of meticulously describing and documenting a subject, he calls *exhaustion*. His basic method and tool to do so, was of course, writing. For Perec, writing is not just the means to express his ideas, but the act of writing itself becomes an *experimental fieldwork* practice (Philips, 2016). Perec goes out to observe the world and describe it in detail in his notebook, much like the anthropologist. Often, writing becomes both the practice and the report of this practice, as his texts are the immediate, unedited output of his field practice. A most explicit example of this practice is his booklet *An attempt at exhausting a place in Paris* (1975/2010), where



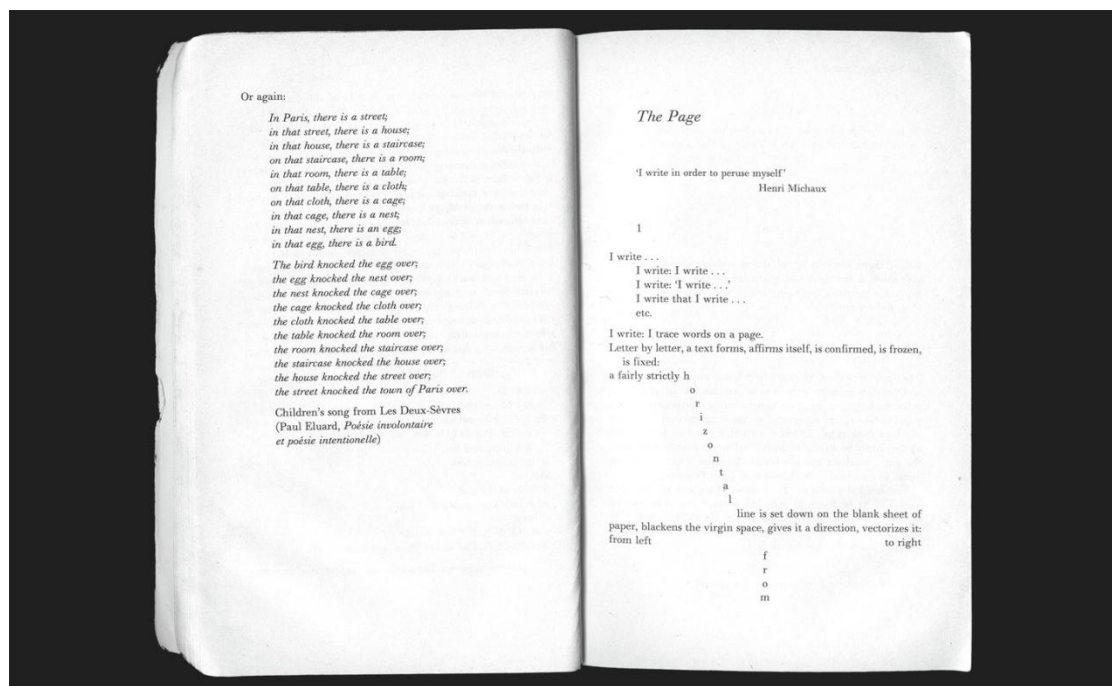
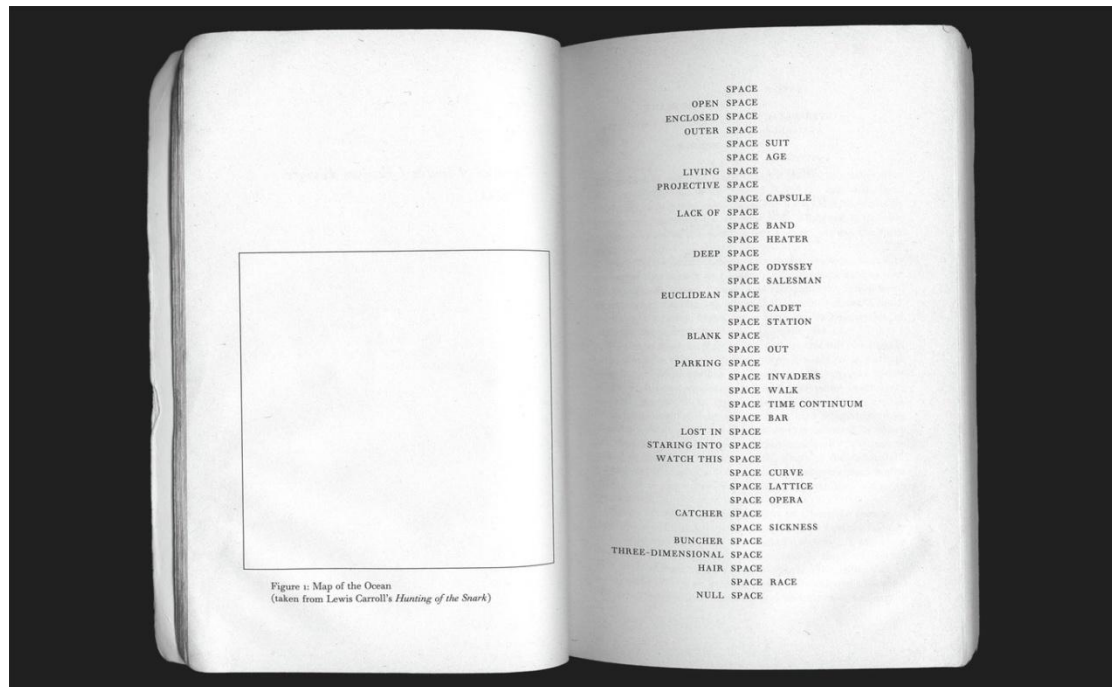
for three subsequent days, Perec sits in a Parisian café and writes down everything that he sees. The result is an extensive list of shorter or longer, but always ‘flat’ descriptions of people, activities, repetitions, details and generalities as registered into the author’s perception, but without any commentary or emotional reaction. Phillips (2016) refers to this kind of writing as an ‘*empirertext*’, a text that is at once empirical and textual.

This notion of ‘experimental fieldwork’ imbues my research. Through several tryouts, workshops and experiments that I will elaborate on later, I attempted to create my own ‘empirertexts’ which then served different functions: as tools for further choreographic research in the studio, as documentation or as proper artistic outcomes.

Another form of text Perec often delivers is the essay, understood as a trial, an experiment, an *assay* (Phillips, 2016). This notion is expressed with the use of the word attempt in the previous title: his main concern is not the end result but the process itself. As a type of text, the essay attempts to link the personal with the universal, to talk about a common issue by placing it into context and through the individual lens of the writer. Perec’s essays go beyond the usual formats and intersect with other modes of writing: lists, indexes, diary entries as well as ethnographic and geographical descriptions (Phillips, 2016). His essays become collections of fragments of insights and ideas with no specific intention of delivering conclusions.

Another example of this essayistic mode is his book *Species of Spaces* (1974 / 1997), which as mentioned above was used in the creation of Oun Kapan street performance, where he attempts to exhaust the concept of space. Space and place always hold a key role in Perec’s work: he drew interest in the ways they direct our behaviors and shape our lives. For Perec space is not a finite entity, but an infinite unpredictable structure, composed of countless micro events and phenomena.

Therefore, it is not to be measured – one can only attempt to *exhaust* it (Neural, 2010).



pages from *Species of Spaces* (1974)

retrieved from: <https://www.fitzroyandfinn.co.uk/journal/georges-perec>

The notion of an *essay* links for me with the concept of *rehearsal as interruption* that was discussed earlier. In this lens, any proposed action in the public space can be

seen as an *essay* to interrupt the flow of everyday life, in order to reflect on it and further comprehend it. For example, the rehearsals for Oun Kapan, were an essay on studying the specific urban space, and so were my own reflections on the process, and the documentation of both the rehearsal and the reflections through a written essay, photographs, videos and notes. Later, I experimented with more essays in different urban spaces, mainly through the research project I DON'T SEE DEER.

### **23 movements I saw – solo B**

*Observe the street, from time to time  
with some concern for system perhaps.  
Species of Spaces (1974)*

Departing from this research on Perec I created a solo, where I wanted to experiment with:

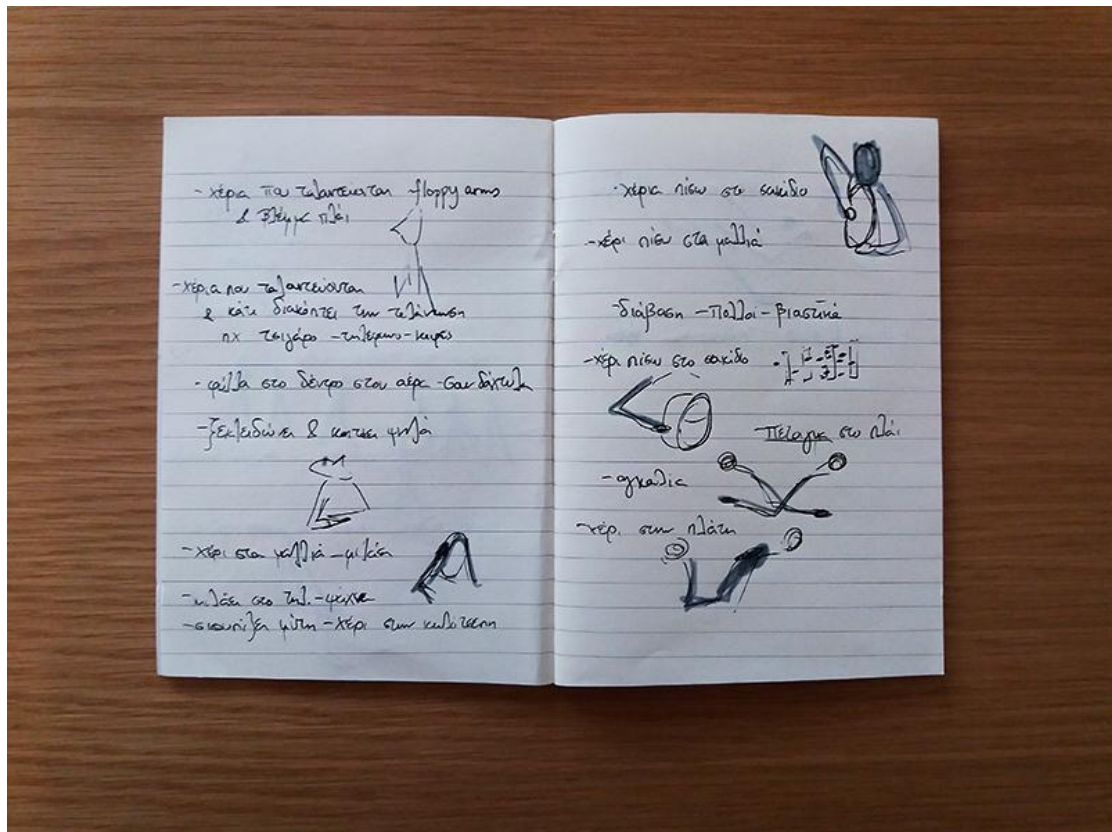
- Observing movement in the street – documenting in and reappropriating it in the studio as a tool for movement creation
- The concept of exhaustion and listing as a tool for composition

This solo, under the working title *23 movements I saw*, was a first attempt on employing Perec's methods and experimental fieldwork with the intent of creating for the stage. The working method that crystallized while working for this piece, later served as a prototype for my final work WE ARE NOT TIGERS.

Undertaking Perec's experiment, I set up to observe the same spot for three subsequent days and keep notes and sketches from the movement I noticed, human or other. My intention was to follow Perec's suggestion to 'look more flatly', or as he explains:

*My aim is to describe what is generally never noted, what is never noticed, what is not important: what happens when nothing happens, but time, people, cars and clouds. (Perec, 1975)*

Despite my intentions, I found myself looking for ‘interesting’ movement that I would be able to translate into ‘dance’ later. I also found myself easily bored and distracted – this observation made me realize that if I wanted to develop this further I would need a more specific task, especially if I wanted to communicate this idea and process to others.



23 movements I saw - notebook page

In the observing process, I also had some hesitation around ways of documenting my observations. I mostly experimented with text and sketch, consciously avoiding video and photo. This meant that there was a ‘translation’ process – from actual movement observed into writing/sketch and then into movement in my own body. I noticed that this double translation offered to the movement a layer of abstraction which appealed to me. However, I wondered if this translation was necessary: several times, I found myself skipping any documentation media and appropriating the movement I observed directly into my own body – through movement or through memory.

Eventually, what I did manage to observe and document revolved around three main themes: patterns, gestures and walking. So, I used these three elements as the basic materials for the solo. The final piece was a gestural phrase that was set on a walking track and built up through repetition, accumulation and acceleration.

For the sound, I created a track that started with recorded city soundscapes and crowds and transitioned into rhythmical patterns to support the buildup of the movement. This was the first time I experimented with creating the sound design for my work by myself and although the technical part was not professionally done, I believe that the outcome as a composition 'made sense' for the piece. I also used the lighting design to create a transition from the personal, a specific person into a more abstract figure.

In order to re-work this solo, I experimented with the concept of a rehearsal as a presentation, as a solution to the fact that I did not have a clear proposal for a reworked version. At that moment presenting a 'rehearsal' instead of a 'final outcome' offered me an open frame for sharing ideas and feeding forward my work.

I also did a short experiment with bringing the solo back into the public space as a re-working of the solo. Even though outside the theater the piece lost a lot of the dynamic that was supported by the theatrical conditions, this *essay* highlighted for me the concept of everyday life and *everydayness* as an important aspect of this research, that I wanted to look into.

### **Conclusions and findings - on method, documentation and composition**

This creative process was a first attempt at experimenting with the tool of observing movement in the public space as a means for studio improvisation and development of movement material. This approach links my research not only to Perec's work but

also to the field of sociology and anthropology, where observation and taking notes of what happens are basic tools. But, I have found that there are a couple of differences in the approach and aims when these tools are used for artistic research.

In Perec's words:

*It matters little to me that these questions should be fragmentary, barely indicative of a method, at most of a project. It matters a lot to me that they should seem trivial and futile: that's exactly what makes them just as essential, if not more so, as all the other questions by which we've tried in vain to lay hold on our truth. (Perec, 1973/1997)*

Thus, he highlights a more philosophical – existential aspect of art questioning as opposed to scientific questioning and methods. Moreover, in the case of choreographic research, the part of noting down, of documenting observations might not only be done pen to paper or through photo or video, but also directly through the body. As for Perec instantly writing down his unedited observations was both the documentation and the final artistic outcome (i.e. in *Attempt*), for me the observation of movement might also be directly rendered through the body and documented through body memory.

The compositional elements of this solo were mainly a gestural phrase and a walking track. I was particularly interested in the possibilities of walking as a means to create intangible spaces on stage, especially when supported by the soundscape. All of those elements, the gestural movement, walking and the soundscape form that I created here, have been further perused in my final piece *WE ARE NOT TIGERS*, in order to 'bring the city on stage.'

## Clarifying concepts and tools through theory research and creative experiments

### The everyday

*Le quotidien: ce qui il y a  
de plus difficile a decouvrir.  
Maurice Blanchot*

The notion of the everyday appears in the works of artists, sociologists and thinkers traced back to the surrealists, in ways not at all homogenous, which interweave theoretical, political and imaginative insights. (Sheringham, 2006). A definition of the everyday or the *quotidien*, as encountered in the French school, seems to constantly escape a concrete formulation. What is more urgent is to raise questions and devise new approaches to it.

But then, to quote Georges Perec, approaches to what? Perec employs the term the *infraordinary*, to describe the everyday, the mundane, the common-things.

*What is really happening, what we live through, what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infraordinary, the background noise, the habitual, how can we give some account of it, how can we interrogate and describe it? (Perec, 1973/1997)*

*How can we speak of these 'common things', or rather how can we track them down, flush them out, prize them from the magma in which they are stuck, how can we give them a meaning, a language: so that they may at last speak of what is, of who we are? (Perec, 1973/1997)*

Susan Foster (1986) highlights the desire of postmodern dance makers to blur the boundary between art and life, by taking dance outside the theater and by employing everyday movement as a source for movement creation. Pedestrian gesture and actions, like walking, running and standing, were reappropriated and brought onto the stage, as an attempt to bring everyday life on stage.

## **Gesture**

*Thought is gesture.*

*We have no pure ideas.*

*Marcel Jousse, 1969*

Gesture can be defined as meaningful movements of hands and arms that denote a multitude of phenomena, without involving speech and language (Tangeberg-Grischin, 2011). The word derives from the Latin verb *gerere*, which means to carry, to carry towards. Bertold Brecht employed the term *gestus*, which implies a clear and stylized physical expression of social attitudes. He described *gestus* as something that is larger than the movement itself and that speaks of itself (Mokotow, 2009). Gesture is a form of communication within a societal group that is to be learned by individual members as part of cultural patterns that are culturally specific (Tangeberg-Grischin, 2011). In this research I am interested in a sociological notion of gesture, not to be confused with artistic forms of gesture, pantomime or sign languages, which have a clear communicative intention and are inevitably linked to language. To describe this notion of gesture we need ‘a rich understanding of gesture’, as employed by Noland (2009) and Gill (2012).

Carrie Noland (2009) considers gestures as ‘occasions for rich kinesthetic experience because they are not confined to linguistics but are open to ‘non-text-based vocabularies and concepts’, that is experience that do not require verbal explanations. In this frame, gestures are defined as ‘chains of movements performed by individual bodies’ which shape the bodies that perform them by imprinting on them the values and distinctions of a certain societal group on the habitual, thus rendering the individual bodies as culturally identifiable, as being part of the group (Gill, 2012). Through gestural patterns, society actually imprints itself into the material bodies of its members and cultural patterns are made visible through individual members’ gestures. Thus, gestures become markers of the individuals’ culture.



As Matthews (2005) observes, gestures are communicative, even unintentionally: They are not necessarily about what we actually do with our bodies, but more about how that action is understood by others. However, Carrie Noland (2009) argues that the gesture is not merely about the message that it communicates as an end result, but more about what the very act of performing the gesture is communicating and how it is inscribed in its author's body through repetition. She offers the example of the practice of graffiti tagging: The gesture of graffiti tagging on the wall mediates not only the graffiti tag as the end result, but also the very body of the person creating it. At the same time, through repetition the body of the artist will be inscribed by the performing of the gesture, 'his own body will eventually be inscribed, the muscles and ligaments physiologically altered, by the gestural routine that expresses and confines his body' (Noland, 2009). Gill (2012) argues how this applies in an even more complex and interesting way to dancing: here the body is both the means and the end result of the gesture.

Gill (2012) highlights the potential of gesture for resistance and transformation. If a society exist as the collective techniques and gesturing patterns of its individual members, this means that individual acquire the potential to present resistance to society, through changes in the ways of performing gesture and techniques that are socially insinuated. Gill links this potential to the 'impression particulier': individuals are the source of particular actions and particular impression and are consequently able to modify cultural gestures because they are the ones performing them.

Gestures are connecting members of a society while excluding non members. However, as Matthews stresses, gestures can also be unifying across cultures: 'any particular gestural technique will almost invariably have a counterpart within another social, material or spatial context.' (Matthews, 2005)

Gill (2012) takes further the concept of gesture by introducing the notion of touch as a primary aspect of gesture. For him all gestures are incomplete and have no

meaning until they integrate touch: 'Gesturing is the movement before touching rather than the touching itself'. He illustrates this with the example of open arms for a hug – the potential of this gesture to become a hug will remain incomplete until another person responds to it.

Matthews (2005) considers emotions as a main component of gestures. Resulting from his phenomenological approach, emotions –like knowledge- are embodied and material, they are 'already and always present' as an inseparable aspect of our material world. They are also ways of being in the world and making sense of the world, which are shared and understood amongst individuals: 'The bodily practices of others concern and affect me because of shared collective habits of emotion'. Emotions are part of our cultural traditions and they differ between cultures (Matthews, 2005).

### **Gesture as dance**

Mokotow (2009) gives a brief overview of the use of gesture in contemporary dance history. She defines gesture in dance as 'movement that has a recognizable referent, is short, autonomous and symbolic' (Mokotow, 2009). She locates the origins of dance gesture in Rudolph Laban's and Emil Dalcroze's researches on body mechanics. Pina Bausch incorporated in her work the notions of gesture from both Laban and Brecht to create her particular gesture language, based on everyday movements and repetition, as a tool for inducing recognizable meanings in her pieces and bring the audience close to them. Mokotow (2009) recognizes a similar effect in the early works of de Keersmaker with Rosas. From the 1980s on, gesture has been used extensively in dance, often as a critique to abstract dance and 'excessive movement' and usually in addition to the use of text and scenic technologies, i.e, scenographies and media. Mocotow argues that the latter can make it easier for audiences to 'understand' and relate to dance; however, they often detach the choreographic process from researching the actual movement of the human body and its ability to communicate meaning through movement. She

suggests that 'it may be time to reinstate the specifically kinetic but silent meaning making of bodies dancing' (Mokotow, 2009).

### **Walking as gesture – walking choreographies**

*Walking is not just what a body does;  
it is what a body is.*

*Ingold & Vergunst, 2016*

Walking is arguably the most basic form of movement in public space, which occurs daily and mostly unconsciously. Through walking we form a primarily bodily relationship with the urban space: It is through walking that we experience and interact with the urban environment in ways sensorial and reflective at the same time (Takaki & Fillion, 2012, Vroman & Lagrange, 2017). The body experience in the city is constructed from everyday practices where the behaviors, gestures and movements are responsible for the micro-sociability and spatial dynamics. Thus, the body movement is translated as well as walking practices in the space. (Takaki & Fillion, 2012)

The urban environment can influence the way we walk and vice versa the way we walk can affect the ways we experience and interact with the environment. Walking patterns and also pace and rhythm as the main characteristics of walking may be influenced –other than by individual intentions- by the organization and the design of urban space. Vroman & Lagrange mention De Keersmaker's project My Walking is My Dancing (2015), where the choreographer invited people to walk with her through Brussels in a very slow pace, in order to consciously shift their experience of the city. Another way of shifting the audience's perception of their everyday urban environment can be found in Willi Dorner's work Bodies in Urban Spaces (2007). Dorner places performers dressed in bright colors in unexpected places, throughout the city, filling openings and recesses, climbing mounts and poles, thus drawing the audience's attention where it wouldn't usually go and altering the way they perceive the city and the city itself.

This notion of walking the city as a conscious practice likens to the concept of the flâneur, as proposed by the situationists. The flâneur is not to be confused with the pedestrian who engages in everyday activities: 'The flâneur not only uses but witnesses and responds' to it, their avocation with the city environment involves both 'wandering and wondering'. (Collie, 2013). Ingold & Vergunst (2016) liken the flâneur to a small child on their way to school, finding endless sources of fascination in the details of the city as they walk by it. This fascination in urban details is the main element in Lucinda Childs' *Street Dance* (1964). Childs invites the audience to look onto the street through a window – their observing experience is enriched by taped instructions and by two dancers highlighting details in the urban space with their movement. At the same time, the everydayness of pedestrian life is also highlighted, as passersby become part of the performance. Walking and other pedestrian movement has been often used in the works of the Judson Group. In *Radial Courses* (1976), Childs sets four dancers walking on a circular path as the basis to create intricate patterns in space. Although the dancers' walk is too rhythmically paced to be considered natural, the piece has an abstract pedestrian quality, supported by the simple costume and the performers' stance.

Ingold & Vergunst (2016) highlight how walking entails the whole body in motion; it is 'as much the work of the hands and lungs as of the feet'. This could bring us back to the concept of gesture and a notion of gesture as part of walking, but also walking itself as a form of gesture. In his 1984 book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau, borrows from Rilke to refer to moving trees of gestures: 'These 'trees of gestures' are in movement everywhere. Their forests walk through the streets.'

Gill (2012) refers to the 'cultural gesture of walking one's culture' which gets inscribed into the tissue of the body and shapes the way individuals walk.

## Observing urban movement - Developing observation as a tool for choreographic research

*Nobody enjoys sitting on a stoop  
or looking out a window at an empty street.  
Jane Jacobs, 1961*

Urban movements and especially pedestrian movement has often been studied by urbanists and sociologists in order to gather information about the ways people appropriate the urban space, often with the intention to develop better urban design strategies. (Vroman & Lagrange, 2017). Artists from various fields have also found a fruitful field of inspiration and reflection in the observation of public everyday life.

Jane Jacobs, in her 1961 essay *The Uses of Sidewalks*, highlights a tendency evidenced throughout human history and especially the history of cities: people enjoy watching the activities of other people and mindlessly entertain themselves by watching street activity. Jacobs likens urban movement to a perpetual dance, full of diversity and variations, but still, making sense as a whole:

*This order is all composed of movement and change, and although it is life, not art, we may fancifully call it the art form of the city and liken it to the dance [...] The ballet of the good city sidewalk never repeats itself from place to place, and in any one place is always replete with new improvisations.*

The concepts of space and place are central in Perec's work and closely interweaved with his fascination with everyday life. Several of his writing projects –completed or not- present close observation of life in the urban environment as the focal point of the creation process.

*My aim is to describe what is generally never noted, what is never noticed, what is not important: what happens when nothing happens, but time, people, cars and clouds. (Perec, 1975)*

Many of his essays (1973, 1974) offer literal prompts to observe and document life in the streets:

*Observe the street, from time to time, with some concern for system perhaps.*

*(Perec, 1974)*

*Describe your street. Describe another street. Compare. (Perec, 1973)*

*The street: try to describe the street, what it's made of, what it's used for. The people in the street. The cars. [...] The people in the streets: where are they coming from? Where are they going to? Who are they? (Perec, 1974)*

## **Methodologies**

While doing literature research, I encountered several methodologies used for others kinds of research, that could apply to or inspire choreographic approaches.

As Gehl and Svarre put it in the preface of their book *How to study public life* (2013), 'public life studies are straightforward. The basic idea is for observers to walk around while taking a good look.' They propose a list of basic techniques like counting, mapping, tracing, tracking, looking for traces, photographing, keeping a diary and doing test walks.

Vroman & Lagrange (2017) also emphasize the importance of systematic observation in order to collect qualitative data, as opposed to Gehl's methods who mostly intent to quantitative results. They stress that a 'continuous practice in movement observation in relation to spatial elements, will result in developing a certain skill of recognizing qualities or enhancements in the body movement'. I find interesting a similar approach but with a movement creation intent.

Takaki & Fillion (2012) also include the use of video footage, but again along with direct observation. Degen et al (2010) also specify ethnographic and photographic observation in order to record the 'doing' and the 'feel' of a place, what happens there, who are its users and its uses. In their research they specifically focused on

bodily gestures, but also in the shifts of the place's rhythms on a daily and weekly basis. What is most interesting in their approach is that they also observe their own embodied experience of the specific urban space, thus, they also include a notion of observing through experiencing and sensing. Other methods include questionnaires, identifying and looking further into significant practices and walk-alongs – accompanying people in their routines whilst talking with them in a reflective way.

As mentioned above, Perec's 'experimental fieldwork' (Phillips, 2016) comprises of a big variety of methodologies for studying: interrogating, listing, observing, describing, exhausting. He employs classic methods from the fields of sociology, anthropology and ethnology, and addresses them towards the common, to the familiar. The difference is that he does not aim to obtain measurable results –after all he is not a scientist but an artist.

### **Developing methods and ways of sharing**

My own approach on observation as tool for choreographic research has kept shaping and reforming throughout the process. In the next section, I discuss three smaller projects that I made where I experimented with different modes of observing and different media for documenting observations. These projects were also opportunities of sharing my research and bringing more people in.

### **Creative outcomes/experiments**

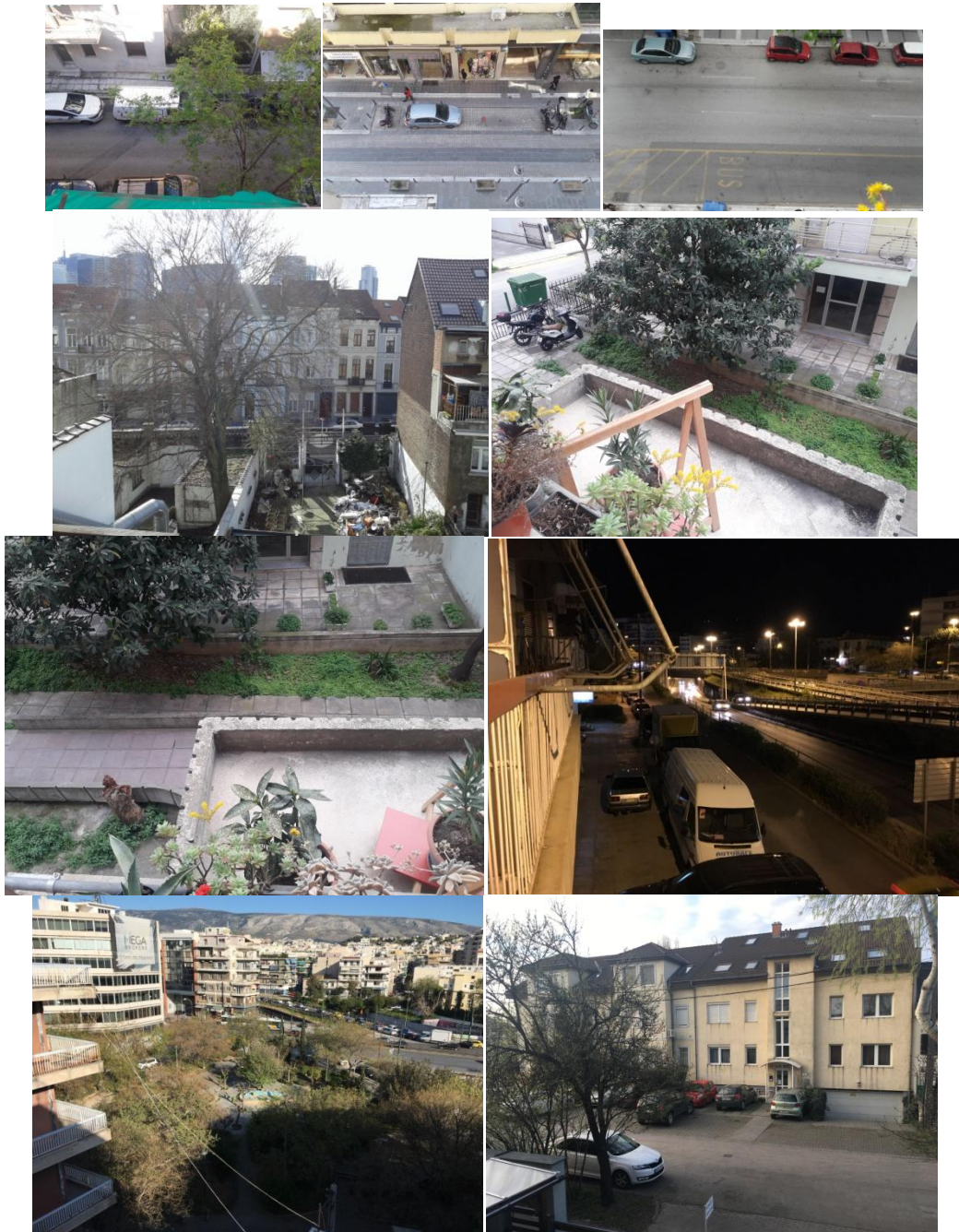
#### **City Flows**

A website created as a log of unsystematic observation of urban everyday life, as an experiment on Georges Perec's prompt to 'look more flatly'. It is a collection of short video clips from various city streets that I made myself or were contributed by peers and friends. I initiated this process intuitively, as an experiment on documentation for myself, but also as a first attempt to open up my research to people outside of the master. The idea of using video in a simple and uncomplicated way was inspired by the work of Pipsilab - Amsterdam and their concept of mobile choreography. The immediacy of the medium made it easier for people to participate and for me to collect and edit the videos.

**WEBSITE LINK:** <https://creativeresponse.tumblr.com/>



Deer, Tigers, Perec and The Everyday  
Stella Mastorosteriou  
COMMA Master Choreography – Exegesis



City Flows – stills from contributed videos

As an artistic outcome, the website depicts the idea of a list, as an inherently futile attempt of exhausting a concept, more so the concept of ‘the everyday’ that is by definition inexhaustible. The use of video as an ‘easy’ and accessible media of documentation offered the possibility to gather fragments and details that when composed as a whole give a macroscopic view of everyday life in the city. The

composition creates a constant juxtaposition between details and landscapes, a constant zooming in and out that I find to be a metaphor for the way our perception of everyday life works. I transferred this notion of zoom in/zoom out as a compositional tool, both in *I DON'T SEE DEER*, where it was used as a guide for video editing and in *WE ARE NOT TIGERS*, where it was used as a tool for choreographic composition.

### **Workshop on observation**

In order to look into possibilities of developing tools on observation and implementing them into my choreographic process, I designed a workshop on observation. Through a series of tasks and exercises, together with the participants we attempted to sharpen our observational abilities, by opening up all the senses to the space around us. We gradually moved into observing the street and experimenting with ways of documentation. The tasks proposed here were mainly inspired by Perec's 'suggestions' for observing the street in *Species of Spaces*, but guided to focus more towards the movement that could be observed – human or other.

As a form of documenting, I proposed writing down and sketching, thus I gave participants empty notebooks to keep notes, which they kept for a week after our meeting. During that week, there were different responses and a lot of creativity in the ways of interpreting the original instructions.



observation workshop – notebook pages

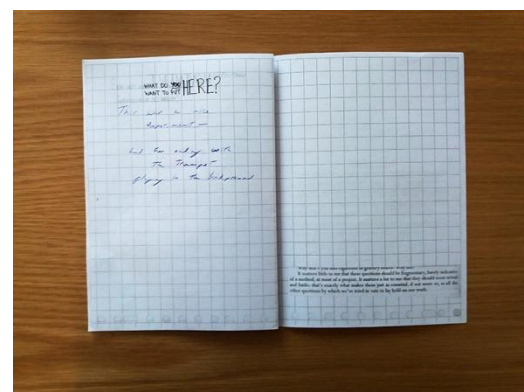
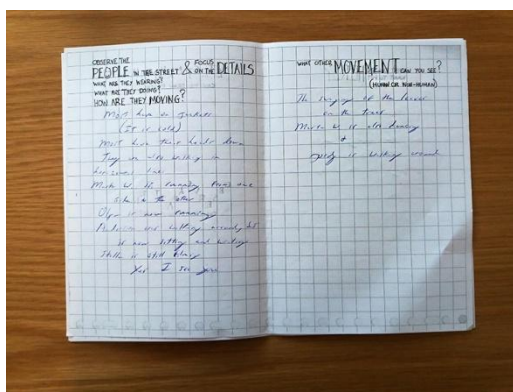
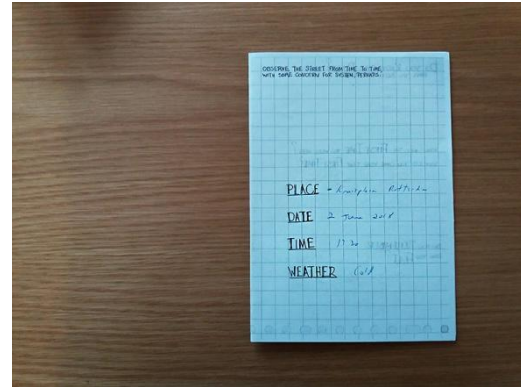
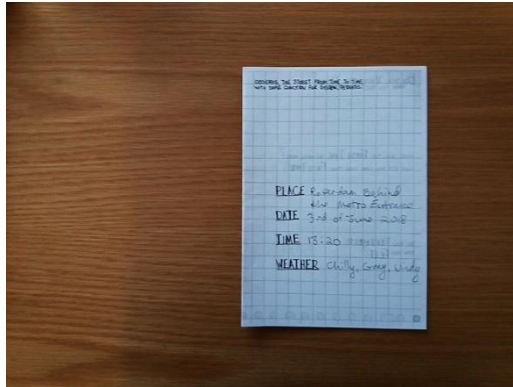
### Prototype presentation – How to look more flatly

On different moments during my research I attempted to use guided writing prompts as a tool for observing and documenting movement. The information that was collected this way was used as incentive for movement research or for discussion on a specific concept. In the workshops described above, I gave the participants empty notebooks to fill in with their observations. Although a lot of creativity was shared in those notebooks, I realized that if I wanted to develop this as a tool, I would have to create a much more concrete framework.

For my Prototype presentation, I decided to work with a form of workbook that would invite the audience to observe and document, but in a more guided way. The workbook I created included text and prompts by Perec as well as artist's Keri Smith's popular workbooks. As there was not time enough to make a 'real' workshop – it would have to be more of an illustration of my idea. So, I created a 'sample' workshop, supported by the workbook and an audiofile with recorded instructions for observing the public space around us, in the pedestrian street in front of Codarts. During the event, I also experimented with introducing subtle *interruptions* as



discussed by Gielen (2015), which later became the primary way of working for I DON'T SEE DEER.



Eventually, this event was not as much an ‘actual workshop’ for actually collecting observations, but more of a performative event and a sharing moment of my general research idea.

## Conclusions - feedforward

These small projects were an open context for experimenting with different tools and fields, and communicating the ideas that shaped my research to different

publics. The next step would be to clarify the ways and methods to bring those back to my choreographic practice.

This cluster of the research had the act of observing in its core, both as a theme and as a tool, thus, the outcomes stay very much in an external eye state. This approach made sense up to now, but now I felt the lack of practice and the need for more embodied approaches.

Specifically, I wanted to carry on developing observation as a tool, through framed writing prompts, but with the aim to connect it more clearly to movement research and creation both in the studio and outside in the urban space. Also, I was curious to experiment more with the use of video and the possibilities that it can offer for documenting, creating, presenting and sharing the creative process.

This concludes the first part of my research path, which coincided with the end of the first year of the master. In the second part I discuss the two projects / research strands that shaped through the theory concepts and practical assays that I discovered and played with in the first part and were further developed in the second year of the master.

## PART TWO

### I DON'T SEE DEER



#### PORTFOLIO PAGE ON RESEARCH CATALOGUE:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/655011/655012>

#### CONTENTS:

- Video project
- Photo series
- Creation diary
- Written exercises documentation
- -Live performance documentation video

## A framework for creating in the public space

*I DON'T SEE DEER is a choreographic study of the interrelations between the body and urban space. Creating ephemeral site-specific images that play with the boundary between the familiar and the unfamiliar, it attempts to highlight alternative, more playful ways of being in/thinking about the city.*

My intent with this project was to explore the possibilities when working *from* and *for* the public space. Without bringing in any preconceived material, I wanted to employ the tool of observation, which would then give input for creation.

My initial research question for this project was a basic one:

What is considered 'regular' behavior in the public space and where is the fine line between 'regular' and 'irregular' behavior?

Erving Goffman describes this as 'the dichotomy between acts that are approved and acts felt to be improper' (Goffman, 1963). According to Goffman, these social conduct rules are relevant to their specific context: any act can be considered proper or improper according to the judgment of a specific social group or situation. The basic rule that applies to all kinds of social orders is the tendency 'to fit in'. As individuals in the public space, we are guided to conform, much like a child in a fancy restaurant:

'The individual must be 'good' and not cause a scene or a disturbance – he must not attract undue attention to himself, either by thrusting himself on the assembled company or by attempting to withdraw too much from their presence –he must keep within the spirit or ethos of the situation –he must not be *de trop* or out of place'. (Goffman, 1963)

The working title for the project was OFF PATTERN, as my first inclination was to look into the patterns of everyday life, which direct human conduct in the public realm.

Every aspect of human behavior in the urban space is governed by patterns and rules: How we can use the space, where we can go, the speed of our walk, the way we dress or gesture and every other choice we make are guided by inherent rules, a tacit etiquette, in order to 'fit in' the flow of everyday life. My curiosity then, was to research the boundaries of these patterns: How little is enough to be *off* pattern?

The research was focused on the physical behaviors and the ways people move.

More specifically, questions I worked with were:

How is this need for conformity in the public space manifested through body posture and movement? What kinds of patterns are created and how can we (subtly?) interrupt them?

Specific aspects of movement that I wanted to explore were:

- Speed of movement
- Gestures
- A sense of organic/natural movement vs not organic / unnatural
- Intentional / unintentional actions
- Intimacy – private acts in the public space

For this project I worked with a small group of performers, in the studio and in various busy public spaces in the center of Thessaloniki. My first goal for the output of the research was to make a video, in order to explore video making and the possibilities that it offers as a medium. Later I had the opportunity to rework and present this project as a live performance, in a very different area of the city, in the context of Thessaloniki Design Week.



## **Tools / methods**

### **Observing & recording on paper**

Observation, as discussed above, has developed into a basic tool throughout my research. Here, observation was used as input for movement research, but also, and more importantly, as a means for creating a common understanding within the group and to facilitate discussion and exchange on the concept and research questions.

I introduced observation to the group firstly with a couple of ‘written exercises’. From my previous experience of working with blank notebooks and guided workbooks I realized that I need to give more clear and precise prompts, in order to focus observation on the framework of the project, i.e. physical movement and what are the boundaries of ‘regular’ behavior. Below are the two ‘exercises’ I used:

#### **1. Find the ‘opposite’:**

I see ..... I don’t see.....

On the ‘I see’ line, write down something that you actually see – it can be anything, the most banal or the most extraordinary thing. For example: I see people walking.

On the ‘I don’t see line’, write down one ‘opposite’ of what you just wrote, something that you actually cannot see. For example: I don’t see people crawling.

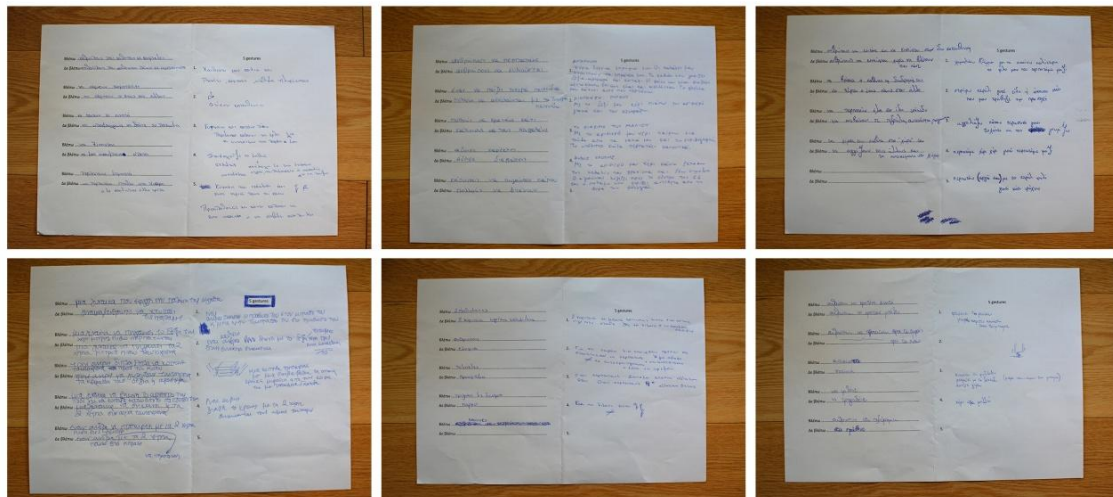
The opposite can be anything, let your imagination go!

\*The title of the project came from this exercise, as one of the performers didn’t see deer. (see portfolio)

#### **2. 5 gestures**

Observe a gesture in the street. Find a way to document it on the paper as text or sketch.

Both exercises were articulated in an open way, so there were different interpretations and creativity in the reports. At the same time, they allowed for discussion and exchange, which lead into identifying concepts, interests and questions.



written exercises responses

### Observing and recording through bodily actions – movement research

While the first part of observing and recording happened through the studio windows, the next step was to go out, into the public space. My tools for this part were inspired by Vloeistof dance company, who work and create exclusively in the public space. From them I borrowed the tool of observing the *dominant aspects* of a place – what it is that attracts our attention in the moment. For Vloeistof, when performing in the public space, the performance and the performer has to ‘compete’ with what is already there, dominating the space, so it is important to be aware of these dominant aspects, in order to be able to use them and work *with* them instead of against them.

After identifying the dominant aspects, the task was to ‘show’ these through a bodily action. With this task we created a series of short site-specific scenes that were then developed further and incorporated into the video. Most of the scenes include one or two performers, as it has proved especially challenging to move as a larger group

in the constant flow of public space. As the dominant aspects are not fixed, but change as we move through space, or as we change our focus, the performers have to be conscious of those changes and able to incorporate them as fast as possible. Especially when working with a group of performers, the attention needs to be both towards the changes in space and to the changes inside the group.



photographs from I DON'T SEE DEER – video rehearsals

When reworking this project later to create a walking performance for Thessaloniki Design Week, we employed the same tools, but in a very different area in the west side of the city. The place here is significantly less busy, with many completely abandoned spots. With hardly any people moving in the streets, our main input here was the space itself and its physical attributes. We found that here it was easier – and almost necessary – to stay together as a group, in order for our site-specific



interventions to have a stronger appeal. There was also the element of feeling safer within the group, in this area, where a lot of illegal activities take place. This second time we created the whole project in a very short time, so everything was more spontaneous and less planned. There was no written report and the documentation of the project came in the form of a short video and a series of photographs.



photographs from I DON'T SEE DEER - video

## **Reflection on tools, methods and influences**

### **On working in the public space**

Once again I realize that there is no rehearsal in the public space – nothing can be rehearsed or recreated – everything just happens once and it will be different the next time we try it out. The rehearsal is the performance every time. Nothing can be recreated, maybe only open-ended scores. Also, the ‘rehearsal’ brings more of surprise, of irregularity, of ‘interruption’, as it is often unreadable for the passersby. When we were filming with the camera it was easy to recognize what was going on as ‘normal’, as some kind of ‘art’ – we were getting more questions and interaction. During ‘rehearsals’ my guess is that people, either didn’t realize that ‘something’ was going on, or if they did they could not immediately ‘read’ what it was, which led to some awkward moments. This was more intense when only one person was more visible vs being in a group.

### **On video as a creative tool / zooming in and out**

Creating with a video-making mindset reinforced the idea of rehearsal as performance. What we were doing at the moment was a performance for the passersby witnessing it, although for us, the final artistic result would be created later on the computer. The whole process felt more like a series of rehearsals or tryouts than it would have been if there would be a live performance as an end result.

The process of framing and editing was very interesting to me, as it gave the possibility to re-create the urban space for the screen in a very selective, scenographic way. Also, to play with distance and closeness, with alternating between big picture and detail, which I find incites emotion for the viewer. This notion of zooming in and zooming out as a tool to direct the attention of the viewer and to create emotion, was something that I experimented with again in WE ARE NOT TIGERS, this time on the theater stage.



### On photography as a creative tool

The inspiration for I DON'T SEE DEER came – amongst others – from various photographic projects that explore the relationship between body and space. Namely the work of photographers Tjasa Kalkan, Marin Hock, Brooke Didonato and Ben Zank has been a source of visual input and reflection. Kalkan and Hock work with the opposition of a performing body in relation to 'regular' everyday movement in the city. Didonato and Zank create more surreal images, using extreme body posture and body staging. Photography, much like video can edit out transitions, thus creating unreal images with a strong poetic impact. In I DON'T SEE DEER, I started taking photos for documentation purposes, which then developed into an artistic outcome of the research on their own, as they transfer the sense of uncertainty between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the regular and irregular that was the starting point for the project.



photographs from I DON'T SEE DEER – a walk in the west area – Thessaloniki Design Week

### **On using bright color**

The final outcome is of course mainly visual, which was reinforced with the use of bright red color on the performers' clothes. The use of bright color on performers' clothes in the public space refers to Willi Dorner's *Bodies in Urban Spaces* (2007), where big groups of performers dressed in colorful athletic wear create human sculptures, in gaps and openings of the urban space. Given the ephemeral nature of the images created in the public space, I find that the use of bright color creates a nice effect for the viewer and makes it easier to perceive the intervention.

Dorner chooses to hide the performer's face into the hoodie, which creates a sense of strangeness that can either spark curiosity or bring a need for distance to the viewer. In *I DON'T SEE DEER*, I found that keeping the faces of the performers visible, thus rendering them open to potential interaction, often created a link towards the passerby viewer instead of keeping them away. I wonder what would be the effect if we didn't use costume at all. Would the performers be completely lost visually or maybe the movement would still make a strong effect?

### **On writing prompts**

Compared to previous times that I experimented with writing prompts, I find that this time the writing exercises I proposed worked better: the goal was to create a common understanding of the concept, through observing, noting down, sharing and reflecting. The exercises were more clear and precise and the overall concept was less broad than the previous times.

### **On method**

This whole process was about observing specific public spaces and testing out some hypotheses – that came from theory research and from our own subjective experiences and observations of the city. Goffmann says that [...] *the propriety of an act can only be established by systematic empirical research*. And he goes on to admit that his book is full of unverified assertions. So is my project... But, once again:

*It matters little to me that these questions should be fragmentary, barely indicative of a method, at most of a project. It matters a lot to me that they should seem trivial and futile: that's exactly what makes them just as essential, if not more so, as all the other questions by which we've tried in vain to lay hold on our truth. (Perec, 1973 / 1997)*



## WE ARE NOT TIGERS

*A tiger's personal space is 30 feet.*

*We are not tigers.*

This was the second main strand of my research, where I attempted to incorporate concepts, tools and findings from working in the public space into choreographic research and creation for the stage. While keeping observation of street life as one of my main tools, the practical research here was mainly studio-based. This strand led to the creation of the work WE ARE NOT TIGERS that I presented as my final project for the master.



### PORTFOLIO PAGE ON RESEARCH CATALOGUE:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/655011/655256>

### CONTENTS:

- Performance trailer
- Performance photos
- Original soundscape
- Lighting design notes
- Creation process documentation

## **Zooming in**

Continuing my research line of studying the interrelations of space and human behavior, mainly through a sociological approach, for the next part of my research and moving towards the final project, I wanted to do a 'zoom-in', towards the interior, the inside, the private. I have previously studied and worked in the public space, observing movement patterns and situations, experimenting with ways of documenting those and proposing alternative ways of moving in the urban space. For the next part of my research, I wanted to study the concepts of personal space, intimacy and proxemics, with the intention to create a duet for the stage as my final project, while I kept informing my process with concepts that arose from working in the public space.

My goal for this part of the research was to gain a more holistic understanding on the various concepts and typologies of space, by studying different theoretical approaches and by devising my own choreographic approach(es) to them. With this input, I wanted to create a piece for the stage, incorporating and developing concepts and methodologies from my previous research in the context of the master: *23 movements I saw solo*, *How to look more flatly* prototype and *I DON'T SEE DEER*.

## **Theory research**

### **Personal space – Proxemics - Territoriality**

The starting point for this part of the research was the concept of intimacy and of private acts in the public space, which came up during the research for *I DON'T SEE DEER*. It was interesting for us to observe how an intimate act, like a hug has a different weight when performed in the public space – as opposed to in a private space. Such observations led me to research the concepts of personal space further.

Personal space, in the fields of sociology, anthropology and sociology, is considered an invisible boundary around an individual, often imagined as a bubble with the

person in the center, forming an area which they don't want to be invaded. It is an area that is emotionally and psychologically considered private, owned by the individual. Allowing someone into one's personal space indicates familiarity and intimacy and any invasion may create feelings of discomfort, anger, nervousness and embarrassment.

The concept of personal space is further elaborated in neuroscience, and related to the way we are able to navigate around obstacles in space and keep away from danger. Neuroscientist Michael Graziano (2018) refers to it as a 'second skin' that comes in layers: *'some layers close to the skin like a bodysuit, other farther away like a quarantine tent. [...] It isn't a scientific abstraction. It is real and it infiltrates almost all aspects of our lives.'*

Proxemics is a study of space and the ways we use it, specifically looking into the spatial distances we tend to maintain between ourselves and others, how spatial relation can make us feel more or less comfortable and how we arrange objects and ourselves in relation to space. The term was introduced by cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall, in his 1966 book *The Hidden Dimension*, who analyzed it as part of non-verbal communication in social situations.

Hall described four distinct zones or distances in which interpersonal transactions usually occur:

- Intimate space – 45 cm or two fists away from the body, it involves both physical and emotional interactions, including embracing, touching and whispering. It can be further distinguished into a far zone of 15-45 cm and a close zone of less than 1-2 cm.
- Personal space – 1,2 m or one handshake away from the body, where one allows only select people, usually friends and family, or people with whom personal conversation is mandatory.
- Social space – 3,6 m or two arm lengths away, where social contacts among acquaintances occur on a temporary basis. Although it is generally allowed to be in

another's social zone, the non-verbal communication between the individuals defines a situation as either intimidating or acceptable.

- Public space – 7,2 m, or the distance where one feels comfortable when addressing a big group, although direct contact with others is not necessarily expected in that zone.

The four zones in this scheme apply across cultures, although variations in actual metrics are noted according to culture, gender and age. They also apply across species, although each species has its own rules relating to personal territory. Especially wild animals are meticulously concerned with the spaces around them. 'Animals seem to have an internal map of the spaces around them. For one thing, they have territories' (Graziano, 2018). A territory is a spatial concept recognized across species that is closely related to instinctual fight-or-flight behavior. The concept of territoriality formed initially in zoological studies and refers to the ways humans and animals use space to communicate ownership.

### **Tools and methods**

I began the studio research with these new concepts in mind, while at the same time bringing back my previously developed tools and concepts.

Observation, as discussed above, was employed here again as a main tool for movement research. We experimented with different ways of observing and documenting movement, and then with ways of transcribing those through studio improvisations.

Movement findings from previous stages of the research that I wanted to incorporate and develop were mainly walking and gesture. Walking is for me the main way to connect a stage piece to the public space. I find that walking has the possibility to create space on an empty stage and to refer to the pathways of a city grid. Also, gesture as observed in the public space is for me another link to the city

and the everyday. Through observation of movement in the street, we gathered an extensive repertoire of gestures that were then set on different walking tracks. The notion of gesture as touch was explored in conjunction with the concept of intimate space.

In the movement research process, I kept referring back to Perec's working methods, especially in *An attempt at exhausting a place in Paris* (1975) and I decided to 'edit' movement as little as possible. Meaning that I would not interfere with the movement that came into the studio through observation, by the dancers or by me, but I would keep it unedited. So, throughout the process, we kept working with what was coming in, and let go of what was forgotten from our bodies and our minds. With this approach I wanted to keep my process close to a process of automatic writing, of keeping notes, of creating a list of gestures, which for me refers again to the concept of everydayness.

Whilst the first part of movement material came from reappropriating the previously developed tools of observation, walking and gesture, in this project I also aimed to devise a somatic approach to the theory concepts of personal space and intimacy. Through a simple task of moving through touch, we found a movement quality 'from the inside outwards' which allowed to make a metaphorical passage from a public space towards an intimate space during the piece.

Working for the stage also offered the opportunity to investigate how I could create different spaces on stage. Given that I didn't want to create a physical scenography, this was achieved with the use of light.

## The final piece

**WE ARE NOT TIGERS** is an attempt to talk about the everyday, or, *'about what happens when nothing happens, but time, people, cars and clouds.'* (Perec, 1975)

The research is inspired by the writings and working methods of French writer Georges Perec, notably his approach on space and everyday life and the way he transcribed those into his creative processes and eventually into his writing.



The piece develops in two scenes:

In the first scene, the two dancers create parallel walking paths on stage, performing a series of gestural phrases, which become more intricate as time passes. Their task and challenge is to 'stay together', in an anyway impossible parallelism. The soundscape of recorded city sounds supports the intention to create a city on stage. In the second scene, a passage to a more intimate space is depicted, where the two dancers come closer together and tune together in a more subtle, intrinsic way.

The idea of ‘everydayness’ as constantly escaping definition is supported throughout the piece by the dancers’ non-performed presence and the fluidity of the gesture. The title of the piece is inspired by a quote from a lecture on proxemics by anthropologist Tim Stock: *‘A tiger’s personal space is 30 feet. We are not tigers.’* In the context of the piece and in relation to the title of my complementary research project I DON’T SEE DEER, this title resonated with me, as it subtly references to humankind, through abstraction.



## **Sound design**

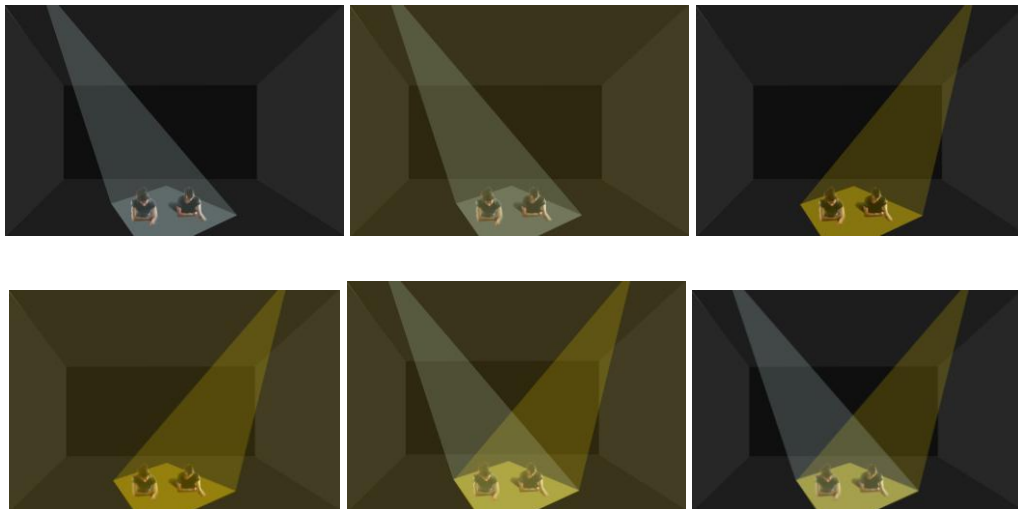
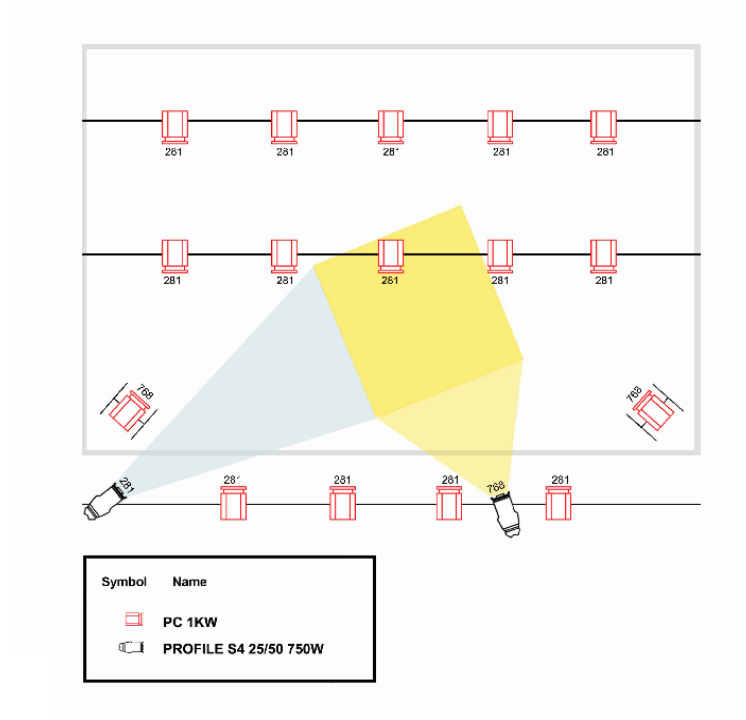
The soundscape was created in collaboration with Italian composer Alessandro Bartolena. For the first scene, he created a street soundscape, in order to support the notion of creating an abstract city on stage. Although the idea of a city soundscape for the walking scene was already in my mind, in the rehearsal process, the piece was created independently from music or sound. We created the walking scene mostly in silence, or experimenting with sounds and a metronome. This way, the dancers do not depend to the support of sound in order to tune in together.

The second scene was also developed before the music was composed. Bartolena's composition supports the idea of an intimate space, by creating a minimalistic, fluid melody that slightly refers to an underwater sensation.

## **Light design**

The lighting design by Eliza Alexandropoulou reflects the idea of 'a walk in the city, in the course of 24 hours'. Starting with a bright stage (day light), the light slowly lowers in order to create shadows and blur the details. Transitioning into the second scene, the light becomes yellow (night light) and a closed, internal space is created through a precise shape, which later dissolves again.





Lighting plan and sketches for WE ARE NOT TIGERS by Eliza Alexandropoulou

### On working with a duet

Mainly because of logistics, I decided to create a duet for the final project. My initial idea would be to work with a small group, 4-5 dancers. I abandoned this idea when I decided that I wanted to bring the piece to the 'COMMA festival'. I had a very limited budget, which inevitably means that I can only work with two people, if I also want

to travel with them. That been said, I like the idea of working on a duet, as it represents the basic form of a human relationship. At the same time it can also be bit 'dangerous' as it can easily take on connotations of specific kinds of relationships.

The duality became a very important element in the final piece, as it was emphasized through unison – in movement and in the costume. Synchronized movement for me created a kind of underlining of the gestural phrases and imbued a notion of universality. Creating unison was another reference to Perec, who manages to invoke emotion and make his texts relatable despite – or because of – the 'flatness' of his writing. I find that through uniformity the small differences and detail become apparent at certain moments, blurring the boundaries between the individual and the impersonal.

### **Approaching The Everyday**

During a research day for I DON'T SEE DEER in spring, I picked up some wildflowers that were growing abundantly in the mostly abandoned area we were working in. By the time I was home, they were already dead. Observing this inevitable transition made me wonder if the same was true of any observation that we try to pick up from the street – is it already dead before we bring it into the studio, before we edit and reappropriate it through any artistic mill? This thought brought me back to the set of questions that formed during the first year of the master:

*How can everyday life observation inform a choreographic practice?*

*How can movements and gestural patterns as observed in the flow of everyday life be translated into movement creation (in the studio)? Can the meanings and symbols they carry not get lost in the process? If the 'everyday' is impossible to grasp and define, how can we talk about it through art? How can we recognize and cherish the poetry in the mundane?*

*Also, why?*

If we accept that the everyday is impossible to grasp then, what is it that artistic approaches and experiments to it can offer to our understanding of everydayness? Perec prompted that while accepting the routine and the habituality as the essential elements of everyday life, we need to devise '*new approaches to it*', new ways to look at it, to study and think about the everyday and our own existence in the flow of everyday life.

There can hardly be any conclusions – there can mostly be approaches, experiments, essays. Every text, photograph, project, choreography, painting or other artistic form created using a lens to the everyday, is but an attempt to preserve a moment in time and to communicate a subjective point of view – an attempt 'to rescue the everyday from the neglect and oblivion to which it is customarily consigned'. (Sheringham, 2006). And if Perec's Attempt to exhaust has proven to be impossible – as any other – we might look at the totality of such essays as a collective *attempt to exhaust*. That might prove more effective.

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